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HER MAJESTY'S MAILS:

AN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE
ACCOUNT OF
THE BRITISH POST-OFFICE.
TOGETHER WITH AN APPENDIX.

BY
WILLIAM LEWINS.

"OUR ENGLISH POST-OFFICE IS A SPLENDID TRIUMPH
OF CIVILIZATION."—*Lord Macaulay.*

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PREFACE.

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This volume is the first of a contemplated series designed to furnish some account of the history and ordinary working of the revenue departments of the country—to do for the great *Governmental* industries what Mr. Smiles has so ably done (to compare his great things with our small) for the profession of civil engineering and several *national* industries. Few attempts have ever been made to trace the rise and progress of the invaluable institution of the Post-Office. We have more than once seen the question asked in *Notes and Queries*—that *sine quâ non* of the curious and the learned—where a continuous account might be found of English postal history. In each case, the inquirer has been referred to a short summary of the history of the Post-Office, prefixed to the Postmaster-General's *First Report*. Since that, the Messrs. Black, in the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, have supplied an excellent and more extended notice. Still more recently, however, in an admirable paper on the Post-Office in *Fraser's Magazine*, Mr. Matthew D. Hill has expressed his astonishment that so little study has been given to the subject —that it "has attracted the attention of so small a number of students, and of each, as it would [Pg iv] appear, for so short a time." "I have not been able to find," adds Mr. Hill, "that even Germany has produced a single work which affects to furnish more than a sketch or outline of postal history." The first part of the following pages is offered as a *contribution* to the study of the subject, in the hope that it will be allowed to fill the vacant place, at any rate, until the work is done more worthily. With regard to that most interesting episode in the history of the Post-Office which resulted in the penny-post reform, the materials for our work—scanty though they undoubtedly are in the earlier periods—are here sufficiently abundant. The scope, however, of the present undertaking would not allow of much more than a proportionate amount of space being devoted to that epoch. Besides, the history of that eventful struggle can be properly told but by one hand, and that hand, if spared, intends, we believe, to tell his own story. Mr. Torrens MacCullagh, in his *Life of Sir James Graham*, has thrown much new light on the letter-opening transactions of 1844, and we have been led, on inquiry, to concur in many of his views on the subject.

The greater portion of the second division of this volume, as well as a portion of the first part, appeared originally in the pages of several popular serial publications—principally *Chambers's Journal* and Mr. Chambers's *Book of Days*; the whole, however, has been thoroughly revised, where it has not been re-written, and otherwise adapted to the purposes of the present work. We are indebted to Mr. Robert Chambers, LL.D., not only for permitting the republication of these papers in this form, but also for kindly indicating to us sources of information from the rich storehouse of his experience, which we have found very useful. On collateral subjects, such as roads and conveyances, besides having, in common with other readers, the benefit of Mr. [Pg v] Smiles's valuable researches in his *Lives of the Engineers*, we are personally indebted to him for kindly advice. We have only to add that, while in no sense an authorized publication, personal acquaintance has been brought to bear on the treatment of different parts of it, and that we have received, in describing the various branches of the Post-Office, much valuable information from Mr. J. Bowker and several gentlemen connected with the London Establishment. It is hoped that the information, now for the first time brought together, may prove interesting to many letter-writers who are ignorant, though not willingly so, of the channels through which their correspondence flows. If our readers think that the Wise Man was right when he likened the receipt of pleasant intelligence from a far country to cold water given to a thirsty soul, surely they will also admit that the *agency* employed to compass this good service, which has made its influence felt in every social circle, and which has brought manifold blessings in its train, deserves some passing thought and attention.

The Appendix is designed to afford a source of general reference on many important matters relating to the Post-Office, some parts of it having been carefully collated from Parliamentary documents not easily accessible to the public.

April 16, 1864.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Circular letters, and a kind of post for conveying them, are frequently mentioned both in sacred and profane history. Queen Jezebel is remarkable as being the first letter-writer on record, though it is not surprising to find that she used her pen for purposes of deception. According to the sacred chronicler, she "wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles in the city." From the Book of Esther we learn that Ahasuerus, king of Persia, being displeased at the disobedience of his wife, Vashti, sent letters into every province of his vast empire, informing his subjects that it was his imperial will that "every man should bear rule in his own house." The first recorded *riding post* was established in the Persian empire by Cyrus, who, when engaged in his Scythian expedition, in order to have news brought expeditiously, "caused it to be tried how far a horse could go in a day without baiting, and, at that distance, appointed stages and men whose business it was to have horses always in readiness."[1] Another authority[2] tells us that there were one hundred and eleven [Pg 2] postal stages, a day's journey distant from one another, between Susa and the Ægean Sea, and that at each stage a large and beautiful structure was erected, with every convenience for the purpose designed.

It is certainly remarkable that neither in this nor in any other recorded instance have the posts in ancient times developed into one for the conveyance of private correspondence. It is certain that the Greeks and Romans, even when at the height of their civilization, had no regular public post. There are some traces of *statores* and *stationes* under the Roman Republic; and Augustus, we find, instituted posts on the principal trunk-roads, for the use of the Imperial Government. He also established a class of mounted messengers, called *tabellarii*, who went in charge of the despatches. That these messengers should have been strictly forbidden to convey letters for private persons, or that no provision was subsequently made for that purpose, is the more wonderful, when we consider the high character of the nations themselves, and the fact, often pointed out, that the progress of civilization has always been intimately and essentially connected with, and dependent upon, facilities for intercommunication—keeping pace, in fact, with the means which nations possessed for the interchange of person and property, and with them of thought and knowledge. That those nations to which we are so greatly indebted for so much that exalts the intellect and adorns life, should not have left us an example of such a useful and (considering the vast extent of their respective territories), we should have thought, indispensable institution as that of a public letter-post, is marvellous.

Marco Polo, the famous Venetian, who travelled in China in the fourteenth century,[3] describes the government post as similar to that in use in Persia under Cyrus. The posts had existed in China from the earliest times. Every twenty-five miles there were posts, called *jambs*, where the [Pg 3] imperial envoy was received. There were frequently as many as three or four hundred horses in waiting at one of these places. Polo further states that there were ten thousand stations of this

kind in China, some of them affording sumptuous accommodation to travellers. Two hundred thousand horses are said to have been engaged in the service. The fact affords a curious commentary on the progress of civilization in the Celestial Empire, that, though this gigantic and elaborate establishment has been in existence so long and up to the present century, it is only within the last few years that provision has been made in China for public letter-posts.

The earliest date in modern history at which any postal service is mentioned, is the year 807, when an organization was planned by the Emperor Charlemagne. The service, however, did not survive him. The first regular European letter-post was established in the Hanse Towns in the early part of the thirteenth century. This federation of republics required constant communication with each other; for, being largely engaged in similar commercial pursuits, it became indispensable to their existence that some system of letter-conveyance should be originated. The next establishment was a line of letter-posts connecting Austria with Lombardy, in the reign of the Emperor Maximilian, said to have been organized by the princes of the house of Thurn and Taxis. The representatives of the same house established another line of posts from Vienna to Brussels, thus further connecting the most distant parts of the vast dominions of the Spanish Emperor, Charles V. It may be mentioned here, that the Counts of Thurn and Taxis have, in virtue of their original establishment, which they controlled from the first, always held peculiar rights and privileges in relation to the postal systems of Germany; and up to this day the posts of the house of Thurn and Taxis are entirely distinct from the existing Crown establishments, and, in fact, are maintained in rivalry to those of some of the German states. In France, in the fifteenth century, Louis XI. revived the system of Charlemagne, organizing a body of 230 couriers for purposes of state. [Pg 4]

We may gather from the existing materials, scanty though they be, something like a continuous account of the early history of the English post-office, tracing, very clearly, its progress from the fifteenth century to its present position.

While the *general post* dates from the Stuarts, the establishment of a regular *riding post* in England owes its origin to Edward IV. The English post seems from the first to have been fully commensurate with the demands for its service, its growth depending on the gradual advance which the country made in other measures of social progress. Four or five centuries ago, few private persons could either read or write. On the other hand, the business of the State demanded correspondence. The king had his barons to summon, or his sheriffs to instruct, and letters of writ were issued accordingly, a few Government messengers supplying all the wants of the time. Now and then the nobles would require to address each other, and sometimes to correspond with their dependents, but, as a general rule, neither the serf nor his master had the power, even if they had the will, to engage much in writing. As time wore on, and we come nearer the age of the Tudors, the desire for learning spread, though still the few who engaged in literary or scientific pursuits were either attached to the Court or to the monastic establishments. Even when the Tudor dynasty came in, trade with foreign countries, and remote districts in our own country, was almost equally unknown. Each district dwelt alone, supplied its own wants, and evinced very little desire for any closer communication.

In the earliest times in England, and prior to the first regular horse posts, both public and private letters were sent by private messengers, travelling when required. In the reign of Henry I. messengers were first permanently employed by the king. So early as the reign of King John the payments to *Nuncii*—as these messengers were now called—for the conveyance of Government despatches, are to be found entered in the *Close* and *Misæ Rolls*, "and the entries of these payments may be traced in an almost unbroken series through the records of many subsequent reigns." Nuncii were also attached to the establishments of the principal barons of the time, and communications passed between them by means of those functionaries. In the reign of Henry III., the son and successor of King John, these messengers began to wear the royal livery. At first it was necessary for them to keep horses of their own, or use those belonging to the royal or baronial mansion. In the reign of Edward I. we find that fixed stations or *posts* were established, at which places horses were kept for hire, the *Nuncii* ceasing to provide horses of their own, or borrowing from private individuals. Several private letters are in existence, dating as far back as the reign of Edward II., which bear the appearance of having been carried by the *Nuncii* of that period, with "Haste, post, haste!" written on the backs of them. [Pg 5]

With the machinery thus ready to his hand, the improvements contrived by Edward IV. were easily accomplished. In 1481 this monarch was engaged in war with Scotland, when, in order to facilitate the transmission of news from the English capital, he ordered a continuous system of posts, consisting of *relays* of horses and messengers every twenty miles. By this arrangement, despatches were conveyed to him at the English camp with marvellous expedition, his couriers riding at an average rate of seventy miles a day. When peace was restored, the system of relays was allowed to fall into disuse, only to be revived in cases of urgency. Little improvement in communication could be expected under such a course of procedure, and little was effected. Henry VIII. was the first monarch who endeavoured to keep the posts in a state of efficiency, and improve their organization, in peace as well as in war; though still it is noticeable that the post stages are kept up purely and exclusively as a convenience to the Government for the conveyance of its despatches.

Henry VIII. instituted the office of "Master of the Postes,"[4] with entire control of the department. During the king's lifetime the office was filled by one Brian Tuke, afterwards Sir Brian. We gain some insight into the duties of the office, and also into the manner in which the work is done, from the following letter (found in the voluminous correspondence of Thomas [Pg 6]

Cromwell) from the "Master of the Postes," no doubt in exculpation of himself and his arrangements, which seem to have been in some way called in question by the Lord Privy Seal. "The Kinge's Grace hath no moo ordinary postes, ne of many days hathe had, but betwene London and Calais. For, sir, ye knowe well, that, except the hackney horses betwene Gravesende and Dovour, there is no suche usual conveyance in post for men in this realme as in the accustomed places of France and other *parties*; *ne men can keepe horses in redynes without som way to bere the charges*; but when placardes be sent for such cause, (viz. to order the immediate forwarding of some state packet,) the constables many tymes be fayne to take horses oute of plowes and cartes, *wherein can be no extreme diligence*." The king's worthy secretary thus charges the postmaster with remissness, and the mails with tardiness, when the facts, as gathered from the above letter, show that the Government had not gone to the trouble and expense of providing proper auxiliaries, as in France; *ergo*, they could not expect the same regularity and despatch. Master Tuke then defends the character of his men. "As to the postes betwene London and the Courte, there be now but 2; whereof the *on* is a good robust felowe, and wont to be diligent, evil intreated meny times, he and other postes, by the herbigeours, for lack of horse rome or horse mete, *withoute which diligence cannot be*. The other hathe been a most payneful felowe in nyght and daye, that I have knowen amongst the messengers. If he nowe *slak* he shalbe changed as reason is."

During the insurrection in the Northern Counties in the reign of Henry VIII., the rebel leaders, in order to insure a rapid transmission of orders, established regular posts from Hull to York, York to Durham, and Durham to Newcastle.[5] [Pg 7]

The council of Edward VI. finding that a great many irregularities existed in the hire of post-horses, had an Act passed (2 & 3 Edward VI. c. 3) fixing the charge at a penny per mile for all horses so impressed.

Up to the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, no further improvements seem to have been made, although her council took steps to make the existing service as efficient as possible, by reforming some abuses which had crept into it during Queen Mary's reign. Before Elizabeth's death, the expenses of the post were reduced to rather less than 5,000*l.* per annum. Before the reduction, the sum charged for conveying Her Majesty's despatches from stage to stage was enormous. Up to the thirty-first year of her reign, a rate of 20*d.* a letter was levied by the proprietors of the post-horses, for *every post travelled over*. The council resolved to pay the proprietors 3*s.* a day for the service, irrespective of the distance travelled. The payment was reduced to 2*s.* and ultimately to 18*d.* a day. Much information respecting the service—the different stages, the routes taken at this early period, &c. &c. has been found in old records of the "Master of the Postes," exhumed some twenty years ago from the vaults of Somerset House. This functionary, it would appear, paid all current expenses appertaining to his department, "the wages and entertainment of the ordinary posts," and he was reimbursed in full under the grant "for conveyance of Her Highness's letters and her Council's." The information respecting the routes taken is especially interesting, because it serves to show that even at this early period arrangements were made with great circumspection, and that some of these early routes existed, with only trifling modifications, down to the present century, and to the time of railroads. The route from London to Berwick is shown by the lists of posts (or stages) laid down between the two places in the fifteenth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign. They run as follows:—1. London; 2. Waltham; 3. Ware; 4. Royston; 5. Caxton; 6. Huntingdon; 7. Stilton; 8. Stamford; 9. Grantham; 10. Newark; 11. Tookesford (Tuxford); 12. Foroby (Ferriby); 13. Doncaster; 14. Ferry Bridge; 15. Wetherby; 16. Bouroughbridge; 17. Northallerton; 18. Derneton (Darlington); 19. Durham; 20. Newcastle; 21. Morpeth; 22. Hexham; 23. Hawtwistle; 24. Carlisle; 25. Alnwick; 26. Belford; 27. Berwick. For three centuries, therefore, the High North Road took in all these posts with the exception of Tuxford. A considerable diversion, it will be noticed, was made at Morpeth towards the west, in order to take in the then important towns of Hexham and Carlisle; but it is more probable that the direct post-road continued north through Alnwick to Berwick, and that the west road was only a kind of cross-post. There were no less than three post routes to Ireland in this reign, and all of them were used more or less. The first and most important, perhaps, left London and took the following towns in its way; the distance between each town constituting a "stage;" viz. Dunstable, Dayntry (Daventry), Collsill (Coleshill), Stone, Chester and Liverpool, from which latter place a packet sailed. The remaining two mails took slightly different routes to *Holyhead*, whence also a packet sailed for Ireland. We find there were also *two* posts between London and Bristol and the west of England; the first going by way of Maidenhead, Newbury, Marlborough and Chippenham; the other, by Hounslow, Maidenhead, Reading, Marlborough, Maxfield to Bristol. To Dover there were also *two* posts; the one passing through Dartford, Gravesend, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Canterbury, Margate and Sandwich; the other passing through Canterbury direct, without calling at the two last-named places. The posts above enumerated were called the "ordinary" posts, and may be supposed to have been the permanent arrangements for the transmission of the Government despatches. When these posts did not avail —and it must be understood that they were never allowed to make a *détour* into the cross-roads of the country—"extraordinary posts" were established. Generally speaking, these extra posts were put on for any service which required the greatest possible haste. Here is an extract from the records of which we have spoken, on this point. "Thomas Miller, gent. sent in haste by special commandment of Sir Francis Walsingham, throughout all the postes of Kent to warn and to order, both with the posts for an augmentation of the ordinary number of horses for the packet, and with the countries near them for a supply of twenty or thirty horses a-piece for the 'throughe posts,' during the service against the Spanish navy by sea, and the continuance of the army by [Pg 8] [Pg 9]

land." Again, in 31st Elizabeth, special or "extraordinary" posts were laid between London and Rye, upon unwelcome news arriving from France, "and for the more speedy advertisement of the same." "Thomas Miller, gent. sent at Easter, 1597, to lay the posts and *likest* landing places either in Kent or Sussex, upon intelligence given of some practices intended against the Queen's person." Mr. Miller seems to have judged Rye to be the "likest landing place" for the purpose, and, returning, "received seven pound for his services." Other extraordinary posts were often laid down between Hampton Court and Southampton and Portsmouth, for the "more speedy advertisement" of occurrences from the ports of Normandy and Bretaigne.

In the early part of Queen Elizabeth's reign, disputes were frequent with the foreign merchants resident in London with regard to the foreign post, which, up to this reign they had been allowed to manage among themselves. In 1558, the Queen's Council of State issued a proclamation "for the redresse of disorders in postes which conveye and bring to and out of the parts beyond the seas, pacquets of letters." It would seem that soon after the arrival of the Flemings in this country, in the previous century, they established a post-office of their own, between London and [Pg 10] the Continent, appointing one of themselves as postmaster, by the sufferance and favour of the reigning sovereign. "Afterwards," says Stowe,[6] "by long custom, they pretended a right to appoint a master of the *Strangers' Post*, and that they were in possession of from the year 1514." This continued till 1558, in which year the foreign merchants fell out among themselves over the question of appointing a postmaster. The Flemings, aided by the Spanish ambassador, chose one Raphael Vanden Putte; the Italians, by this time a considerable body of foreigners, chose one of their number for the vacant place. Not being able to agree, the disputants referred their case to the English Council, when, to the surprise of the foreigners, their right to appoint at all was publicly disputed. The English merchants took up the matter very warmly, and addressed the Privy Council in two or three petitions. They took the opportunity to complain that the authorities of the foreign post had frequently acted unfairly to them, in keeping back their continental letters, and so giving the foreigners the advantage of the markets. In one of the petitions, they urged, "that it is one of the chief points of the prerogative belonging to all princes, to place within their dominions such officers as were most trusty of their own subjects; that the postmaster's place was one of great trust and credit in every realm, and therefore should be committed to the charge of the natural subjects and not strangers, especially in such places as had daily passages into foreign realms, and where was concourse of strangers." Further, "The strangers were known to have been the occasion of many injuries in the staying and keeping back of letters, and, in the meantime, an extraordinary would be despatched to prevent the markets and *purpose*." The English merchants urged that it would be doing the foreigners no injustice to appoint an English postmaster; no new exactions need be imposed upon them, "and such men might be placed in the office as could talk with them in their own language, and that should make [Pg 11] as good promise, and as faithfully perform the same in all equity and upright dealings, as any stranger had done." The result was, that it was finally settled that the "Master of the Postes" should have the charge of both the English and foreign offices, and that the title of this functionary should be changed to "Chief Postmaster." Thomas Randolph was the first "Chief Postmaster" of England.

Under the Tudor dynasty, marvellous strides were taken in the social progress of the country. The habits of a great nation can, of course, only change slowly; but, notwithstanding, the England of the Plantagenets was a different country to the England which Elizabeth left in 1603. The development of trade, which really commenced with the Tudors, gave the first great impulse to a new social era. People began to feel more interest in each other, and as this became manifest, the demand for interchange of thought and news became more and more urgent. In the reign of Henry VIII. the English people began a considerable trade with Flanders in wool. A commercial treaty subsequently gave free ingress and egress to the ships of both nations. The change that this new trade wrought was immediate and striking. English rural districts which had before been self-supporting—growing their own corn and feeding their own cattle—now turned their corn-land into pasture-land, and sought grain among their neighbours. The dissolution of the monasteries under the same monarch had the effect, among other results, of scattering broadcast over the country those who had previously lived together and enjoyed almost a monopoly of learning. The Reformation civilized as well as christianized the people. Other causes were at work which operated in opening out the country, and encouraging habits of locomotion and the spread of intelligence generally. Amongst many such, were changes, for instance, in the routine of law procedure, introduced by Henry. Up to his time, courts of arbitration had sat from time immemorial within the different baronies of England, where disputes, especially those between [Pg 12] landlord and tenant, were cheaply and equitably adjusted. Now, such cases were ordered to be taken to London, and country people found themselves compelled to take journeys to London and sue or be sued at the new courts of Westminster.[7]

We could not well exaggerate the difficulties which encompassed *travellers* at this early period. As yet there were but one or two main roads. Even in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, and certainly in all the remote parts of the country, the roads were not unlike broad ditches, much waterworn and strewn with loose stones. Travellers had no choice but to ride on horseback or walk. Everybody who could afford it rode. The sovereign and all gentlefolk rode. Judges rode the circuit in jackboots. Ladies rode on pillions fixed on the horse, and generally behind some relative or serving-man. In this way Queen Elizabeth, when she rode into the city, placed herself behind her Lord Chancellor. The wagon was an invention of the period. It was a rude contrivance; nothing, in fact, but a cart without springs, the body of it resting solidly upon the axles. The first conveyance of this sort was constructed for the Queen's own use, and in it she journeyed to open

Parliament.[8] Elizabeth rode in it but on this one occasion, and has left behind her a curious and most graphic account of her sufferings during the journey, in a letter, written in the old French of that period, to the French ambassador at her court, who seems to have suggested the improvement to her. The wagon, which had been originally contrived for ladies, now that the Queen discarded it, was not brought into great use during her reign. It seems to have found its way into the provinces, however, the gentry of that time being delighted with it. "On a certaine day in 1583," according to Mr. Smiles, "that valyant knyght, Sir Harry Sydney, entered Shrewsbury in his wagon, with his trompeter blowynge, verey joyfull to behold and see." Under [Pg 13] such circumstances, it cannot be wondered at that general intelligence travelled slowly. Among the common people, few ever saw a letter. Pilgrims, as they travelled between the monasteries of the period, or who, after their dissolution, visited their shrines, dispensed news to the poor, and would occasionally carry letters for the rich.[9] Public and private couriers riding post were sometimes surrounded, at the villages or towns on their *route*, by crowds of people desirous of obtaining some information of the world's doings. At times, they were not suffered to pass without furnishing some kind of information. The letters of the period, many of which survive, show that great care was taken to protect them from the curiosity of the bearer; and precautionary measures were resorted to to prevent delay. They were usually most carefully folded, and fastened at the end by a sort of paper strap, upon which the seal was affixed, whilst under the seal a piece of string or silk thread, or even a straw, was frequently placed, running round the letter. The following letter, still extant, will serve to give an insight into the way letters were dealt with at this period, and the speed at which they were forwarded.—(Vide *Postmaster-General's 2nd Report*, p. 38.)

ARCHBISHOP PARKER *to* SIR W. CECIL.

SIR,

According to the Queen's Majesty's pleasure, and your advertisement, you shall receive a form of prayer, which, after you have perused and judged of it, shall be put in print and published immediately, &c. &c.

From my house at Croyden, this 22d July, 1566, at four of the clock, afternoon.

Your honour's alway,

MATTHEW CANT.

This letter is thus endorsed by successive postmasters, according to the existing custom. [Pg 14]

Received at Waltham Cross the 23d of July, at nine at night.

Received at Ware the 23d of July at 12 at night.

Received at Croxton the 24th of July, between 7 and 8 of the morning.

So that his Grace's letter, which would appear to have been so important as that one or more messengers were required to travel night and day in order to deliver it at the earliest possible moment, took 40 hours to travel 63 miles.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Xenophon.

[2] Herodotus.

[3] Travels of Marco Polo, pp. 139, 140.

[4] Camden's Annals.

[5] Froude's History, Vol. III. p. 185.

[6] Surveye of London, Vol. II.

[7] Froude's History, Vol. III. p. 94.

[8] Smiles's Lives of the Engineers, Vol. I.

[9] Historian of Craven, speaking of the close of the sixteenth century.

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CHAPTER II.

THE RISE OF THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

It was reserved for the Stuarts to organize for the first time in England a regular system of post communication, the benefits of which should be shared by all who could find the means. England was behind other European nations in establishing a public letter-post. It was not until the foreign post had been in existence a hundred years, and until the foreigners had drawn particular attention to their postal arrangements by their constant disputes, that the English government established a general post for inland letters, similar to the one whose benefits "the strangers" had enjoyed even prior to the reign of Henry the Eighth. Little progress towards this end was

made in the reign of the first James, if we except a better organization for the conveyance of official despatches. At the same time, it ought to be stated, that the improved organization here referred to was the groundwork for the subsequent public post.

One of the results attendant on the accession[10] of the Scotch king to the English Crown necessitated important improvements in the system of horse posts, for which it called loudly. Immediately on his accession, the high road from Edinburgh to London was thronged night and day with the king's countrymen. All ordinary communications fell far short of the demand; so much so, that post messengers riding from the Council at Edinburgh to the king in London, or *vice versâ*, were stopped whole days on the road for want of horses, which had been taken by the Scottish lords and gentlemen rushing forward to the English capital to offer their congratulations to his majesty. As a remedy, the lords of the English council issued a proclamation, calling upon all magistrates to assist the postmasters "*in this time so full of business*," by seeing to it that they were supplied with "fresh and able horses as necessitie shall require." They were to be "able and sufficient horses," well furnished "of saddles, bridles, girts and stirropes, with good guides to look to them; who for the said horses shall demand and receive of such as shall ride on them the prices accustomed" (*Book of Proclamation*, 1603-1609). [Pg 16]

As the general intercourse between the two capitals now promised to be permanent, and travelling along the North Road increased rather than diminished, further general orders were published from time to time by royal proclamation. Two kinds of post were established during the reign of James the First, both being in operation together towards its close. They were known as the "*thorough post*," and "*the post for the packet*." The first, consisting of special messengers who rode "thorough post," that is, through the whole distance "with horse and guide," was established in 1603. The couriers were ordered to pay at the rate of "twopence-halfpenny the mile" for the hire of each horse, and to pay in advance. Further, they must not ride any horse more than one stage (or seven miles in summer, and six in winter), except "with the consent of the post of the stage at which they did not change." For the service of the second post, or "*the post for the packet*," every postmaster was bound to keep not less than two horses ready, "with furniture convenient," when on the receipt of a "packet" or parcel containing letters, from a previous stage, he was to send it on towards the next within a quarter of an hour of its receipt, entering the transaction in "a large and faire ledger paper book." As a further precaution, and in order to prevent the courier loitering on the road with any important despatch, each postmaster was required to endorse each single letter with the exact time of the messenger's arrival, just as we have seen in the case of the one found in the collection of Archbishop Parker's correspondence. For the purposes of this packet-post, we find it arranged that each postmaster should have ready "two bags of leather, at the least, well lined with baize or cotton, so as not to injure the letters." It also rested with the different postmasters to furnish the couriers with "*hornes* to sound and blowe as oft as the post meets company, or at least four times in every mile."[11] Thus arose a custom which, under slightly different circumstances, was strictly observed in the days of mail-coaches. [Pg 17]

It will be readily observed that in the arrangements of the packet-post there was nothing to prevent its being extensively used, except the important restrictions which the King put upon its use. During the reign of James nothing but the despatches of ambassadors were allowed to jostle the Government letters in the leather bags, "lined with baize or cotton," of "the post for the packet." It was not until Charles the First had succeeded his father, that this post came to be used, under certain conditions, by merchants and private persons.

It was during the reign of James the First that the Government secured, and kept for a hundred years, certain privileges with respect to the hiring of post-horses. We have seen that the royal couriers, travelling with despatches by either of the two posts, had priority of claim to sufficient horses and proper accommodation on their journeys. They also settled, by order in Council, that any person, whether travelling on the business of the Government or not, should, if furnished with warrants from the Council, have prior claim to private individuals, over post-horses and proper entertainment, demanding them in the name of the King. In a warrant of Council, for instance, dated Whitehall, May 12, 1630, we find the Privy Council ordering all postmasters to furnish Sir Cornelius Vermuyden with horses and guides to enable him to ride post from London to Boston, and thence to Hatfield, where he was engaged in draining the royal chase for the King. [12] [Pg 18]

Little as James the First did towards establishing an inland post, though with materials so ready to his hand, in the posts of which we have spoken, yet he deserves some credit for setting on foot a general post for letters to foreign countries. It would seem that the abuses complained of by English merchants, with regard to letters coming *from* abroad, had been lessened by the appointment of an English Postmaster for the Foreign Office, but not so with letters *sent* abroad: hence the independent foreign post projected by the King. In another of the very numerous proclamations of his reign, it is stated that the King had created the office of Postmaster-General for Foreign Parts, "being out of our dominions, and hath appointed to this office Matthew de Quester the elder, and Matthew de Quester the younger." The duties of this new office are stated to consist in the "sole taking up, sending, and conveying of all packets and letters concerning his service, or business to be despatched into forraigne parts, with power to grant moderate salaries." These appointments interfering in some way with his department, gave great offence to Lord Stanhope, the English "Chief Postmaster," and mutual unpleasantness sprung up between the officers of the two establishments. A suit was instituted in the law courts, and whilst it was pending, both offices got completely disarranged, some of Lord Stanhope's staff going without [Pg 19]

salary for as long as eight years; "divers of them," as we find it given in a petition to the Council, "lie now in prison by reason of the great debt they are in for want of their entertainment." The dispute was not settled until after Charles the First had become king—namely, in 1632—when Lord Stanhope was induced to retire from the service as "Chief Postmaster," the De Questers at the same time assigning the office they had jointly held to William Frizell and Thomas Witherings. A royal proclamation was thereupon issued, to the effect that the King approved of the above assignment. "The King," it went on to say, "affecting the welfare of his people, and taking into his princely consideration how much it imports his state and this realm, that the secrets thereof be not disclosed to forraigne nations, which cannot be prevented if a promiscuous use of transmitting or taking up of forraigne letters and packets should be suffered, forbids all others from exercising that which to the office of such postmaster pertaineth, at their utmost perils."

Witherings seems to have made good use of his time, for in 1635, or only three years from the date of his appointment, he saw the great necessity which existed for some improvement in the postal resources of the country, and proposed to the King to "settle a pacquet post between London and all parts of His Majesty's Dominions, for the carrying and recarrying of his subjects' letters." In this memorial, which justly entitles him to a front rank in the number of great postal reformers, Witherings stated some curious facts relating to the service of those days. "Private letters," it was said, "being now carried by carriers or persons travelling on foot, it is sometimes full two months before any answer can be received from Scotland or Ireland to London." "If any of his Majesty's subjects shall write to Madrid in Spain, he shall receive answer sooner and surer than he shall out of Scotland or Ireland." Witherings proposed that the existing posts should be used; that the journey between London and Edinburgh should be performed in three days, when [Pg 20] —"if the post could be punctually paid—the news will come *sooner than thought*." Witherings' memorial had the desired effect on the Council, who at once set about making the machinery already in use applicable for a general post for inland letters. In 1635 they issued a proclamation, in which they state that there had not been hitherto any constant communication between the kingdoms of England and Scotland, and therefore command "Thomas Witherings, Esquire, His Majesty's Postmaster for forraigne parts, to settle a running post or two, to run night and day between Edinburgh in Scotland and the City of London, to go thither and back again in 6 days." Directions were also given for the management of the correspondence between the principal towns on the line of road. *Bye* posts shall be connected with the main line of posts, by means of which letters from such places as Lincoln, Hull, Chester, Bristol, or Exeter, shall fall into it, and letters addressed to these and other places shall be sent. Other bye posts are promised to different parts of the country. All postmasters on the main line of posts, as well as those of the bye posts, were commanded to have "always ready in their stables one or two horses." The charges settled by James I. were ordered to be the charges under the new system, "2½*d.* for a single horse, and 5*d.* for two horses per mile." In a subsequent proclamation two years afterwards, a monopoly of letter-carrying was established, which has been preserved ever since, in all the regulations of the Post-Office. No other messengers or foot posts shall carry any letters, but those who shall be employed by the King's "Chief Postmaster." Exceptions were made, however, when the letters were addressed to places to which the King's post did *not* travel; also, in the case of common known carriers; messengers particularly sent express; and to a friend carrying a letter for a friend. These exceptions, trifling as they were, were withdrawn from time to time, as the Post-Office became more and more one of the settled institutions of the country. As it was, the prohibitory clauses caused great dissatisfaction in the country. The middle of the [Pg 21] seventeenth century was certainly a bad time for introducing a measure that should bear any appearance of a stretch of the royal prerogative. That no one but the servants of the King's Postmaster should carry private letters was regarded as an unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the subject; so much so, that in 1642 a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into that part of the measure. The subject was also frequently mentioned in Parliament; notwithstanding which, the Government strictly adhered to the clause.[13]

The first rates of postage for the new service were fixed at *twopence*, for a single letter, for any distance under 80 miles; 4*d.* up to 140 miles; 6*d.* for any longer distance in England; and 8*d.* to any place in Scotland. Of course the distances were all reckoned from London.

The control of the English letter-office was entrusted to the Foreign Postmaster-General, who had suggested the new undertaking. Witherings held the joint offices for five years, when in 1640 he was charged with abusing both his trusts, and superseded by Philip Burlamachy, a London merchant. It was arranged, however, that Burlamachy should execute the duties of his offices under the care and inspection of the principal Secretary of State. And now began a quarrel which lasted incessantly from 1641 to 1647. When the proclamation concerning the sequestration of his office was published, Witherings assigned his patent to the Earl of Warwick. Mindful of this opportunity, Lord Stanhope, the "Chief Postmaster" under the King's father, who had surrendered his patent some years before, now came forward and stated that the action had not been voluntary, but, as we learn from his petition to the House of Lords, he "was summoned to the Council table, and obliged, before he was suffered to depart, to subscribe somewhat there [Pg 22] penned upon your petitioner's patent by the Lord Keeper Coventry." Lord Stanhope found a staunch friend and adherent in Mr. Edmund Prideaux, a member of the House of Commons, and subsequently Attorney-General to the Commonwealth. Two rival offices were established in London, and continued strife was maintained between the officers of the two claimants. On one occasion, Prideaux himself helped to seize the Plymouth mail which had just arrived in London, and was proceeding to the office of the Earl of Warwick near the Royal Exchange. Burlamachy

and the Government failed to restore peace. In the Commission on the Post-Office, to which we have already referred, the subject was taken up, but the resolution of the Committee only rendered matters more complicated. The Committee, though Prideaux contrived to be made Chairman of it, declared that the sequestration of two years before "was a grievance and illegal, and ought to be taken off," and Mr. Witherings restored to office. The Commission decided against the Government, both as regards the sequestration and the monopoly of letter-carrying, which the King proclaimed in 1637. Both questions were left in abeyance for two years, when, in 1644, the Parliamentary forces having begun to gain an ascendancy over those of the King, the Lords and Commons by a joint action appointed Edmund Prideaux, the Chairman of the Committee of 1642, "and a barrister of seven years' standing," to the vacant office. It is somewhat amusing to note how the monopolizing tendencies of the Crown, denounced but two years ago by the Parliament, were now openly advocated and confirmed by an almost unanimous vote of both Houses. The resolution establishing Prideaux in the office states,[14] that the Lords and Commons, "finding by experience that it is most necessary for keeping of good intelligence between the Parliament and their forces, that post-stages be erected in several parts of the kingdom, and the office of Master of the Post and Couriers being at present void, ordain that [Pg 23] Edmund Prideaux shall be and hereby is constituted Master of the Posts, Couriers, and Messengers." Prideaux must have been an energetic and pains-taking manager. He was very zealous and greatly improved the service, "establishing," says Blackstone, "a weekly conveyance of letters to all parts of the country, thereby saving to the public the charge of maintaining postmasters to the amount of 7,000*l.* per annum." It seems to have been clearly seen in Parliament that the Post-Office would eventually pay its own expenses, and even yield a revenue; for, in deciding on Prideaux's proposal, their object is stated quite concisely in one of the clauses sanctioning it:—"That for defraying the charges of the several postmasters, *and easing the State of it*, there must be a weekly conveyance of letters to all parts of the country." For twenty years previously the establishment of the post had been a burden to the extent of three or four thousand pounds a year on the public purse. Prideaux at first was allowed to take the profits of his office, in consideration of his bearing all the charges. In 1649, five years after his appointment, the amount of revenue derived from the posts reached 5,000*l.* and a new arrangement was entered into. The practice of farming the Post-Office revenue began from the year 1650, and lasted, as far as regards some of the bye posts, down to the end of the last century. In 1650 the revenue was farmed for the sum of 5,000*l.*

In the year 1649 the Common Council of London deliberately established a post-office for inland letters in direct rivalry to that of the Parliament. But the Commons, although they had loudly denounced the formation of a monopoly by the Crown, proceeded to put down this infringement of the one which they had but lately secured to themselves. The City authorities, backed, as they were in those days, by immense power, stoutly denied that the Parliament had any exclusive privilege in the matter. They could see no reason why there should not be "another weekly [Pg 24] conveyance of letters and for other uses" (this latter clause most probably meaning conveyance of parcels and packets). Though pressed to do so, "they refused to seek the sanction of Parliament, or to have any direction from them in their measure."[15] "The Common Council," it is further stated by way of complaint, "have sent agents to settle postages by their authority on several roads, and have employed a natural Scott, who has gone into Scotland, and hath there settled postmasters (others than those for the state) on all that road." Prideaux took care to learn something from the rival company. He lowered his rates of postage, increased the number of despatches, and then resolutely applied himself to get the City establishment suppressed. Prideaux, who had now become Attorney-General, invoked the aid of the Council of State. The Council reported that, "as affairs now stand, they conceive that the office of Postmaster is, and ought to be, in the sole power and disposal of Parliament." After this decision the City posts were immediately and peremptorily suppressed, and from this date the carrying of letters has been the exclusive privilege of the Crown. Though the Government succeeded in establishing the monopoly, public opinion was greatly against the measure. The authorities of the city of London, as may well be imagined, were incessant in their exertions to defeat it, not only at that time, but on many subsequent occasions. Pamphlets were written on the subject, and one book, especially, deserves mention, inasmuch as its author bore a name now memorable in the annals of the British Post-Office. In 1659 was published a book, entitled *John Hill's Penny Post; or a vindication of the liberty of every Englishman in carrying merchants' or other men's letters against any restraints of farmers of such employment*. 4*to.* 1659.

Under the Protectorate, the Post-Office underwent material changes. Whilst extending the basis of the Post-Office, Cromwell and his Council took advantage of the State monopoly to make it [Pg 25] subservient to the interests of the Commonwealth. One of the ordinances published during the Protectorate sets forth that the Post-Office ought to be upheld, not merely because it is the best means of conveying public and private communications, but also because it may be made the agent in "discovering and preventing many wicked designs, which have been and are daily contrived against the peace and welfare of this Commonwealth, the intelligence whereof cannot well be communicated except by letters of escript." A system of espionage was thus settled which has always been abhorrent to the nature and feelings of Englishmen. But perhaps we ought not to judge the question in the light of the present day. And we would do justice to the Council of the Commonwealth. The Post-Office now for the first time became the subject of parliamentary enactments, and the acts passed during the interregnum became the models for all subsequent measures. In the year 1656 an Act was passed, "to settle the postage of England, Scotland, and Ireland," and henceforth the Post-Office was established on a new and broad basis.[16] It was ruled that there "shall be one General Post-Office, and one officer *stiled* the Postmaster-Generall

of England, and Comptroller of the Post-Office." This officer was to have the horsing of all "through" posts and persons "riding post." "Prices for the carriage of letters, English, Scottish, and Irish," as well as foreign, and also for post-horses, were again fixed. All other persons were forbidden "to set up or employ any foot-posts, horse-posts, or packet-boats." Two exceptions, however, were made under the latter head, in favour of the *two universities*, "who may use their former liberties, rights, and privileges of having special carriers to carry and recarry letters as formerly they did, and as if this Act had not been made." The *Cinque Ports* also must "not be interfered with, and their ancient rights of sending their own post to and from London shall remain intact." [Pg 26]

At the Restoration this settlement of the Post-Office was confirmed in almost all its particulars. The statute 12 Car. II. c. 35 re-enacts the ordinance of the Commonwealth, and on account of its being the earliest recognised statutory enactment, is commonly known as the "Post-Office Charter." It remained in full force until 1710. The following is the important preamble to the statute in question: "Whereas for the maintainance of mutual correspondencies, and prevention of many inconveniences happening by private posts, several public post-offices have been heretofore erected for carrying and recarrying of letters by post to and from all parts and places within England, Scotland, and Ireland, and several posts beyond the seas, the well-ordering whereof is a matter of general concernment, and of great advantage, as well for the preservation of trade and commerce as otherwise."

It does not appear *why* Prideaux's connexion with the Post-Office was dissolved, nor yet exactly *when*. Probably his more onerous duties as first law officer of the Government demanded all his time and energy. However it was, we hear no more of him after his victory over the then formidable City magnates. During the remaining years of Cromwell's life, the revenues of the Post-Office, wonderfully augmented by Prideaux's management, were farmed for the sum of 10,000*l.* a year to a Mr. John Manley. During Manley's tenure of office, the proceeds must either have increased with marvellous rapidity, or the contracts were under estimated; for when, in 1659, Manley left the Post-Office, he calculated that he had *cleared* in that and some previous years the sum of 14,000*l.* annually. A Parliamentary Committee instituted a strict scrutiny into the proceeds of the office in the first year of the Restoration, at which period it became necessary that a new Postmaster-General should be appointed. It was agreed by the members of this Committee to recommend that a much higher sum be asked from the next aspirant to the office, inasmuch as they found that Mr. Manley, instead of over-estimating his receipts, had erred on the other side, and that they could not have come far short of the annual sum of 20,000*l.* The result of the Committee's investigation was, that Mr. Henry Bishop was only appointed to the vacant place on his entering into a contract to pay to Government the annual sum of 21,500*l.* In estimating the increase of Post-Office revenue from year to year, it must be borne in mind that a considerable item in the account was derived from the monopoly in post-horses for travelling, which monopoly had been secured under Cromwell's ordinances, and re-secured under 12 Car. II. c. 35. By this Act, no traveller could hire horses for riding post from any but authorized postmasters.[17] This statute remained in force, under some limitations, till 1779. [Pg 27]

Many matters of detail in the arrangements of the Post-Office were discussed in Parliament during the first three years of the Restoration. Long-promised bye-posts were now for the first time established; the circulation of the letters, meaning by that the *routes* the mails shall take, and many such subjects, best settled of course by the authorities, weary the reader of the Journals of the House of Commons about this date. In December, 1660, for instance, we find the House deliberating on a proviso tendered by Mr. Titus to the following effect:—"Provided also and be it enacted, that a letter or packet-post shall once every week come to Kendal by way of Lancaster, and to the town of Penrith in Cumberland by way of Newcastle and Carlisle, and to the City of Lincoln and the borough of Grimsby likewise;" and we are glad to find that this reasonable proviso, to give these "*out-of-the-way places*" the benefit of a weekly post, was agreed to without cavil. We notice one important resolution of the session of this year, setting forth that, as the Post-Office Bill has been carried through the Houses satisfactorily, "such of the persons who have contributed their pains in improvement of the Post-Office, be recommended to the King's Majesty for consideration, to be had of the pains therein taken accordingly." Let us hope (for we find no further mention of the matter) that all concerned got their deserts. Tardy as the English people were, compared with their continental neighbours, in rearing the institution of the post, the foundation of an establishment was now laid which has, at the present time, far distanced all competitors in its resources and in the matter of liberal provisions for the people. Even before the days of penny postage, the Duke of Wellington, than whom no man was supposed to know better the postal regulations of the Continent, gave it as his deliberate opinion, that "the English Post-Office is the only one in Europe which can be said to do its work." In rewarding, therefore, those who contributed so much to this success at this early period of the history of the establishment, King Charles would simply pay an instalment of the debt which future generations would owe to them. [Pg 28] [Pg 29]

Mr. Bishop was only left undisturbed for two short years. As it was evident that the revenue of the office was increasing, the House of Commons took advantage, at the close of his second year of office, to desire his Majesty that "no further grant or contract of the Post-Office be again entered into till a committee inspect the same and see what improvements may be made on the Revenue, as well as in the better management of the department." They pray that the office may be given to the highest bidder. His Majesty replies that he has not been satisfied with the hands in which it has been. Notwithstanding that a measure was carried requiring the officers of the Post-Office in London and the country to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and

notwithstanding that these oaths were properly subscribed, his Majesty is not at all satisfied, "for the extraordinary number of *nonconformists and disaffected persons* in that office," and is desirous of a change. The term being expired, his Majesty "will have a care to see it raised to that profit it may fairly be, remembering always that it being an office of much trust as well as a farm, it will not be fit to give it to him that bids most, because a dishonest or disaffected person is likeliest to exceed that way." There can be no manner of doubt now, that the King's words on this occasion were meant to prepare the minds of his faithful Commons for the successor which he had by this time fully resolved upon. Two months subsequently to the above message to the Commons, the entire revenue of the Post-Office is settled by statute, 15 Car. II. c. 14, upon James, Duke of York, and his heirs male in perpetuity. This arrangement existed only during the lifetime of Charles, for when, at his death, the Duke of York ascended the throne, the revenue of the Post-Office, which had by that time reached to 65,000*l.* a-year, again reverted to the Crown. No means were spared to make the Post-Office fruitful during the remainder of the years of Charles II. Not only were direct measures sanctioned, but others which had only a bearing on the [Pg 30] interests of the Post-Office were introduced, and easily carried through the Houses. Now, for the first time, in 1663, the *Turnpike Act* made its appearance on our Statute-book, and we may gather from the preamble to this useful Act some of the impediments which at that time existed to postal communication. It sets forth that the great North Road—the main artery for the post-roads and our national intercourse—was in many parts "very vexatious," "almost impassable," and "very dangerous." The Act provided for needful improvements, and was the beginning of legislation on that subject.

Letter-franking also commenced in this year. A Committee of the House of Commons which sat in the year 1735 reported, "that the privilege of franking letters by the knights, &c. chosen to represent the Commons in Parliament, began with the creating of a post-office in the kingdom by Act of Parliament." The proviso which secured this privilege to members cannot now be regarded otherwise than as a propitiatory clause to induce a unanimous approval of the bill in general. The account[18] of the discussion of the clause in question is somewhat amusing. Sir Walter Earle proposed that "members' letters should come and go free during the time of their sittings." Sir Heneage Finch (afterwards Lord Chancellor Finch) said, indignantly, "It is a *poor mendicant* proviso, and below the honour of the House." Many members spoke in favour of the clause, Sir George Downing, Mr. Boscowen, among the number, and Sergeant Charlton also urged "that letters for counsel went free." The debate was, in fact, nearly one-sided; but the Speaker, Sir Harbottle Grimstone, on the question being called, refused for a considerable time to put it, saying he "felt ashamed of it." The proviso was eventually put and carried by a large majority. When the Post-Office Bill, with its franking privilege, was sent up to the Lords, they threw out the clause, *ostensibly* for the same reasons which had actuated the minority in the Commons in [Pg 31] opposing it, but *really*, as it was confessed some years afterwards, because there was no provision made in the Bill that the "*Lords' own letters should pass free*." A few years later this important omission was supplied, and both Houses had the privilege guaranteed to them, neither Lords nor Commons now feeling the arrangement below their dignity.

Complaint is made for the first time this year, that letters have been opened in the General Post-Office. Members of Parliament were amongst the complainants. The attention of the Privy Council having been called to the subject, the King issued a proclamation "for *quieting* the Postmaster-General in the execution of his office." It ordained that "no postmaster or other person, except under the immediate warrant of our principal Secretary of State, shall presume to open letters or packets *not* directed unto themselves."

Two years before the death of Charles II. a penny post, the only remaining post-office incident of any importance during his reign, was set up in London for the conveyance of letters and parcels. This post was originated by Robert Murray, an upholsterer, who, like many other people living at the time, was dissatisfied that the Post-Office had made no provision for correspondence between different parts of London. By the then existing arrangements, communication was much more easy between town and country than within the limits of the metropolis. Murray's post, got up at a great cost, was assigned over to Mr. William Docwray, a name which figures for many succeeding years in post-office annals. The regulations of the new penny post were, that all letters and parcels not exceeding a pound weight, or any sum of money not above 10*l.* in value, or parcel not worth more than 10*l.*, might be conveyed at a charge of *one penny* in the city and suburbs, and for *twopence* to any distance within a given ten-mile circuit. Six large offices were opened at convenient places in London, and receiving-houses were established in all the principal streets. Stowe says, that in the windows of the latter offices, or hanging at the doors, were large [Pg 32] placards on which were printed, in great letters, "Penny post letters taken in here." "Letter-carriers," adds the old chronicler, "gather them each hour and take them to the grand office in their respective circuits. After the said letters and parcels are duly entered in the books, they are delivered at stated periods by other carriers." The deliveries in the busy and crowded streets near the Exchange were as frequent as six or eight times a day; even in the outskirts, as many as four daily deliveries were made.

The penny post was found to be a great and decided success. No sooner, however, was that success apparent, and it was known that the speculation was becoming lucrative to its originator, than the Duke of York, by virtue of the settlement made to him, complained of it as an infraction of his monopoly. Nor were there wanting other reasons, inducing the Government to believe that the penny post ought not to be under separate management. The Protestants loudly denounced the whole concern as a contrivance of the Popish party. The great Dr. Oates hinted that the Jesuits were at the bottom of the scheme, and that if the bags were examined, they would be

found full of treason.[19] The city porters, too, complained that their interests were attacked, and for long they tore down the placards which announced the innovation to the public. Undoubtedly, however, the authorities were most moved by the *success* of the undertaking, and thereupon appealed to the Court of King's Bench, which decided that the new post-office, with all its profits and advantages, should become part and parcel of the royal establishment. Docwray was even cast in slight damages and costs. Thus commenced the *London District Post*, which existed as a separate establishment to the *General Post* from this time until so late as 1854. It was at first thought that the amalgamation of the two offices would be followed by a fusion of the two systems; but this fusion, so much desired, and one we would have thought so indispensable, was [Pg 33] not accomplished (from a number of considerations to be adduced hereafter), although the object was attempted more than once.

About a year after the new establishment had been wrested from him, Mr. Docwray was appointed, under the Duke of York, to the office of Controller of the District-Post. This was doubtless meant as some sort of compensation for the losses he had sustained.[20]

In 1685, Charles II. died, and the Duke of York succeeding him, the revenues of the Post-Office, of course, reverted to the Crown. Throughout the reign of the second James, the receipts of the Post-Office went on increasing, though (the King being too much engaged in the internal commotions which disturbed the country) no improvements of any moment were made. The only subject calling for mention is, that James first commenced the practice of granting pensions out of the Post-Office revenue. The year after he ascended the throne, the King, acting doubtless under the wishes of the "merry monarch," that provision should be made for her, granted a pension of 4,700*l.* a-year to Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, one of the late King's mistresses, to be paid out of the Post-Office receipts. This pension is still paid to the Duke of Grafton, as her living representative. The Earl of Rochester was allowed a pension of 4,000*l.* a-year from the same source during this reign. In 1694, during the reign of William and Mary, the list of pensions[21] paid by the Post-Office authorities stood thus:—

Earl of Rochester	£4,000
Duchess of Cleveland	4,700
Duke of Leeds	3,500
Duke of Schomberg	4,000
Earl of Bath	2,500
Lord Keeper	2,000
William Docwray, till 1698	500

Docwray's pension began in 1694, and was regarded as a further acknowledgment of his claims [Pg 34] as founder of the "District-post," or the "Penny-post," as it was then called. He only held his pension, however, for four years, losing both his emoluments and his office in 1698, on certain charges of gross mismanagement having been brought against him. The officers and messengers under his control memorialized the Commissioners of the Treasury, alleging that the "Controller doth what in him lyes to lessen the revenue of the Penny Post-Office, that he may farm it and get it into his own hands;" also, that "he had removed the Post-Office to an inconvenient place to forward his ends." There appears to have been no limit as to the weight or size of parcels transmitted through the district-post during Docwray's time, but the memorial goes on to say that "he forbids the taking in of any band-boxes (except very small) and all parcels above a pound; which, when they were taken in, did bring a considerable advantage to the Post-Office;" that these same parcels are taken by porters and watermen at a far greater charge, "which is a loss to the public," as the penny-post messengers did the work "much cheaper and more satisfactory." Nor is this all. It is further stated that "he stops, under spetious pretences, most parcells that are taken in, which is great damage to tradesmen by loosing their customers, or spoiling their goods, and many times hazard the life of the patient when physick is sent by a doctor or an apothecary." [22] It was hinted that the parcels were not only delayed, but misappropriated; that letters were opened and otherwise tampered with: and these charges being partially substantiated, Docwray, who deserved better treatment, was removed from all connexion with the department.

It was only towards the close of the seventeenth century, that the Scotch and Irish post establishments come at all into notice. The first legislative enactments for the establishment of a [Pg 35] Scotch post-office were made in the reign of William and Mary. The Scotch Parliament passed such an act in the year 1695. Of course the proclamations of King James I. provided for the conveyance of letters between the capitals of the two countries; and although posts had been heard of in one or two of the principal roads leading out of Edinburgh, even before James VI. of Scotland became the first English king of that name, it was only after the Revolution that they became permanent and legalized. Judging by the success which had followed the English establishment, it was expected that a Scotch post would soon pay all its expenses. However, to begin, the King decided upon making a grant of the whole revenue of the Scotch office, as well as a salary of 300*l.* a year, to Sir Robert Sinclair, of Stevenson, on condition that he would keep up the establishment.[23] In a year from that date, Sir Robert Sinclair gave up the grant as unprofitable and disadvantageous. It was long before the Scotch office gave signs of emulating the successes of the English post, for, even forty years afterwards, the whole yearly revenue of the former was only a little over a thousand pounds. About 1700, the posts between London and Edinburgh were so frequently robbed, especially in the neighbourhood of the borders, that the two Parliaments of England and Scotland jointly passed acts, making the robbery or seizure of

the public post "punishable with death and confiscation of moveables."

Little is known of the earlier postal arrangements of Ireland. Before any legislative enactments were made in the reign, it is said, of Charles I., the letters of the country were transmitted in much the same way as we have seen they were forwarded in the sister country. The Viceroy of Ireland usually adopted the course common in England when the letters of the King and his Council had to be delivered abroad. The subject is seldom mentioned in contemporary records, and we can only picture in imagination the way in which correspondence was then transmitted. [Pg 36] In the sixteenth century, mounted messengers were employed carrying official letters and despatches to different parts of Ireland. Private noblemen also employed these "intelligencers," as they were then and for some time afterwards called, to carry their letters to other chiefs or their dependents. The Earl of Ormond was captured in 1600, owing to the faithlessness of Tyrone's "intelligencer," who first took his letters to the Earl of Desmond and let him privately read them, and afterwards demurely delivered them according to their addresses.[24]

Charles I. ordered that packets should ply weekly between Dublin and Chester, and also between Milford Haven and Waterford, as a means of insuring quick transmission of news and orders between the English Government and Dublin Castle. We have seen that packets sailed between Holyhead and Dublin, and Liverpool and Dublin, as early as the reign of Elizabeth. Cromwell kept up both lines of packets established by Charles. At the Restoration, only one—namely, that between Chester and Dublin—was retained, this being applied to the purposes of a general letter-post. The postage between London and Dublin was 6*d.*, fresh rates being imposed for towns in the interior of Ireland. A new line of packets was established to make up for that discontinued,[25] to sail between Port Patrick and Donaghadee, forming an easy and short route between Scotland and the north of Ireland. For many years this mail was conveyed in an open boat, each trip across the narrow channel costing the Post-Office a guinea. Subsequently, a grant of 200*l.* was made by the Post-Office in order that a larger boat might be built for the service. This small mail is still continued.

FOOTNOTES:

[10] The special messenger who informed James of Queen Elizabeth's death accomplished a great feat in those days. Sir Robert Carey rode post, with sealed lips, from Richmond in Surrey to Edinburgh in less than three days.

[11] *Notes and Queries*, 1853.

[12] This instance, showing the usage, gives us an insight into the amount of control under which these public servants were held. Sir Cornelius was in the bad grace of the people of the district through which he had to pass, on account of being a foreigner; so at Royston Edward Whitehead refused to provide any horses, and on being told he should answer for his neglect, replied, "Tush! Do your worst. You shall have none of my horses, in spite of your teeth."—*Smiles.*

[13] Blackstone, in speaking of the monopoly in letter traffic, states that it is a "provision which is absolutely necessary, for nothing but an exclusive right can support an office of this sort; many rival independent offices would only serve to ruin one another."—*Com.* vol. i. p. 324.

[14] Journals of the House of Commons, 1644.

[15] Journals of the House of Commons, 21st March, 1649.

[16] In Burton's *Diary* of the Parliament of Cromwell, an account is given of the third reading of the new Act, which is important and interesting enough to be here partly quoted. "The bill being brought up for the last reading—

Sir Thomas Wroth said: 'This bill has bred much talk abroad since yesterday. The design is very good and specious; but I would have some few words added for general satisfaction: to know how the monies shall be disposed of; and that our letters should pass free as well in this Parliament as formerly.'

Lord Strickland said: 'When the report was made, it was told you that it (the Post-Office) would raise a revenue. It matters not what reports be abroad, *nothing can more assist trade and commerce than this intercourse*. Our letters pass better than in any part whatsoever. In France and Holland, and other parts, letters are often laid open to public view, as occasion is.'

Sir Christopher Pack was also of opinion, 'That the design of the bill is very good for trading and commerce; and it matters not what is said abroad about it. As to letters passing free for members, *it is not worth putting in any act*.'

Colonel Sydenham said: 'I move that it may be committed to be made but probationary; *it being never a law before*.'" The bill was referred to a Committee, and subsequently passed nearly unanimously.

[17] Lord Macaulay states that there was an exceptional clause in this act, to the effect, that "if a traveller had waited half an hour without being supplied, he might hire a horse wherever he could."—*History of England*, vol, i.

[18] Cobbett's Parliamentary History, vol. ix.

[19] Macaulay's History of England, vol. i. pp. 387-8.

[20] Under William and Mary, Docwray was allowed a pension, differently stated by different authorities, of 500*l.* and 200*l.* a year.

[21] Amongst the Post-Office pensions granted in subsequent reigns, Queen Anne gave one, in 1707, to the Duke of Marlborough and his heirs of 5,000*l.* The heirs of the Duke of Schomberg were paid by the Post-Office till 1856, when about 20,000*l.* were paid to redeem a fourth part of the pension, the burden of the remaining part being then transferred to the Consolidated Fund.

[22] Stowe's Survey of London.

[23] Stark's Picture of Edinburgh, p. 144.

[24] "Letters and Despatches relative to the taking of the Earl of Ormond, by O'More. A.D. 1600."

[25] In 1784, the line of Milford Haven packets was re-established, the rates of postage between London and Waterford to be the same as between London and Dublin, *viâ* Holyhead. The packets were, however, soon withdrawn.

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CHAPTER III.

ON OLD ROADS AND SLOW COACHES.

If we seem in this chapter to make a divergence from the stream of postal history, it is only to make passing reference to the tributaries which helped to feed the main stream. The condition of the roads, and no less the modes of travelling, bore a most intimate relationship, at all the points in its history, to the development of the post-office system and its communications throughout the kingdom. The seventeenth century, as we have seen, was eventful in important postal improvements; the period was, comparatively speaking, very fruitful also in great changes and improvements in the internal character of the country. No question that the progress of the former depended greatly on the state of the latter. James the First, whatever might be his character in other respects, was indefatigable in his exertions to open out the resources of his kingdom. The fathers of civil engineering, such as Vermuyden and Sir Hugh Myddleton, lived during his reign, and both these eminent men were employed under his auspices, either in making roads, draining the fen country, improving the metropolis, or in some other equally useful scheme. The troubles of the succeeding reign had the effect of frustrating the development of various schemes of public utility proposed and eagerly sanctioned by James. Under the Commonwealth, and at intervals during the two succeeding reigns, many useful improvements of no ordinary moment were carried out.

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In the provinces, though considerable advances had been made in this respect during the century, travelling was still exceedingly difficult. In 1640, perhaps the Dover Road, owing to the great extent of continental traffic constantly kept up, was the best in England; yet three or four days were usually taken to travel it. In that year, Queen Henrietta and household were brought "with expedition" over that short distance in four long days. Short journeys were accomplished in a reasonable time, inasmuch as little entertainment was required. It was different when a long journey was contemplated, seeing how generally wretched were the hostelries of the period.[26] So bad, again, were some of the roads, that it was not at all uncommon, when a family intended to travel, for servants to be sent on beforehand to investigate the country and report upon the most promising track. Fuller tells us that during his time he frequently saw as many as six oxen employed in dragging slowly a single person to church. Waylen says that 800 horses were taken prisoners at one time during the civil wars by Cromwell's forces, "while sticking in the mud."

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Many improvements were made in modes of conveyance during the century. A kind of stage-coach was first used in London about 1608; towards the middle of the century they were gradually adopted in the metropolis, and on the better highways around London. In no case, however, did they attempt to travel at a greater speed than three miles an hour. Before the century closed, stage-coaches were placed on three of the principal roads in the kingdom, namely those between London and York, Chester, and Exeter. This was only for the summer season; "during winter," in the words of Mr. Smiles, "they did not run at all, but were laid up for the season, like ships during Arctic frosts." Sometimes the roads were so bad, even in summer, that it was all the horses could do to drag the coach along, the passengers, *per force*, having to walk for miles together. With the York coach especially the difficulties were really formidable. Not only were the roads bad, but the low midland counties were particularly liable to floods, when, during their prevalence, it was nothing unusual for passengers to remain at some town *en route* for days together, until the roads were dry.

Public opinion was divided as to the merits of stage-coach travelling. When the new threatened altogether to supersede the old mode of travelling on horseback, great opposition was manifested to it, and the organs of public opinion (the pamphlet) began to revile it. In 1673, for instance, a pamphlet[27] was written which went so far as to denounce the introduction of stage-coaches as the greatest evil "that had happened of late years to these kingdoms." Curious to know how these sad consequences had been brought about, we read on and find it stated that "those who travel in these coaches contracted an idle habit of body; became weary and listless when they had rode a few miles, and were then unable to travel on horseback, and not able to endure frost, snow, or rain, *or to lodge in the fields*." In the very same year another writer, descanting on the improvements which had been introduced into the Post-Office, goes on to say, that "besides the

excellent arrangement of conveying men and letters on horseback, there is of late such an *admirable commodiousness*, both for men and women to travel from London to the principal towns in the country, *that the like hath not been known in the world*, and that is by *stage-coaches*, wherein any one may be transported to any place, sheltered from foul weather and foul ways; free from endamaging of one's health and one's body by hard jogging or over violent [Pg 40] motion; and this not only at a low price (about a shilling for every five miles), but with such velocity and speed in one hour as that the posts in some foreign countreys cannot make in a day." [28] M. Soubrière, a Frenchman of letters who landed at Dover in the reign of Charles II., alludes to stage-coaches, but seems to have thought less of their charms than the author we have just quoted. "That I might not take post," says he, "or again be obliged to use the stage-coach, I went from Dover to London in a wagon. I was drawn by six horses placed one after another, and driven by a wagoner who walked by the side of them. He was clothed in black and appointed in all things like another St. George. He had a brave monteror on his head, and was a merry fellow, fancied he made a figure, and seemed mightily pleased with himself."

The stage-wagon here referred to was almost exclusively used for the conveyance of merchandise. On the principal roads strings of stage-wagons travelled together. A string of stage-wagons travelled between London and Liverpool, starting from the Axe Inn, Aldermanbury, every Monday and Thursday, and occupying *ten* days on the road during summer and generally about *twelve* in the winter season. Beside these conveyances, there were "strings of horses," travelling somewhat quicker, for the carriage of light goods and passengers. The stage-wagon, as may be supposed, travelled much slower on other roads than they did between London and Liverpool. On most roads, in fact, the carriers never changed horses, but employed the same cattle throughout, however long the journey might be. It was, indeed, so proverbially slow in the north of England, that the publicans of Furness, in Lancashire, when they saw the conductors of the travelling merchandise trains appear in sight on the summit of Wrynose Hill, on their journey between Whitehaven and Kendal, were jocularly said to begin to brew their beer, always having a stock of [Pg 41] good drink manufactured by the time the travellers reached the village![29]

Whilst communication between different large towns was comparatively easy—passengers travelling from London to York in less than a week before the close of the century—there were towns situated in the same county, in the year 1700, more widely separated for all practical purposes than London and Inverness are at the present day. If a stranger penetrated into some remote districts about this period, his appearance would call forth, as one writer remarks, as much excitement as would the arrival of a white man in some unknown African village. So it was with Camden in his famous seventeenth-century tour. Camden acknowledges that he approached Lancashire from Yorkshire, "that part of the country lying beyond the mountains towards the western ocean," with a "*kind of dread*," but trusted to Divine Providence, which, he said, "had gone with him hitherto," to help him in the attempt. Country people still knew little except of their narrow district, all but a small circle of territory being like a closed book to them. They still received but few letters. Now and then, a necessity would be laid upon them to write, and thereupon they would hurry off to secure the services of the country parson, or some one attached to the great house of the neighbourhood, who generally took the request kindly.[30] Almost the only intelligence of general affairs was communicated by pedlars and packmen, who were accustomed to retail news with their wares. The wandering beggar who came to the farmer's house craving a supper and bed was the principal intelligencer of the rural population of [Pg 42] Scotland so late as 1780.[31] The introduction of newspapers formed quite an era in this respect to the gentlefolk of the country, and to some extent the poorer classes shared in the benefit. The first English newspaper published bears the date of 1622. Still earlier than this, the News Letter, copied by the hand, often found its way into the country, and, when well read at the great house of the district, would be sent amongst the principal villagers till its contents became diffused throughout the entire community. When any intelligence unusually interesting was received either in the news letter or the more modern newspaper, the principal proprietor would sometimes cause the villagers and his immediate dependants to be summoned at once, and would read to them the principal paragraphs from his porch. The reader of English history will have an imperfect comprehension of the facts of our past national life if he does not know, or remember, how very slowly and imperfectly intelligence of public matters was conveyed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and what a bearing—very difficult to understand in these days—such circumstances had upon the facts themselves. Thus, a rebellion in one part of the country, which was popular throughout the kingdom, might be quelled before the news of the rising reached another part of the country. Remote districts waited for weeks and months to learn the most important intelligence. Lord Macaulay relates that the news of Queen Elizabeth's death, which was known to King James in three days, was not heard of in some parts of Devonshire and Cornwall till the court of her successor had ceased to wear mourning for her. The news of [Pg 43] Cromwell having been made Protector only reached Bridgewater nineteen days after the event, when the church bells were set a-ringing. In some parts of Wales the news of the death of King Charles I. was not known for two months after its occurrence. The churches in the Orkneys continued to put up the usual prayers for him for months after he was beheaded; whilst their descendants did the same for King James long after he had taken up his abode at St. Germains.

In Scotland, all the difficulties in travelling were felt to even a greater degree than in England. There were no regular posts to the extreme north of Scotland, letters going as best they could by occasional travellers and different routes. Nothing could better show the difficulties attendant on locomotion of any sort in Scotland, than the fact that an agreement was entered into in 1678 to run a coach between Edinburgh and Glasgow, to be drawn by six horses, the journey, there and

back, to be performed in six days. The distance was only forty-four miles, and the coach travelled over the principal post-road in the country!

The reader has thus some idea of the difficulties which stood in the way of efficient postal communication during the seventeenth century. However much the work of the Post-Office, and the slow and unequal manner in which correspondence was distributed, may excite the scorn of the present generation, living in the days of cheap and quick postage, they must nevertheless agree with Lord Macaulay in considering that the postal system of the Stuarts was such as might have moved the envy and admiration of the polished nations of antiquity, or even of the contemporaries of our own Shakespeare or Raleigh. In Cornwall, Lincolnshire, some parts of Wales, and amongst the hills and dales of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire, letters, it is true, were only received once a week, if then; but in numbers of large towns they were delivered two and three times a week. There was *daily* communication between London and the Downs, and the same privileges were extended to Tunbridge Wells and Bath, at the season when those [Pg 44] places were crowded with pleasure-seekers.[32]

Accounts survive of the Post-Office as it existed towards the close of the seventeenth century, an outline of which, contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* by a correspondent in the early part of the present century, we must be excused for here presenting to the reader. The Postmaster-General of the period, under the Duke of York, was at that time the Earl of Arlington. The letters, it would seem, were forwarded from London to different parts on different days. For instance: Every Monday and Tuesday the Continental mails were despatched, part on the former day, the remainder on the latter. Every Saturday letters were sent to all parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. On other days posts were despatched to the Downs, also to one or two important towns and other smaller places within short distances of London. The London Post-Office was managed by the Postmaster-General and a staff of twenty-seven clerks.[33] In the provinces of the three countries, there were 182 deputy-postmasters. Two packet-boats sailed between England and [Pg 45] France; two were appointed for Flanders, three for Holland, three for Ireland, and at Deal two were engaged for the Downs. "As the masterpiece," so our authority winds up, "of all these grand arrangements, established by the present Postmaster-General, he hath annexed (*sic*) and appropriated the market-towns of England so well to the respective postages, that there is no considerable one of them which hath not an easy and certain conveyance for the letters thereof *once a week*. Further, though the number of letters missive was not at all considerable in our [Pg 46] ancestors' day, yet it is now so prodigiously great (*and the meanest of people are so beginning to write in consequence*) that this office produces in money 60,000*l.* a year. Besides, letters are forwarded with more expedition, and at less charges, than in any other foreign country. A whole sheet of paper goes 80 miles for twopence, two sheets for fourpence, and *an ounce of letter* for but eightpence, and that in so short a time, by night as well as day, that every twenty-four hours the post goes one hundred and twenty miles, and in *five* days an answer to a letter may be had from a place distant 200 miles from the writer!"

FOOTNOTES:

[26] There were many exceptions, of course. Numbers of innkeepers were also the postmasters of the period. Taylor, the water-poet, travelling from London into Scotland in the early part of the century, has described one of these men, in his *Penniless Pilgrimage*, as a model Boniface.

[27] "The Grand Concern of England explained in several Proposals to Parliament."—Harl. MSS. 1673.

[28] Chamberlayne's Present History of Great Britain. 1673.

[29] Private coaches were started in London at the time when the stage- or hackney-coaches were introduced, and Mr. Pepys secured one of the first. Mightily proud was he of it, as any reader of his *Diary* will have learnt to his great amusement.

[30] There are few traces in this country, at any time, of *public* letter-writers. This is somewhat remarkable, inasmuch as then, and still in some of the southern states of Europe, the profession of public letter-writer has long been an institution. In England it has never flourished. Some years ago there might have been seen at Wapping, Shadwell, and other localities in London where sailors resorted, announcements in small shop-windows to the effect that letters were written there "to all parts of the world." In one shop a placard was exhibited intimating that a "large assortment of letters *on all sorts of subjects*" were kept on hand. There were never many, and now very few, traces of the custom.

[31] Chambers' Domestic Annals.

[32] Lord Macaulay. Vol. i. p. 388.

[33] No less interesting are the particulars of one year's postal revenue and expenditure, extracted from the old account-books of the department, by the present Receiver and Accountant-General of the Post-Office. The date given is within a year or two of that referred to in the text, viz. 1686-7. The net produce of the year was a little over 76,000*l.*, and the following is a few of the most important and most suggestive items:—

	£	*s.*	*d.*
Product of foreign mails for the year	17,805	1	7
The King's Majesty paid for his foreign letters	178	18	4

Product of Harwich packet-boats	950	5	4
The Inland window money amounted to	870	4	2
The letter-receivers' money	313	19	8
The letter-carriers' money	30,497	10	0
The Postmaster's money	37,819	8	11
Officers were *fined* to the extent of	13	0	0
The profits of the Irish Office were	2,419	14	0
The profits of the Penny-Post	800	0	0

The Scotch Office appears not only not to have brought in any profits, but we find an item of absolute loss on the exchange of money with Edinburgh to the extent of 210*l.* 10*s.* 10*d.*

Amongst the more interesting items of expenditure we notice that—

	£	*s.*	*d.*
The six clerks in the Foreign Office and about twenty clerks belonging to other departments received per annum	60	0	0
The salary of the Postmaster-General was	1,500	0	0
Two officers had 200*l.* per annum, a third had 150*l.*, and a fourth had 100*l.*—all four, doubtless, heads of departments	450	0	0
There were eight letter-receivers in London, viz. at Gray's Inn, at Temple Bar, at King Street, at Westminster, in Holborn, in Covent Garden, in Pall Mall, and in the Strand two offices, whose yearly salaries amounted in all to	110	6	8
The yearly salaries of the whole body of letter-carriers	1,338	15	0
The salaries of the deputy-postmasters	5,639	6	0

The entire total expenditure was 13,509*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* "Thus we find," adds Mr. Scudamore, "that while the 'whole net produce' of the establishment for a year was not equal to the sum which we derive from the commission on money-orders in a year (Mr. Scudamore is writing of 1854), or to the present 'net produce' of the single town of Liverpool, so also, the whole expenditure of the whole establishment for a year was but a little larger than the sum which we now pay *once a month* for salaries to the clerks of the London Office alone." If we subtract the total expenditure from the "whole net produce," as it is called, we get a sum exceeding 62,000*l.* as the entire net *receipts* of the Post-Office for the year 1686-7.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

Ten years after the removal of Docwray from his office in connexion with the "Penny Post," another rival to the Government department sprung up in the shape of a "Halfpenny Post." The arrangements of the new were nearly identical with those of Docwray's post, except that the charges, instead of a penny and twopence, were a halfpenny and penny respectively. The scheme, established at considerable expense by a Mr. Povey, never had a fair trial, only existing a few months, when it was nipped in the bud by a law-suit instituted by the Post-Office authorities.

In 1710, the Acts relating to the Post-Office were completely remodelled, and the establishment was put on an entirely fresh basis. The statutes passed in previous reigns were fully repealed, and the statute of Anne, c. 10, was substituted in their place, the latter remaining in force until 1837. The preamble of the Act just mentioned sets forth, that a Post-Office for England was established in the reign of Charles II. and a Post-Office for Scotland in the reign of King William III.; but that it is now desirable, since the two countries are united, that the two offices should be united under one head. Also, that packet-boats have been for some time established between England and the West Indies, the mainland of North America, and some parts of Europe, and that more might be settled if only proper arrangements were made "at the different places to which the packet-boats are assigned." It is further deemed necessary that the existing rates of postage should be altered; that "with little burthen to the subject some may be increased" and other new rates granted, "which additional and new rates," it is added, "may in some measure enable Her Majesty to carry on and furnish the present war." Suitable powers are also needed for the better collecting of such rates, as well as provision for preventing the illegal trade carried on by "private posts, carriers, higlers, watermen, drivers of stage-coaches, and other persons, and other frauds to which the revenue is liable."

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As these alterations and various improvements cannot be well and properly made without a new Act for the Post-Office, the statutes embodied in 12 Charles II. and the statutes referring to the Scotch Post-Office passed in the reign of William and Mary, entitled "An Act anent the Post-Office," and every article, clause, and thing therein, are now declared repealed, and the statute of 9 Anne, c. 10, called "An Act for establishing a General Post-Office in all Her Majesty's dominions, and for settling a weekly sum out of the revenue thereof for the service of the war, and other Her Majesty's occasions," is substituted. This Act, which remained in force so long, and may be said to have been the foundation for all subsequent legislation on the subject, deserves special and detailed notice.

1. By its provisions a General Post and Letter-Office is established within the City of London,

"from whence all letters and packets whatsoever may be with speed and expedition sent into any part of the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, to North America and the West Indies, or any other of Her Majesty's dominions, or any country or kingdom beyond the seas," and "at which office all returns and answers may be likewise received." For the better "managing, ordering, collecting, and improving the revenue," and also for the better "computing and settling the rates of letters according to distance, a chief office is established in Edinburgh, one in Dublin, one at New York, and other chief offices in convenient places in her Majesty's colonies of America, and one in the islands of the West Indies, called the Leeward Islands." [Pg 49]

2. The whole of these chief offices shall be "under the control of an officer who shall be appointed by the Queen's Majesty, her heirs and successors, to be made and constituted by letters patent under the Great Seal, by the name and stile of Her Majesty's *Postmaster-General*." "The Postmaster-General shall appoint deputies for the chief offices in the places named above, and he, they, and their servants and agents, and no other person or persons whatsoever, shall from time to time, and at all times, have the receiving, taking up, ordering, despatching, sending post with all speed, carrying and delivering of all letters and packets whatsoever." The only exceptions to this clause must be—[34]

(*a*) When common known carriers bear letters concerning the goods which they are conveying, and which letters are delivered with the goods without any further hire or reward, or other profit or advantage.

(*b*) When merchants or master-owners of ships send letters in ships concerning the cargoes of such ships, and delivered with them under the self-same circumstances.

(*c*) Letters concerning commissions or the returns thereof, affidavits, writs, process or proceeding, or returns thereof, issuing out of any court of justice.

(*d*) Any letter or letters sent by any private friend or friends in their way of journey or travel.

3. The Postmaster-General, and no other person or persons whatever, shall prepare and provide horses or furniture to let out on hire to persons riding post on any of Her Majesty's post-roads, under penalty of 100*l.* per week, or 5*l.* for each offence.[35] The rates of charge for riding post are settled as follows:—The hire of a post-horse shall be henceforth 3*d.* a mile, and 4*d.* a mile for a person riding as guide for every stage. Luggage to the weight of 80 pounds allowed, the guide to carry it with him on his horse. [Pg 50]

4. The rates of postage under the present Act are settled.

	s.	*d.*
For any single letter or piece of paper to any place in England not exceeding 80 miles	0	3
" double letter	0	6
" packet of writs, deeds, &c. per ounce	1	0
" single letter, &c. exceeding 80 miles, or as far north as the town of Berwick	0	4
" double letter	0	8
" packet, per ounces	1	4
From London to Edinburgh and all places in Scotland south of Edinburgh, per single letter	0	6
" " double letter	1	0
" " packets, per ounce	2	0

The other Scotch posts were calculated from Edinburgh, and charged according to the distance as in England.

	s.	*d.*
From London to Dublin, single letter	0	6
" " double letter	1	0
" " packets, per ounce	2	0

From Dublin to any Irish town the charge was according to distance, at the English rate.

Any letter from any part of Her Majesty's dominions for London would be delivered free by the penny post, and if directed to places within a circuit of ten miles from the General Post-Office, on payment of an extra penny over and above the proper rate of postage.

	s.	*d.*
The postage of a single letter to France was	0	10
" " Spain	1	6
" " Italy	1	3
" " Turkey	1	3
" " Germany, Denmark	1	0
" " Sweden	1	0
" " from London to New York	1	0

Other rates were charged to other parts of the American continent, according to the distance from New York, at something less than the English rate. [Pg 51]

5. The principal deputy postmasters are empowered to erect *cross-posts* or stages, so that all parts of the country may have equal advantage as far as practicable, but only in cases where the postmasters are assured that such erections will be for "the better maintainance of trade and commerce, and mutual correspondences."

6. A survey of all the post-roads shall be made, so that the distances between any place and the chief office in each country "shall be settled by the same measure and standard." These surveys must be made regularly, "as necessity showeth;" and when finished, the distances must be fairly shown by "*books of surveys*" one of which must be kept in each of the head offices, and by each of the surveyors themselves. The surveyors who shall be appointed and authorized to measure the distances must swear to perform the same to the best of their skill and judgment.[36]

7. Letters may be brought from abroad by private ship, but must be delivered at once into the hands of the deputy postmasters at the respective ports, who will pay the master of such ship a penny for every letter which he may thus deliver up to them. It is hoped that, by these arrangements, merchants will not suffer as they had previously done, by having their letters "*imbezilled* or long detained, when they had been given into the charge of ignorant and loose hands, that understandeth not the ways and means of speedy conveyance and proper deliverance, to the great prejudice of the affairs of merchants and others."

8. The Postmaster-General and the deputy postmasters must qualify themselves, if they have not already done so, by receiving the *sacrament* according to the usage of the Church of England; [Pg 52] taking, making, and subscribing the test, and the oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and adjuration. It is also decided that the Post-Office officials must not meddle with elections for members of Parliament. The officers of the Post-Office must also qualify themselves for the duties of their office by observing and following such orders, rules, directions, and instructions, concerning the settlements of the posts and stages, and the management of post-horses, and the horsing of all persons riding by royal warrant, as Her Majesty shall see fit from time to time to make and ordain.

A short proviso follows concerning the time-honoured privileges of the two English Universities, and guaranteeing the same; and then we come to an arrangement for the attainment of which object, it would appear (almost exclusively), the Post-Office was remodelled in the manner we have shown.

9. "Towards the establishment of a good, sure, and lasting fund, in order to raise a present supply of money for carrying on the war, be it enacted that from the present time, and during the whole term of 32 years, the full, clear, and entire weekly sum of 700*l.* out of the duties and revenues of the Post-Office shall be paid by the Postmaster-General into the receipts of the Exchequer on the Tuesday of every week."

Whatever else was arranged permanently, the increased rates of postage were only meant to be temporary; for at the end of thirty-two years, it was provided that the old rates shall be resorted to. The clause was simply inserted as a war measure, for the purpose of raising revenue, but we shall see that, so far from returning to the old postages, fresh burdens were imposed at the end of that period and from time to time.[37]

The improvements introduced by the bill of 1710 had the natural effect of increasing the [Pg 53] importance of the Post-Office institution, and of adding to the available revenue of the country considerable sums each year. For ten years no further steps were taken to develop the resources of the service; but in 1720 Ralph Allen appears, another and perhaps the most fortunate of all the improvers of the Post-Office. Up to this year, the lines of post had branched off, from London and Edinburgh respectively, on to the principal roads of the two kingdoms; but the "cross-posts," even when established, had not been efficient, the towns off the main line of road not being well served, whilst some districts had no direct communication through them. The Post-Office Bill had given facilities for the establishment of more "cross-posts;" but, till 1720, the authorities did not avail themselves of its provisions to any great extent. Mr. Allen, at that time the postmaster of Bath, and who must, from his position, have been well aware of the defects of the existing system, proposed to the Government to establish cross-posts between Exeter and Chester, going by way of Bristol, Gloucester, and Worcester, connecting in this way the west of England with the Lancashire districts and the mail route to Ireland, and giving independent postal intercommunication to all the important towns lying in the direction to be taken. Previous to this proposal, letters passing between neighbouring towns were conveyed by circuitous routes, often requiring to go to the metropolis and to be sent back again by another post-road, thus, in these days of slow locomotion, causing serious delay. Allen proposed a complete reconstruction of the cross-post system, and guaranteed a great improvement to the revenue as well as better accommodation to the country. By his representations, he induced the Lords of the Treasury to grant him a lease of the cross-posts for life. His engagements were to bear all the cost of his new service, and pay a fixed rental of 6,000*l.* a-year, on which terms he was to retain all the surplus [Pg 54] revenue. From time to time the contract was renewed, but of course at the same rental; each time, however, the Government required Allen to include other branches of road in his engagement, so that at his death, in 1764, the cross-posts had extended to all parts of the country. Towards the last, the private project had become so gigantic as to be nearly unmanageable, and it was with something like satisfaction that the Post-Office authorities saw it

lapse to the Crown. At this time it was considered one of the chief duties of the surveyors—whose business it was to visit each deputy postmaster in the course of the year—to see that the distinction between the bye-letters of the cross-posts, the postage of which belonged to Mr. Allen, and the postage of the general post letters, which belonged to the Government, was properly kept up. The deputies were known to hold the loosest notions on this subject, some of them preferring to appropriate the revenues of one or the other post rather than make mistakes in the matter. The disputes and difficulties lasted to the death of Allen.[38] Notwithstanding the losses he must have suffered through the dishonesty or carelessness of country postmasters, the farmer [Pg 55] of the cross-posts, in an account which he left at his death, estimated the net profits of his contract at the sum of 10,000*l.* annually, a sum which, during his official life, amounted in the total to nearly half a million sterling! Whilst, in official quarters, his success was greatly envied, Mr. Allen commanded, in his private capacity, universal respect. In the only short account we have seen of this estimable man, a contemporary writer states[39] that "he was not more remarkable for the ingenuity and industry with which he made a very large fortune, than for the charity, generosity, and kindness with which he spent it." It is certain that Allen bestowed a considerable part 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 *Allworthy*. 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:—

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

On the death of Allen, the cross-posts were brought under the control of the Postmaster-General. An officer, Mr. Ward, was appointed to take charge of the *Bye-letter Office*, as the branch was [Pg 56] now called, at the salary of 300*l.* a-year. The success of the amalgamation scheme was so complete, that at the end of the first year, profits to the amount of 20,000*l.* were handed over to the Crown. Afterwards, the proceeds continued to increase even still more rapidly; so much so, that when, in 1799, the "Bye-letter Office" was abolished, and its management transferred to the General Office, they had reached the enormous yearly sum of 200,000*l.*!

At the revision of the Post-Office in 1710, the bounds of the penny post were extended, as we have seen, to a district within ten miles of the General Post-Office. This extension was granted on a memorial from several townships in the London district, who volunteered, if such extension were made, that they would pay an extra penny for every letter delivered beyond "the boundaries of the cities of London and Westminster, and the borough of Southwark." Numerous disputes having arisen owing to the *wording* of the Act, and many inhabitants claiming in consequence to have their letters delivered free within the ten-mile circuit, a supplementary Act was passed in 1727, "*for the obviating and taking away such doubts*," as to what was the proper charge, and directing that the "penny postmen" must not deliver any letters out of the original limits, but may detain or delay such letters or packets, unless an extra penny were paid for each on delivery.

The statute of Queen Anne provided that a weekly payment of 700*l.* should be made to the Exchequer from the Post-Office for a period of thirty-two years. This term having expired in 1743, an Act was passed in that year making the payment *perpetual*, and all clauses, powers, &c. in the Act of 1711 were also made perpetual. In order to keep up this source of revenue, which was too good to relinquish, the rates of postage, instead of being lowered again as stipulated, were kept up, and several times during subsequent years, as we shall see, fresh additions were made to the burdens of letter-writers. While on this subject, we may simply state the clause of Queen Anne's [Pg 57] Act relating to the disposal of the *surplus* revenue. All pensions were to be paid out of it, and the remainder retained by the Queen "for the better support of Her Majesty's household, and for the honour and dignity of the Crown of Great Britain." On the accession of George I. a bill, granting the same rights and privileges during the King's lifetime, was passed in the first session of Parliament. In the first year of the reign of George II. and his grandson George III. the same rights and privileges were obtained under the self-same conditions. Though the conditions of the following Act were, in reality, carried out several years previously, when a salary of 700,000*l.* a-year was granted to the King for the support of his household, section 48 of 27 George III. enacts that, for the King's lifetime, "the entire *net* revenue of the Post-Office shall be carried to and made part of the fund, to be called 'the Consolidated Fund.'" It is scarcely needful to say that this arrangement has existed from 1787 to the present time.

From the date of Allen's improvement in 1720 to the year 1761, when the postage of letters was again disturbed and many other alterations made, little of special importance was done in the Post-Office, and we cannot do better than take advantage of this quiet time to give some account of the internal arrangements of the establishment, and to notice certain minutiæ, which, though trifling in themselves, will serve to give the reader an insight into the details, the way and means, of this early period.[40] In the time of George I. the officers of the Post-Office in London consisted of *two* Postmasters-General, with a secretary and a clerk. There were four chief officers in the Inland-office—viz. a controller, a receiver, an accountant, and a solicitor. The staff of clerks [Pg 58] consisted of seven for the different roads—Chester, North West, Bristol, Yarmouth, Kent, and Kent night-road. Thirteen clerks were engaged in other duties, and three more clerks attended at the window to answer inquiries and deliver letters. The foreign office, which was a separate department, included a controller and an alphabet keeper, with eight assistant clerks. The whole

London establishment, which at the present day numbers several thousand officers of different grades, was then, without counting letter-carriers, worked with a staff of thirty-two.

"To show the method, diligence, and exactness of our General Post-Office," says a writer of the period, "and the due despatch of the post at each stage, take this specimen." And for our purpose we cannot do better than take Stowe's advice, and insert here a copy of a Post-Office proclamation to postmasters and time-bill, given in his *History of London*:—

> "Whereas the management of the postage of the letters of Great Britain and Ireland is committed to our care and conduct: these are therefore in His Majesty's name to require you in your respective stages to use all diligence and expedition in the safe and speedy conveyance of this mail and letters: that you ride five miles an hour according to your articles from London to East Grinstead, and from thence to return accordingly. And hereof you are not to fail, as you will answer the contrary at your perils.
>
> Signed, Cornwallis.
> James Craggs."[41]

To the several Postmasters betwixt London and East Grinstead. [Pg 59]

Haste, Haste, Post Haste!

Miles.	From the Letter-Office at *half an hour past two in the morning*, July 17, 1719.
16	Received at Epsom half an hour past six, and sent away three-quarters past. Alexander Findlater.
8	Received at Dorking half an hour after eight, and sent away at nine. Chas. Castleman.
6	Received at *Rygate* half an hour past ten, and sent away again at eleven. John Bullock.
16	Received at East Grinstead at half an hour after three in the afternoon.

The speed at which the East Grinstead mail travelled was greater than usual: few post-boys, in the provinces at any rate, were required to go at a greater rate than three or four miles an hour. Not only this, but the boys as a rule were without discipline; difficult to control; sauntered on the road at pleasure, and were quite an easy prey to any robber or ill-disposed persons who might think it worth their while to interfere with them. About this time, we find the Post-Office surveyor complaining dolorously to headquarters, that the gentry "doe give much money to the riders, whereby they be very subject to get in liquor, *which stopes the males*." Expresses at that time travelled somewhat quicker, but still not quick enough for some persons. On one occasion, Mr. Harley (afterwards Lord Oxford) complained of delay in an express which had been sent to him; but the Postmasters-General thought there were no grounds for complaint, inasmuch "as it had travelled 136 miles in 36 hours, which," added they, "is the usual rate of expresses."

In the year 1696, the Treasury sanctioned an arrangement for conveying the mails between Bristol and Exeter, twice a week, under the stipulation that the distance of sixty-five miles should be performed in twenty-four hours! [Pg 60]

In Scotland, about the same time, this work was done even slower, and with greater hardships. The post-boy walked all distances under twenty miles; longer distances required that the messenger should be mounted, though no relays of horses were allowed, however long and tedious the journey might be.[42]

At this time, it was only a secondary consideration, *when* or *how* letters should be delivered. For a number of years the authorities were simply bent on raising revenue out of the Post-Office. Thus, about the period of which we are speaking, a request was made to the authorities from certain inhabitants of Warwick, that the London letters for that place should be sent direct to Warwick and not through Coventry, by which latter route a great many hours were lost. A decided negative was returned to this very reasonable request, and for the following cogent *official* reason, which exhibits well the exacting tendencies of the Government. "From London to Warwick, through Coventry, is more than *eighty* miles," say the Postmasters-General; "so that we can charge 6*d.* per letter going that way, whereas we could only charge 3*d.* if they went direct." No doubt this reply is given to the Lords of the Treasury, through whom all such applications as the foregoing had then, and still have, to pass; for it cannot be imagined that they gave this reply [Pg 61] to the people of Warwick themselves. "Perhaps, however," add the Post-Office officials, with some glimmering idea of the true business principle, "we might get *more letters* at the cheaper rate." Present profits, nevertheless, could not be sacrificed, even though there should be a prospect of increased future revenue. Another instance is on record, proving that in this respect the Post-Office authorities of the period were wiser than the executive that held them in check. The Postmasters-General apply (fruitlessly however) to the Treasury to lower the rates of postage in a particular district, and in urging their request, state that "we have, indeed, found by experience, that where we have made the correspondence more easie and cheape, the number of letters has been thereby much increased, and therefore we do believe such a settlement may be attended

with a like effect in these parts."

The Treasury Lords are slow to sanction what appeared to them to be a sacrifice of revenue, and from the frequent applications which were made to them by deputy postmasters in the early part of last century to settle accounts of long standing, or remit the arrears owing to the Government, we may imagine that their hands were full and their temper soured. Many postmasters in the West of England now petitioned the Treasury to the effect that they had been nearly ruined in the times of His Majesty King William, "through much spoiling of their horses by officers riding-post in the late blessed Revolution." Others grumble at the lowness of their salaries. It was all very well, they argued, that the deputies, during the civil wars or at the Revolution, should be contented with low salaries, because they were exempted from having soldiers quartered upon them, but now that the time of peace had come, they submitted that their salaries should be raised.

The Act of Queen Anne provided for one Postmaster-General. How it came to be altered is not clear; but it is nevertheless certain that, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, the office [Pg 62] was jointly held by two chiefs. All letters and mandates bore the signature of both of them; though it seems probable that the work of the office was equitably divided between the two gentlemen, the one taking charge principally of the inland business, while the other managed the packets. The duties of the latter department were much more onerous than might be supposed, when viewed in the light of the history of that period. As we have not yet directed attention to this department of the Post-Office, we may here state that some curious accounts survive of the infancy of the postal sea-service, during the former part of last century, when Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Thomas Frankland shared its management. In those sad times when war was raging, and French privateers covered every sea, our Postmasters-General were anxious, though shrewd and active men. The general orders to the captains of the vessels under their control were such as, under the circumstances, they ought to be: "You must run while you can, fight when you can no longer run, and throw the mails overboard when fighting will no longer avail." Notwithstanding such an order, and on account of so many mails travelling short of their destination, the Postmasters-General resolve to build swift packet-boats that shall escape the enemy; but in their inexperience, they get them built so low in the water, that shortly afterwards, "we doe find that in blowing weather they take in soe much water that the men are constantly wet through, and can noe ways goe below, being obliged to keep the hatches shut to save the vessel from sinking." It is clear that better and stronger boats must be built, and stronger boats are built accordingly. To make up for the expense, they order that the freight of passengers shall be raised, though "recruits and indigent persons shall still have their passage free." It is noteworthy here, that about this time no political refugee seeking an asylum in England is ever hard pressed for a fare on the continental packet-boats, but an entry is made in the agent's letter-book that so and so [Pg 63] "have not wherewithal to pay their charges," and are sent on their path to liberty without further question.

Every provision is supplied by the authorities in London, and salaries and pensions of all kinds are granted. Thus, in one place, a chaplain is appointed for the crew of one of the packets, with a small stipend, "for doing their offices of births, marriage, and burial." Pensions for wounds received in the service are granted with nice discrimination of the relative parts of the body. In a letter to their agent at Falmouth, the Postmasters-General send a scale of pensions to be granted according to the kind of wound—thus: "For every arm or leg amputated above the elbow or knee, L.8 per annum; below the arm or knee, twenty nobles. Loss of the sight of one eye must be L.4; of the pupil of the eye, L.5; of the sight of both eyes, L.12; of the pupils of both eyes, L.14; and according to these rules, we *consider also how much also the hurts affect the body*, and make the allowances accordingly." The duties devolving upon the chief Post-Office officials seem not only to have been onerous and heavy—some of their instructions to their agents bearing dates from the middle of the night and other extraordinary hours—but curiously varied. Many of their letters are preserved among the old records in the vaults under the General Post-Office, and some of them are quite sad and plaintive in their tone. "We are concerned," they say to one agent, "to find the letters brought by your boat [one from the West Indies] *to be so consumed by the ratts*, that we cannot find out to whom they belong." Another letter to their agent at Harwich is evidently disciplinary, and runs as follows:—

> "Mr. Edisbury—The woman whose complaint we herewith send you, *having given us much trouble upon the same*, we desire you will inquire into the same, and see justice done her, believing she may have had her brandy stole from her by the sailors.—We are your affectionate friends[!],
>
> R. C., T. F."

It would be difficult to fancy such a letter as the above proceeding from officialdom in the year of [Pg 64] grace eighteen hundred and sixty-four. In another letter we find the authorities affectionately scolding an agent because "he had not provided a sufficiency of pork and beef for the prince" (who this pork-loving prince was does not appear); in another, because "he had bought powder at Falmouth that would have been so much cheaper in London." In other cases they act as public guardians of morality and loyalty, suspending one because "he had stirred up a mutiny between a captain and his men, *which was unhandsome conduct in him*;" bringing one Captain Clies to trial, inasmuch as "he had spoken words reflecting on the royal family, which the Postmasters-General *took particular unkind of him*," and can by no means allow; and reprimanding another captain for "breaking open the portmanteau of a gentleman-passenger, and spoiling him of a parcel of snuff."

What with all these cares and duties, the Postmasters-General of those days could scarcely have had an easy time of it.

This sole control over the resources of the packet-service explains much in the history of the *franking system*, which would be quite unintelligible without the information just given. The Treasury warrants of that day franked the strangest commodities—articles which certainly would not be dropped into any letter-box, and which would neither be stamped nor sorted in the orthodox way. The following list of a few franked commodities is culled from a still larger number of such in the packet "agent's book," found amongst the old records to which reference has already been made:—

"*Imprimis.* Fifteen couple of hounds, going to the King of the Romans with a free pass.

"*Item.* Two maid servants, going as laundresses to my Lord Ambassador Methuen.

"*Item.* Doctor Crichton, carrying with him *a cow* and divers necessaries.

"*Item.* Two bales of stockings, for the use of the Ambassador to the Crown of Portugal.[43] [Pg 65]

"*Item.* A deal case, with ffour flitches of bacon, for Mr. Pennington of Rotterdam."

Whilst referring to the subject of letter-franking, we may as well notice here, that before the control of the packet-service passed out of the hands of the Post-Office authorities, and when the right of franking letters became the subject of legislative enactments, we hear no more of these curious consignments of goods. The franking system was henceforth confined to passing free through the post any letter which should be indorsed on the cover with the signature of a member of either House of Parliament. As it was not then made a rule absolute that Parliament should be in session, or that the correspondence should necessarily be on the affairs of the nation in order to insure immunity from postage, this arrangement led to various forms of abuse. Members signed huge packets of covers at once, and supplied them to friends and adherents in large quantities. Sometimes they were sold. They have been known to have been given to servants in lieu of wages, the servants selling them again in the ordinary way of business. Nor was this all. So little precaution seems to have been used, that thousands of letters passed through the Post-Office with forged signatures of members.[44] To such an extent did this and kindred abuses accumulate, that, in 1763, the worth of franked correspondence passing through [Pg 66] the post was estimated at 170,000*l.* During the next year—viz. in 1764—Parliament enacted that no letter should pass free through the Post-Office unless the whole address was in the member's own handwriting and his signature attached likewise. Even these precautions, though lessening the frauds, were not sufficient to meet the evil, for fresh regulations were thought necessary in 1784. This time it was ordered that all franks should be dated, the month to be given in full; and further, that all such letters should be put into the post on the day they were dated. From 1784 to the date of penny postage no further regulations were made concerning the franked correspondence, the estimated value of which during these years was 80,000*l.* annually.

The rates of postage ordered by the Government of Queen Anne continued in force for eighteen years after it was designed by the Act that they should cease, and it was only in 1761, at the commencement of the reign of George III., that any alteration was made. Even then the rates were increased instead of diminished. 1 Geo. III. c. 25 provides, that the improvement of correspondence is a matter of such great concernment and so highly necessary for the extension of trade and commerce, that the statutes of Queen Anne need repealing to some extent, and especially as, through vast accessions of territory, no posts and post-rates are arranged to all his Majesty's dominions. The improvements and alterations made at this time may thus be summed up, viz.:—

1. Additions are made to the vessels on the American station. Other and cheaper rates of postage are established between London and North America and all his Majesty's territories in America.

2. Concerning letters brought by private ships from any foreign part, no ship or vessel shall be permitted to make entry in any port of Great Britain, or to unload any of its cargo, until all letters and packets brought by such ship, or any passenger on board such ship, are [Pg 67] delivered into the hands of the deputy-postmaster of the port, and until the captain shall receive the deputy's receipt for the same. In cases where the vessel "is liable to the performance of quarantine," the first step must be to deliver the letters into the hands of the superintendent of the quarantine, to be by him despatched to the Post-Office. A penalty of 20*l.* with full costs to be inflicted on any master not delivering a letter or packet of letters according to this Act, one moiety to go to the King and the other to the person informing.

3. The roads are to be re-surveyed, under the arrangements laid down in Queen Anne's Act, for the purpose of settling the rates of postage afresh.

4. Letters to be charged according to the post-stages travelled, or shorter distances to be paid for; thus:—

	s.	*d.*
For the conveyance of every single letter not exceeding 15 miles	0	1
" " double letter	0	2
" " ounce	0	4

"	"	single letter, 30 miles and under 40 miles	0 2
"	"	double letter	0 4
"	"	ounce	0 8
"	"	single letter, 40 miles and under 80 miles	0 3
"	"	double letter	0 6
"	"	ounce	1 0

And so on.

These rates were again altered in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of George III. for the raising of revenue to defray his Majesty's expenses, the alteration, which took effect on the introduction of mail-coaches, consisting of the addition of one penny to every existing charge.[45]

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5. Permission is given to settle penny post-offices in other towns in England, on the same basis as the London penny-post establishment. The permission thus granted was soon applied, and long before the establishment of uniform penny-postage, there were at least a thousand penny-posts in existence in different towns. The principle which guided the Department in establishing penny-posts was to select small towns and populous neighbourhoods not situated in the direct line of general post conveyances, which were desirous of obtaining extra facilities, and granting such posts provided that they did not afford the means for evading the general post. The only requisite was, that the authorities should have a reasonable hope that the proposed post would yield sufficient to pay for its maintenance—a thing considered settled if the receipts on its first establishment would pay two-thirds of the entire charges.

6. The weight of any packet or letter to be sent by the London penny-post, or any of the new penny-posts to be established under this improved Act, must not now exceed *four ounces*.

In 1749, the Act restraining any other but officers of the Post-Office from letting out horses to hire for the purpose of riding post, is stated not to refer to cases where chaises, "calashes," or any other vehicles, are furnished. Vehicles to drive may be provided on either post-roads or elsewhere by any person choosing to engage in the trade. In 1779, all Acts giving exclusive privileges to the Postmaster-General and his deputies as to the letting of post-*horses* for hire are henceforth repealed.

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In the year 1766 the first penny-post was established in Edinburgh by one Peter Williamson, a native of Aberdeen. He kept a coffee-shop in the hall of the Parliament House, and as he was frequently employed by gentlemen attending the courts in sending letters to different parts of the city, and as he had doubtless heard something of the English penny-posts, he began a regular post with hourly deliveries, and established agents at different parts of the city to collect letters. He employed four carriers, who appeared in uniform, to take the letters from the different agents, and then to deliver them as addressed. For both these purposes they were accustomed to ring a bell as they proceeded, in order to give due notice of their approach. The undertaking was so successful, that other speculators were induced to set up rival establishments, which, of course, led to great confusion. The authorities saw the success of the undertaking, and, aware of its importance, they succeeded in inducing Williamson to take a pension for the good-will of his concern, and then merged it in the general establishment.

We cannot attempt more than a short *résumé* of the incidents in the previous history of the Scotch Post-Office, although the annals of the seventeenth century contain little of interest, and might, therefore, soon be presented to the reader. The first regular letter-post was established in the reign of James I. (of England). In 1642, owing to the sending of forces from Scotland to put down the Irish Rebellion, it was found that the post arrangements in the south-west of Scotland were defective in the extreme. The Scotch Council proposed to establish a line of posts between Edinburgh and Portpatrick, and Portpatrick and Carlisle, and the English, being more immediately concerned in the Rebellion, agreed to bear the whole expense.[46] In the Privy Council records of the period, we find a list of persons recommended by the Commissioners for appointment on the two lines of road as postmasters, "such persons being the only ones fit for that employment, as being innkeepers and of approved honesty." Seven years afterwards we find the Post-Office at Edinburgh was under the care of John Mean, husband of the woman who discharged her stool at the bishop's head when the service-book was introduced into St. Giles's in 1637. He seems to have himself borne the charges of attending to the office "without any reasonable allowance therefor;" and petitioning the Committee of Estates to that effect, they allowed him to retain the "eighth penny on all letters sent from Edinburgh to London (no great number), and the fourth penny upon all those coming from London to Edinburgh." At the Restoration the office was bestowed on Robert Main, and considerable improvements were made under his management, although only with existing posts. Little was done for other parts of Scotland. A traveller in Scotland so late as 1688, commenting on the absence of stage or other coaches on most Scotch roads, says,[47] that "this carriage of persons from place to place might be better spared, were there opportunities and means for the speedier conveyance of business by letters. They have no horse-posts besides those which ply between Berwick and Edinburgh, and Edinburgh and Portpatrick for the Irish packets.... From Edinburgh to Perth, and so on to other places, they use foot-posts and carriers, which, *though a slow way of communicating our concerns to one another, yet is such as they acquiesce in till they have a better*." Our traveller is somewhat wrong in his date, for in 1667 a horse-post to Aberdeen from Edinburgh, twice a week,

[Pg 70]

was started, with the consent of Patrick Graham, of Inchbrakie, his Majesty's Postmaster-General, "for the *timous* delivery of letters and receiving returns of the *samen*." Two years afterwards Inverness got dissatisfied with the want of postal communication, when Robert Main, the Edinburgh postmaster, was commissioned to establish a constant foot-post between Edinburgh and Inverness, going once a week, "wind and weather serving."[48] "Wind and weather serving" is an amusing qualification, as pointed out by Mr. Chambers, considering that there was only one ferry of six or seven miles, and another of two miles, to cross. In 1661, we find the Edinburgh postmaster useful in another capacity, for in that year the Privy Council grant a warrant to him "to put to print and publish *ane diurnal weekly*, for preventing false news which may be invented by evil and disaffected persons." [Pg 71]

We must now pass over many years, as not offering any incidents of any moment. In the year 1730 we find that the Scotch establishment yielded the sum of 1,194*l.* as the whole gross revenue. From about the year 1750, the mails began to be carried from stage to stage, as in England, by relays of fresh horses and different post-boys, though not entirely to the exclusion of the post-runners, of whom we have previously spoken.

In 1723, the Edinburgh Post-Office occupied the first-floor of a house near the cross, above an alley which still bears the name of the Post-Office Close. It was afterwards removed to a floor on the south side of the Parliament Square, which was fitted up shop-fashion, and where the letters were given out from behind an ordinary shop counter, one letter-carrier doing all the out-door work. The Post-Office was removed to its present situation in 1821. Towards the close of 1865, it is expected, the handsome building now rising up near the old office will be finished and opened for postal purposes.[49] [Pg 72]

Even less interest attaches to the early annals of the Irish Post-Office. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was certainly more remunerative than the Scotch, though much less remunerative than the English departments. Previous to the introduction of mail-coaches, all mails were conveyed, or supposed to be conveyed, by the postmasters, to whom certain special allowances were made for each particular service. "There were no contracts, and no fixed rules as to time. Three miles and a half (per hour) seems to have been the pace acknowledged to have been sufficient. The bags were usually conveyed by boys. In the immediate neighbourhood of the metropolis, some sort of cart was used, but with this exception the bags were carried either on ponies or mules, or on foot."[50] The same authority tells us further that, "at this time, the bags were carried to Cork, Belfast, Limerick, and Waterford, six days a week; and three days a week to Galway, Wexford, and Enniskillen. There were three posts to Killarney; but for this the Government refused to pay anything. The postmaster had a salary of 3*l.* a-year, but the mail was carried by foot-messengers, who were maintained at the cost of the inhabitants and of the news-printers in Cork. Carrick-on-Shannon was the only town in county Leitrim receiving a mail, and this it did twice a week. Now it has two every day. Except at the county-town, there was no post-office in the whole county of Sligo; and there were but sixteen in the province of Connaught, where there are now one hundred and seventy-one."

FOOTNOTES:

[34] These exceptions were again made in the Act 1 Vic. c. 33. s. 2, and still remain the law.

[35] This clause was repealed in the reign of George II.

[36] The office of Post-Office Surveyor, of which we here see the origin, still exists (though the officers now so designated have very different duties) among the most responsible and lucrative appointments in the Department.

[37] "There cannot be devised," says Blackstone, "a more eligible method than this of raising money upon the subject; for therein both the Government and the people find a mutual benefit. The Government requires a large revenue, and the people do their business with greater ease, expedition, and cheapness than they would be able to do if no such tax existed."—*Com.* vol. i. p. 324.

[38] At this time, and for some years subsequently, the mails were carried on horseback in charge of post-boys. Some of these post-boys were sad rogues, who, besides taking advantage of confusion in the two posts, were accustomed to carry letters themselves concealed upon them and for charges of course quite unorthodox. In old records of the Post-Office, principally the Surveyor's Book, referring to country post-offices from the year 1735, there are long complaints from the surveyor on this head. The following, "exhibiting more malice than good grammar," may be taken as a specimen, and will suffice to show the way things were managed at that date:—"At this place (Salisbury) found the post-boys to have carried on vile practices in taking the *bye-letters*, delivering them in this cittye and taking back answers, especially the *Andover* riders. On the 15th found on Richard Kent, one of the Andover riders, 5 bye-letters, all for this cittye. Upon examining the fellow, he confessed he had made it a practice, *and persisted to continue in it*, saying he had noe wages from his master. I took the fellow before the Magistrate, proved the facts, and he was committed, but pleading to have no money or friends, desired a punishment to be whipped, which accordingly *he was to the purpose*. Wrote the case to Andover and ordered the fellow to be dismissed, but no regard was had thereto, but the next day the same rider came post, ran about the cittye for letters *and was insolent*. Again he came post with two gentlemen, made it his business to take up letters; the fellow, however, instead of returning to Andover, gets two idle fellows and rides off with three horses, which was a return for his master not obeying my

instructions." Our shrewd surveyor thus amply got his revenge, and the Post-Office and Mr. Allen suffer no more from the delinquencies of Richard Kent.—*From Mr. Scudamore's Notes.*

[39] *Gentleman's Magazine*, August, 1760.

[40] Mr. Scudamore, of the General Post-Office, to whom we are indebted for much of the *minutiæ* in question, has been successful in his efforts to preserve permanently some of the old records of the Post-Office; and the result of his labours may be found in the Appendix to the Postmaster-General's First Report.

[41] Son of the James Craggs who succeeded Addison as Secretary of State, and who obtained such an unusual portion of the poetical praise of Pope. The son came in for a share also, as, for example:—

> "Statesman, yet friend to truth! of soul sincere,
> In action faithful, and in honour clear."

[42] Campbell, in his *Tales of the Highlands*, relates two or three incidents which show that little improvement had taken place in post communications in some part of Scotland even a hundred years later. The English order of posts and express posts seem there to have been reversed, express work being done the worst. For instance: "Near Inverary, we regained a spot of comparative civilization, and came up with the post-boy, whose horse was quietly grazing at some distance, whilst Red Jacket himself was immersed in play with other lads. 'You rascal,' I said to him, 'are you the post-boy and thus spending your time?' 'Nae, nae, sir,' he answered, 'I'm no the post, I'm only an Express!'"

[43] What the Right Hon. John Methuen wanted with two bales of stockings is, of course, a mystery, if he was not embarking in the haberdashery line. It may be he was desirous of regaining the favour of the Portuguese Court, by supplying the whole with English stockings. This was the Methuen who gave his name to a well-known treaty, which, by the way, was found so distasteful to the Portuguese that when, in 1701, he carried it to Pedro II. for his signature, that monarch gave vent to his displeasure by kicking it about the room.—*Marlborough Despatches*, vol. v. p. 625.

[44] At the investigation in 1763 it was related that "one man had, in the course of five months, counterfeited 1,200 dozens of franks of different members of Parliament."

[45] As an example of the summary proceedings of those days, we may here just note the remarks which Mr. Pitt made in his place in Parliament when he proposed this increase, calculating that the change would produce at least 120,000*l.* additional revenue out of the Post-Office. The tax upon letters, said he, could be calculated with a great degree of certainty, and the changes he had to propose would *by no means reduce the number sent. It was idle to suppose that the public would grumble in having to pay just one penny additional for valuable letters safely and expeditiously conveyed.* He proposed "to charge all letters that went one stage and which now paid one penny in future the sum of 2*d.*, and this would bring in the sum of 6,230*l.* All that now pay 2*d.* paying an additional penny would yield 8,923*l.* Threepenny letters paying another penny would produce 33,963*l.* The increase of fourpenny letters would produce 34,248*l.*" The cross-roads he could not speak of with great certainty, but he thought they might calculate on at least 20,000*l.* from that source, and so on, till the estimated sum was reached.

[46] *Domestic Annals of Scotland.* By Mr. R. Chambers. Vol. ii. p. 142.

[47] *A Short Account of Scotland*, published in London in 1702.

[48] The wording of the qualifying clauses in the proclamations of stage-coaches, &c. are very various, and sometimes exceedingly amusing. In England the Divine Hand was generally recognised in the formula of "God willing," or, "If God should permit." On the contrary, the human element certainly preponderated—whether it was meant so or not—in the announcement made by a carrying communication between Edinburgh and a northern burgh, when it was given out that "a waggon would leave the Grass market for Inverness every Tuesday, God willing, but on Wednesday *whether or no*."

[49] It will be remembered that the late lamented Prince Consort laid the foundation-stone of this structure in 1862, being the last occasion on which he assisted at any public ceremony. For further information of the Scotch Office, see Mr. Lang's *Historical Summary of the Post-Office in Scotland*.

[50] Appendix to Postmaster-General's Third Report, supplied by Mr. Anthony Trollope, then one of the Post-Office Surveyors for Ireland.

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CHAPTER V.

PALMER AND THE MAIL-COACH ERA.

We have now arrived at a most important epoch in the history of the English Post-Office. Fifteen years after the death of Mr. Allen, John Palmer, one of the greatest of the early post-reformers rose into notice. To give anything approaching to a proper account of the eminent services that Palmer rendered towards the development of the resources of the Post-Office, it is requisite that we notice the improvements which had been made up to his time in the internal communications of the country. Trade and commerce, more than ever active, were the means of opening out the country in all directions. Civil engineering had now acquired the importance and dignity of a profession. This was the age of Brindley and Smeaton, Rennie and Telford, Watt and Boulton. Roads were being made in even the comparatively remote districts of England; bridges were built

in all parts of the country; the Bridgewater and other canals were opened for traffic, whilst many more were laid out. And what is perhaps more germane to our special subject, many improvements were apparent in the means of conveyance during the same period.[51] While, on the one hand, the ordinary stage-coach had found its way on to every considerable road, and was [Pg 74] still equal to the usual requirements, the speed at which it travelled did not at all satisfy the enterprising merchants of Lancashire and Yorkshire. So early as 1754, a company of merchants in Manchester started a new vehicle, called the "Flying Coach," which seems to have owed its designation to the fact that the proprietors contemplated an acceleration in the speed of the new conveyance to four or five miles an hour. It started with the following remarkable prospectus: [Pg 75] —"However incredible it may appear, this coach will actually (barring accidents) arrive in London in four days and a half after leaving Manchester." In the same year a new coach was brought out in Edinburgh, but the speed at which it travelled was no improvement on the old rate. It was of better appearance, however; and the announcement heralding its introduction to the Edinburgh public sought for it general support on the ground of the extra comfort it would offer to travellers. "The Edinburgh stage-coach," says the prospectus, "for the better accommodation of passengers, will be altered to a new genteel two-end glass machine, hung on steel springs, exceedingly light and easy, to go (to London) in ten days in summer and twelve in winter."[52] Three years afterwards, the Liverpool merchants established another "flying machine on steel springs," which was designed to, and which really did, eclipse the Manchester one in the matter of speed.[53] Three days only were allowed for the journey between Liverpool and London. Sheffield and Leeds followed with their respective "fly-coaches," and by the year 1784 they had not only become quite common, but most of them had acquired the respectable velocity of eight miles an hour.

The post-boy on horseback travelling at the rate of three or four miles an hour, had been an institution since the days of Charles II., and now, towards the close of the eighteenth century, the Post-Office was still clinging to the old system. It was destined, however, that Mr. Palmer should bring about a grand change. Originally a brewer, Mr. Palmer was, in 1784, the manager of the Bath and Bristol theatres. He seems to have known Mr. Allen, and to have been fully acquainted with his fortunate Post-Office speculations. In this way, to some extent, but much more, doubtless, through his public capacity as manager of two large theatres, he became acquainted with the crude postal arrangements of the period. Having frequently to correspond with the [Pg 76] theatrical stars of the metropolis, and also to journey between London and the then centres of trade and fashion, he noticed how superior the arrangements were for travelling to those under which the Post-Office work was done, and he conceived the idea of improvements.

Palmer found that letters, for instance, which left Bath on Monday night were not delivered in London until Wednesday afternoon or night; but the stage-coach which left through the day on Monday, arrived in London on the following morning.[54] Not only did the existing system of mail conveyance strike him as being exceedingly slow, but insecure and otherwise defective. As he afterwards pointed out, he noticed that when tradesmen were particularly anxious to have a valuable letter conveyed with speed and safety, they never thought of giving it into the safe keeping of the Post-Office, but were in the habit of enclosing it in a brown paper parcel and sending it by the coach: nor were they deterred from this practice by having to pay a rate of carriage for it far higher than that charged for a post-letter. Robberies of the mails were so frequent, that even to adopt the precaution recommended by the Post-Office authorities, and send valuable remittances such as a bank note, bills of exchange, &c. *at twice*, was a source of endless trouble and annoyance, if it did not prove entirely ineffective. Who can wonder at the Post-Office robberies when the carelessness and incompetency of the servants of the Post-Office were taken into account? A curious robbery of the Portsmouth mail in 1757 illustrates the careless manner in which the duty was done. The boy who carried the mail had dismounted at Hammersmith, about three miles from Hyde Park Corner, and called for beer, when some thieves took the opportunity to cut the mail-bags from off the horse's crupper, and got away [Pg 77] undiscovered. The French mail on its outward-bound passage *viâ* Dover was more than once stopped and rifled before it had got clear of London. A string stretched across a street in the borough through which the mail would pass has been known to throw the post-boy from his horse, who, without more ado, would coolly retrace his steps, empty-handed, to the chief office, and report the loss of his bags. What could be expected, however, in the case of raw, unarmed post-boys, when carriages were stopped in broad daylight in Hyde Park, and even in Piccadilly itself, and pistols pointed at the breasts of the nobility and gentry *living close at hand*? Horace Walpole relates that he himself was robbed in Hyde Park in broad daylight, in a carriage with Lord Eglinton and Lady Albemarle.

Mr. Palmer, however, was ready with a remedy for robbery, as well as for the other countless defects in the existing postal arrangements. He began his work of reform in 1783, by submitting a full scheme in a lengthy report to Mr. Pitt, who was at that time Prime Minister. He commenced by describing the then existing system of mail transmission. "The post," he says, "at present, instead of being the quickest, is almost the slowest conveyance in the country; and although, from the great improvements in our roads, other carriers have proportionately mended their speed, the post is as slow as ever." The system is also unsafe; robberies are frequent, and he saw not how it could be otherwise if there were no changes. "The mails," continued Palmer, "are generally intrusted to some idle boy without character, mounted on a worn-out hack, and who, so far from being able to defend himself, or escape from a robber, is more likely to be in league with him." If robberies were not so frequent as the circumstances might lead people to suppose, it was simply because thieves had found, by long practice, that the mails were scarcely worth robbing—

the booty to be obtained being comparatively worthless, inasmuch as the public found other means of sending letters of value. Mr. Palmer, as we have before stated, knew of tradesmen who [Pg 78] sent letters by stage-coach. Why, therefore, "should not the stage-coach, well protected by armed guards, under certain conditions to be specified, carry the mail-bags?" Though by no means the only recommendation which Mr. Palmer made to the Prime Minister, this substitution of a string of mail-coaches for the "worn-out hacks" was the leading feature of his plans. Evincing a thorough knowledge of his subject (however he may have attained that knowledge), and devised with great skill, the measures he proposed promised to advance the postal communication to as high a pitch of excellence as was possible. To lend to the scheme the prospect of *financial* success, he laboured to show that his proposals, if adopted, would secure a larger revenue to the Post-Office than it had ever yet yielded; whilst, as far as the public were concerned, it was evident that they would gladly pay higher for a service which was performed so much more efficiently. Mr. Pitt, who always lent a ready ear to proposals which would have the effect of increasing the revenue, saw and acknowledged the merits of the scheme very early. But, first of all, the Post-Office officials must be consulted; and from accounts[55] which survive, we learn how bitterly they resented proposals not coming from themselves. They made many and vehement objections to the sweeping changes which Palmer's plans would necessitate. "The oldest and ablest officers in the service" represented them "not only to be impracticable, but dangerous to commerce and the revenue."[56] The accounts of the way in which they met some of his proposals is most amusing and instructive. Thus, Palmer recommended Mr. Pitt to take some commercial men into his councils, and they would not fail to convince him of the great need there was for [Pg 79] change. He also submitted that the suggestions of commercial men should be listened to more frequently, when postal arrangements for their respective districts should be made. Mr. Hodgson, one of the prominent officers of the Post-Office, indignantly answered that "it was not possible that any set of gentlemen, merchants, or outriders (commercial travellers, we suppose), could instruct officers brought up in the business of the Post-Office. And it is particularly to be hoped," said this gentlemen, with a spice of malice, "if not presumed, that the surveyors need no such information." He "ventured to say, that the post as then managed was admirably connected in all its parts, well-regulated, carefully attended to, and not to be improved by any person unacquainted with the whole. It is a pity," he sarcastically added, "that Mr. Palmer should not first have been informed of the nature of the business in question, to make him understand how very differently the post and post-offices are conducted to what he apprehends."

Mr. Palmer might not be, and really was not, acquainted with all the working arrangements of the office he was seeking to improve: yet it was quite patent to all outside the Post-Office that the entire establishment needed remodelling. Mr. Hodgson, however, and his *confrères* "were amazed," they said, "that any dissatisfaction, any desire for change, should exist." The Post-Office was already perfect in their eyes. It was, at least, "almost as perfect as it can be, without exhausting the revenue arising therefrom." They could not help, therefore, making a united stand against any such new-fangled scheme, which they predict "will fling the commercial correspondence of the country into the utmost confusion, and which will justly raise such a clamour as the Postmaster-General will not be able to appease." Another of the principal officers, a Mr. Allen, who seems to have been more temperate in his abuse of the new proposals, gave it as his opinion, "that the more Mr. Palmer's plan was considered, the greater number of [Pg 80] difficulties and objections started to its ever being carried completely into execution."

From arguing on the general principles involved, they then descend to combat the working arrangements of the theatre-manager with even less success. Mr. Palmer complains that the post is slow, and states that it ought to outstrip all other conveyances. Mr. Hodgson "could not see *why* the post should be the swiftest conveyance in England. Personal conveyances, I apprehend, should be much more, and particularly with people travelling on business." Then followed Mr. Draper, another official, who objected to the coaches as travelling too fast. "The post," he said, "cannot travel with the expedition of stage-coaches, on account of the business necessary to be done in each town through which it passes, and without which correspondence would be thrown into the utmost confusion." Mr. Palmer had proposed that the coaches should remain fifteen minutes in each town through which they passed, to give time to transact the necessary business of sorting the letters. Mr. Draper said that half an hour was not enough, as was well enough known to persons at all conversant with Post-Office business. Living in this age of railways and steam, we have just reason to smile at such objections. Then, as to the appointment of mail-guards, Mr. Palmer might, but Mr. Hodgson could, see no security, though he could see endless trouble, expense, and annoyance in such a provision. "The man would doubtless have to be waited for at every alehouse the coach passed." He might have added that such had been the experience with the post-boys under the *régime* which he was endeavouring to perpetuate. Mr. Palmer stipulated, that the mail-guards should in all cases be well armed and accoutred, and such officers "as could be depended upon as trustworthy." But the Post-Office gentlemen objected even to this arrangement. "There were no means of preventing robbery with effect,[57] as the strongest cart or coach that could be made, lined and bound with iron, might easily be [Pg 81] broken into by determined robbers," and the employment of armed mail-guards would only make matters worse. Instead of affording protection to the mails, the following precious doctrine was inculcated, that the crime of murder would be added to that of robbery; "for," said the wonderful Mr. Hodgson, "when once desperate fellows had determined upon robbery, resistance would lead to murder"! These were peace and non-resistance principles with a vengeance, but principles which in England, during the later years of Pitt's administration, would seldom be heard, except in furtherance of some such selfish views as those which the Post-Office authorities held in opposition to Mr. Palmer's so-called innovations.

Mr. Palmer's propositions also included the timing of the mails at each successive stage, and their departure from the country properly regulated; they would thus be enabled to arrive in London at regular specified times, and not at any hour of the day or night, and might, to some extent, be delivered simultaneously. Again: instead of *leaving* London at all hours of the night, he suggested that all the coaches for the different roads should leave the General Post-Office at the same time; and thus it was that Palmer established what was, to the stranger in London for many years, one of the first of City sights. Finally, Mr. Palmer's plans were pronounced impossible. "It was an impossibility," his opponents declared, "that the Bath mail could be brought to London in sixteen or eighteen hours."

Mr. Pitt was less conservative than the Post-Office authorities. He clearly inherited, as an eloquent writer[58] has pointed out, his father's contempt for impossibilities. He saw, with the clear vision for which he was so remarkable, that Mr. Palmer's scheme would be as profitable as it was practicable, and he resolved, in spite of the short-sighted opposition of the authorities, that [Pg 82] it should be adopted. The Lords of the Treasury lost no more time in decreeing that the plan should be tried, and a trial and complete success was the result. On the 24th of July, 1784, the Post-Office Secretary (Mr. Anthony Todd) issued the following order:—"His Majesty's Postmasters-General, being inclined to make an experiment for the more expeditious conveyance of mails of letters by stage-coaches, machines, &c., have been pleased to order that a trial shall be made upon the road between London and Bristol, to commence at each place on Monday, the 2d of August next." Then follows a list of places, letters for which can be sent by these mail-coaches, and thus concludes: "All persons are therefore to take notice, that the letters put into any receiving-house before six of the evening, or seven at this chief office, will be forwarded by these new conveyances; all others for the said post-towns and their districts put in afterwards, or given to the bellmen, must remain until the following post at the same hour of seven."

The mail-coaches commenced running according to the above advertisement, not, however, on the 2d, but on the 8th of August. One coach left London at eight in the morning, reaching Bristol about eleven the same night. *The distance between London and Bath was accomplished in fourteen hours.* The other coach was started from Bristol at four in the afternoon on the same day, reaching London in sixteen hours.

Mr. Palmer was installed at the Post-Office on the day of the change, under the title of Controller-General. It was arranged that his salary should be 1,500*l.* a-year, together with a commission of two and a half per cent. upon any excess of net revenue over 240,000*l.*—the sum at which the annual proceeds of the Post-Office stood at the date of his appointment.

The rates of postage, as we have before incidentally pointed out, were slightly raised—an addition of a penny to each charge; but, notwithstanding this, the number of letters began at [Pg 83] once, and most perceptibly, to increase. So great was the improvement in security and speed, that, for once, the additions to the charges were borne ungrudgingly. Coaches were applied for without loss of time by the municipalities of many of our largest towns,[59] and when they were granted—as they appear to have been in most of the instances—they were started at the rate of six miles an hour. This official rate of speed was subsequently increased to eight, then to nine, and at length to ten miles an hour.[60]

The opposition to Mr. Palmer's scheme, manifested by the Post-Office officials before it was adopted, does not seem to have given way before the manifest success attending its introduction. Perhaps Mr. Palmer's presence at the Council Board did not conduce to the desirable unanimity of feeling. However it was, he appears for some time to have contended single-handed with officials determinately opposed to him. When goaded and tormented by them, he fell into their snares, and attempted to carry his measures by indirect means. In 1792, when his plans had been [Pg 84] in operation about eight years, and were beginning to show every element of success, it was deemed desirable that he should surrender his appointment. A pension of 3,000*l.* was granted to him in consideration of his valuable services. Subsequently he memorialized the Government, setting forth that his pension fell far short of the emoluments which had been promised to him, but he did not meet with success. Mr. Palmer never ceased to protest against this treatment; and his son, Major-General Palmer, frequently urged his claims before Parliament, until, in 1813, after a struggle of twenty years, the House of Commons voted him a grant of 50,000*l.* Mr. Palmer died in 1818.

Now that Mr. Palmer was gone from the Post-Office, his scheme was left to incompetent and unwilling hands. All the smothered opposition broke out afresh; and if it had been less obvious how trade and commerce, and all the other interests promoted by safe and quick correspondence, were benefited by the new measures; and if it had not been for the vigilant supervision of the Prime Minister—who had let the reformer go, but had no intention of letting his reforms go with him—all the improvements of the past few years might have been quietly strangled in their infancy. Though we know not what the country lost in losing the guiding-spirit, it is matter of congratulation that the main elements of his scheme were fully preserved. Though the Post-Office officials scrupled not to recommend some return to the old system, Mr. Palmer's plans were fully adhered to until the fact of their success became patent to both the public and the official alike. In the first year of their introduction, the net revenue of the Post-Office was about 250,000*l.* Thirty years afterwards the proceeds had increased sixfold, to no less a sum than a million and a half sterling! Though, of course, this great increase is partly attributable to the increase of population, and the national advancement generally, it was primarily due to the greater speed, punctuality, and security which the new arrangements gave to the service. Whilst, [Pg 85]

financially, the issue was successful, the result, in other respects, was no less certain. In 1797, the greater part of the mails were conveyed in one-half of the time previously occupied; in some cases, in one-third of the time; and on the cross-roads, in a quarter of the time, taken under the old system. Mails not only travelled quicker, but Mr. Palmer augmented their number between the largest towns. Other spirited reforms went on most vigorously. Three hundred and eighty towns, which had had before but three deliveries of letters a-week, now received one daily. The Edinburgh coach required less time by sixty hours to travel from London, and there was a corresponding reduction between towns at shorter distances. Ten years before the first Liverpool coach was started, a single letter-carrier sufficed for the wants of that place; before the century closed, *six* were required. A single letter-carrier sufficed for Edinburgh for a number of years;[61] now *four* were required.

No less certain was it that the mails, under the new system, travelled more securely. For many years after their introduction, not a single attempt was made, in England, to rob Palmer's mail-coaches. It is noteworthy, however, that the changes, when applied to Ireland, did not conduce to the greater security of the mails. The first coach was introduced into Ireland in 1790, and placed on the Cork and Belfast roads, a few more following on the other main lines of road. Though occasionally accompanied by as many as *four* armed guards, the mail-coaches were robbed, according to a competent authority, "as frequently as the less-aspiring riding-post."

Not many months after the establishment of mail-coaches, an Act was passed through Parliament, declaring that all carriages and stage-coaches employed to carry his Majesty's mails [Pg 86] should henceforth be exempt from the payment of *toll*, on both post- or cross-roads. Previously, all post-horses employed in the same service travelled free of toll. This Act told immediately in favour of the Post-Office to a greater extent than was imagined by its framers. Innkeepers, who, in England, were the principal owners of stage-coaches,[62] bargained for the carriage of mails, very frequently at merely nominal prices. In return, they enjoyed the advantages of the coach and its passengers, travelling all roads free of toll.

Arrived at the end of the century, we find the mail-coach system is now an institution in the [Pg 87] country. Other interests had progressed at an equal rate. Travelling, as a rule, had become easy and pleasant. Not that the service was performed without any difficulty or hindrance. On the contrary—and it enters within the scope of our present object to advert to them—the obstacles to anything like a perfect system seemed insurmountable. Though the difficulties consequent on travelling, at the beginning of the present century, were comparatively trifling on the *principal post-roads*, yet, when new routes were chosen, or new localities were designed to share in the common benefits of the new and better order of things in the Post-Office, these same difficulties had frequently to be again got over. Cross-roads in England were greatly neglected—so much so, in fact, that new mail-coaches which had been applied for and granted, were often enough waiting idle till the roads should be ready to receive them. The Highway Act of 1663, so far as the roads in remote districts were concerned, was completely in abeyance. Early in the century we find the subject frequently mentioned in Parliament. As the result of one discussion, it was decided that every inducement should be held out to the different trusts to make and repair the roads in their respective localities; while, on the other hand, the Postmaster-General was directed by the Government to indict all townships who neglected the duty imposed upon them. Under the Acts of 7 & 8 George III. c. 43, and 4 George IV. c. 74, commissioners were appointed to arrange for all necessary road improvements, having certain privileges vested in them for the purpose. Thus, they recommended that certain trusts should have loans granted to them, to be employed in road-making and mending. Mr. Telford, at his death, was largely employed by the Road Commissioners—the improvements on the Shrewsbury and Holyhead road being under his entire superintendence. And it would seem that the above-mentioned road needed improvement. When, in 1808, a new mail-coach was put on to run between the two places, no fewer than [Pg 88] twenty-two townships had to be indicted by the Post-Office authorities for having their roads in a dangerous and unfinished state.

In Scotland and Ireland, great improvements had also been made in this respect, considering the previously wretched state of both countries, Scotland especially. At a somewhat earlier period, four miles of the best post-road in Scotland—namely, that between Edinburgh and Berwick—were described in a contemporary record as being in so ruinous a state, that passengers were afraid of their lives, "either by their coaches overturning, their horses stumbling, their carts breaking, or their loads casting, and the poor people with burdens on their backs sorely grieved and discouraged;" moreover, "strangers do often exclaim thereat," as well they might. Things were different at the close of the last century; still, the difficulties encountered in travelling, say by the Bar, may well serve to show the internal state of the country. "Those who are born to modern travelling," says Lord Cockburn,[63] "can scarcely be made to understand how the previous age got on. There was no bridge over the Tay at Dunkeld, or over the Spey at Fochabers, or over the Findhorn at Forres. Nothing but wretched peerless ferries, let to poor cotters, who rowed, or hauled, or pushed a crazy boat across, or more commonly got their wives to do it.... There was no mail-coach north of Aberdeen till after the battle of Waterloo.... I understand from Hope, that after 1784, when he came to the bar, he and Braxfield rode a whole north circuit; and that, from the Findhorn being in a flood, they were obliged to go up its bank for about *twenty-eight miles*, to the Bridge of Dulsie, before they could cross. I myself rode circuits when I was an Advocate Depute, between 1807 and 1810." A day and a half was still, at the end of the last century, taken up between Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 1788, a direct mail-coach was put on between London and Glasgow, to go by what is known as the west coast route, *viâ* Carlisle.[64] The Glasgow [Pg 89]

merchants had long wished for such a communication, as much time was lost in going by way of Edinburgh. On the day on which the first mail-coach was expected, a vast number of them went along the road for several miles to welcome it, and then headed the procession into the city. To announce its arrival on subsequent occasions, a gun was fired. It was found a difficult task, however, to drive the coach, especially in winter, over the bleak and rugged hills of Dumfriesshire and Lanarkshire; the road, moreover, was hurriedly and badly made, and at times quite impassable. Robert Owen, travelling between his model village in Lanarkshire and England, tells us[65] that it often took him two days and three nights, incessant travelling, to get from Manchester to Glasgow in the coach, the greater part of the time being spent north of Carlisle. On the eastern side of the country, in the direct line between Edinburgh and London, a grand new road had been spoken of for many years. The most difficult part, viz. that between Edinburgh and Berwick, was begun at the beginning of the present century, and in 1824, a good road was finished and opened out as far south as Morpeth, in Northumberland. A continuation of the road from Morpeth to London being greatly needed, the Post-Office authorities engaged Mr. Telford, the eminent engineer, to make a survey of the road over the remaining distance. The survey lasted many years. A hundred miles of the new Great North Road, south of York, was laid out in a perfectly straight line.[66] All the requisite arrangements were made for beginning the work, when the talk of locomotive engines and tramways, and especially the result of the locomotive contest at Rainhill in the year 1829, had the effect of directing public and official attention to a new and promising method of travelling, and of preventing an outlay of what must have been a most enormous sum for the purposes of this great work.[67] The scheme was in abeyance for a few months, and this time sufficed to develop the railway project, and demonstrate its usefulness to the postal system of the country. But we are anticipating matters, and must, at any rate, speak for a moment of the services of Mr. Macadam. The improvements which this gentleman brought about in road-making had a very sensible effect on the operations of the mail-coach service. Most of the post-roads were *macadamized* before the year 1820, and it was then that the service was in its highest state of efficiency. Accelerations in the speed of the coaches were made as soon as ever any road was finished on the new principle. From this time, the average speed, *including stoppages*, was nine miles, all but a furlong. The fastest coaches (known as the "crack coaches" from this circumstance, and also for being on the best roads) were those travelling, in 1836, between London and Shrewsbury (accomplishing 154 miles in 15 hours), London and Exeter (171 miles in 17 hours), London and Manchester (187 miles in 19 hours), and London and Holyhead (261 miles in 27 hours). On one occasion, the Devonport mail, travelling with foreign and colonial letters, accomplished the journey of 216 miles, including stoppages, in 21 hours and 14 minutes.

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In 1836, there were fifty four-horse mails in England, thirty in Ireland, and ten in Scotland. In England, besides, there were forty-nine mails of two horses each. In the last year of mail-coaches, the number which left London every night punctually at eight o'clock was twenty-seven; travelling in the aggregate above 5,500 miles, before they reached their several destinations. We have already stated how the contracts for *horsing* the mail-coaches were conducted; no material change took place in this respect up to the advent of railways. Early in the present century, it was deemed desirable that the mail-coaches should all be built and furnished on one plan. For a great number of years, the contract for building and repairing a sufficient number was given (without competition) to Mr. John Vidler. Though the Post-Office arranged for building the coaches, the mail contractors were required to pay for them; the revenue only bearing the charges of cleaning, oiling, and greasing them, an expense amounting to about 2,200*l.* a-year. In 1835, however, on a disagreement with Mr. Vidler, the contract was thrown open to competition, from which competition Mr. Vidler, for a substantial reason, was excluded. The official control of the coaches, mail-guards, &c., it may here be stated, was vested in the superintendent of mail-coaches, whose location was at the General Post-Office.

Had Hogarth's pencil transmitted to posterity the *tout ensemble* of a London procession of mail-coaches, or of one of them at the door of the customary halting-place (what Herring has done for the old Brighton coach the "*Age*," with its fine stud of blood-horses, and a real baronet for driver), the subject could not but have occasioned marked curiosity and pleasure. No doubt he would have given a distinguished place to the guard of the mail. The mail-guard was no ordinary character, being generally *d'accord* with those who thought or expressed this opinion. Regarded as quite a public character, commissions of great importance were oftentimes intrusted to him. The country banker, for example, would trust him with untold wealth. Though he was paid only a nominal sum by the Post-Office authorities for his official services, he was yet enabled to make his position and place a lucrative one, by the help of the regular perquisites and other accidental windfalls which we need not further specify. Gathering *en route* scraps of local gossip and district intelligence, he was often "private," and sometimes "special," correspondent to scores of different people. The *Muddleton Gazette*, perhaps the only newspaper on his line of road, was submissively dependent upon him. More of him anon: here we would only add that he had special duties on special occasions. The mail-coach was looked for most anxiously in times of great excitement. During the trial of Queen Caroline, says Miss Martineau, "all along the line of mails, crowds stood waiting in the burning sunshine for news of the trial, which was shouted out to them as the coach passed."[68] Again, at the different stages in the history of the Reform Bill, the mail-roads were sprinkled over for miles with people who were on the *qui vive* for any news from London, and the coachman and guards on the top of the coaches shouted out the tidings.[69] When the Ministry resigned, many of the guards distributed handbills which they had brought from London, stating the facts.

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In these days of cheap postage and newspapers in every household, it may be difficult to comprehend the intense interest centring in the appearance of the mail on its arrival at a small provincial town. The leather bag of the Post-Office was almost the undisputed and peculiar property of the upper ten thousand. When there was good reason to suppose that any communication was on its way to some member of the commonalty, speculation would be eager among the knot of persons met to talk over the probable event. Thus we may understand with what eagerness the mail would be looked for, and how the news, freely given out, especially in times of war, would be eagerly devoured by men of all ranks and parties. [Pg 93]

It only remains to notice, in conclusion, the annual procession of mail-coaches on the king's birthday, which contemporaries assure us was a gay and lively sight. One writer in the early part of the century goes so far as to say that the cavalcade of mail-coaches was "a far more agreeable and interesting sight to the eye *and the mind* than the gaud and glitter of the Lord Mayor's show," because the former "made you reflect on the advantages derived to trade and commerce and social intercourse by this *magnificent establishment*" (the Post-Office). Hone, in his *Every-day Book*, writing of 1822, tells us that George IV., who was born on the 12th of August, changed the annual celebration of his birthday to St. George's-day, April 23d. "According to custom," says he, "the mail-coaches went in procession from Millbank to Lombard Street. About twelve o'clock, the horses belonging to the different mails with entire new harness, and the postmen and postboys on horseback arrayed in their new scarlet coats and jackets, proceed from Lombard Street to Millbank and there dine; from thence, the procession being re-arranged, begins to march about five o'clock in the afternoon, headed by the general post letter-carriers on horseback. The coaches follow them, filled with the wives and children, friends and relations, of the guards or coachmen; while the postboys sounding their bugles and cracking their whips bring up the rear. From the commencement of the procession, the bells of the different churches ring out merrily and continue their rejoicing peals till it arrives at the Post-Office again, from whence the mails depart for different parts of the kingdom." Great numbers assembled to witness the cavalcade as it passed through the principal streets of the metropolis. The appearance of the coachmen and guards, got up to every advantage, and each with a large bouquet of flowers in his scarlet uniform, was of course greatly heightened by the brilliancy of the newly-painted coach, emblazoned with the royal arms.

FOOTNOTES:

[51] No one who has read *Roderick Random* can forget the novelist's description of his hero's ride from Scotland to London. As it is generally believed to be a veritable account of a journey which Smollett himself made about the middle of the last century, the reader may be of opinion that the improvement here spoken of was not so great as it might have been. Roderick, however, travelled in the "*stage-waggon*" of the period. He and his faithful friend Strap having observed one of these waggons a quarter of a mile before them, speedily overtook it, and, ascending by means of the usual ladder, "tumbled into the straw under the darkness of the tilt," amidst four passengers, two gentlemen and two ladies. When they arrived at the first inn Captain Weazel desired a room for himself and his lady, "with a separate supper;" but the impartial innkeeper replied he "had prepared victuals for the passengers in the waggon, without respect of persons." Strap walked by the side of the waggon, changing places with his master when Roderick was disposed to walk. The mistakes, the quarrels, and the mirth of the passengers, are told by the novelist with a vivacity and humour which would have been admirable but for their coarseness. After five days' rumbling in the straw, the passengers get quite reconciled to each other; "nothing remarkable happened during the remaining part of our journey, *which continued six or seven days longer*."

There were also a few bad roads. Arthur Young, in his famous *Tour in the North of England*, has described a Lancashire turnpike-road of about the same period in the following vigorous phraseology:—"I know not in the whole range of language terms sufficiently expressive to describe this infernal road. To look over a map and perceive that it is a principal road, one would naturally conclude it to be at least decent; but let me most seriously caution all travellers who may purpose to travel this terrible country to avoid it as they would the devil, for a thousand to one they will break their necks or their limbs by over-throws or breakings-down. They will here meet with ruts which actually measured four feet deep and floating with mud, and this only from a wet summer; what, therefore, must it be after a winter? The only mending which it in places receives is the tumbling in some loose stones, which serve no other purpose but jolting a carriage in the most intolerable manner. These are not merely opinions, but facts, for I actually passed three carts broken down in these eighteen miles of execrable memory." The road in question was that between Wigan and Preston, then a regular post-road and now on the trunk line of mail conveyance into Scotland.

[52] Chambers' *Traditions of Edinburgh*, vol. i. p. 168.

[53] Baines's *History of Lancashire*, p. 83.

[54] The Bath post was no exception. The letters which left London at two o'clock on Monday morning did not reach Worcester, Norwich, or Birmingham till the Wednesday, Exeter not till Thursday, and Glasgow and Edinburgh for about a week.

[55] *Vide* Report of the Committee of House of Commons in 1797, on "Mr. Palmer's Agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post-Office and its Revenue," p. 115.

[56] Report of the Committee appointed to inquire into the state of the Public Offices in 1788.

[57] Post-Office robberies had been exceedingly numerous within a few years of the change which Palmer succeeded in inaugurating. Though one prosecution for a single robbery cost the authorities no less a sum than 4,000*l.*, yet they regarded the occurrences as unavoidable and simply matters of course.

[58] Mr. M. D. Hill, in *Fraser's Magazine*, November, 1862.

[59] The Liverpool merchants were the first to petition the Treasury for the new mail-coach. "This petition being complied with in the course of a few months, the letters from London reached Liverpool in thirty hours. At first these coaches were small vehicles, drawn by two horses, which were changed every six miles. They carried four passengers, besides the coachman and guard, both dressed in livery, the latter being armed to the teeth, as a security against highwaymen."—Baines's *History of Liverpool*. In October, 1784, York applied for a mail-coach, to pass through that place on its way to the North.

[60] This velocity was not attained without considerable misgivings and distrust on the part of travellers. When the eight was increased to ten miles an hour, the public mind was found to be in different stages of alarm and revolt. Vested interests indulged in the gloomiest forebodings on those who should thus knowingly spurn the way of Providence. Lord-Chancellor Campbell relates that he was frequently warned against travelling in the mail-coaches improved by Palmer, on account of the fearful rate at which they flew, and instances were supplied to him of passengers who had died suddenly of apoplexy from the rapidity of the motion.

[61] Sir Walter Scott relates that a friend of his remembered the London letter-bag arriving in Edinburgh, during the year 1745, with but one letter for the British Linen Company. About the same time the Edinburgh mail is said to have arrived in London, containing but one letter, addressed to Sir William Pulteney, the banker.

[62] In Ireland, on the contrary, the trade was in the hands of two or three large contractors, who charged heavily for work only imperfectly performed. Until the introduction of railways, the mail service of Ireland, owing to the absurd system adopted, was always worked at a greater cost, comparatively, than in England. In 1829, the Irish service, of considerably less extent, cost four times as much as the entire mail establishment of England. Mr. Charles Bianconi has been the Palmer of Ireland. In the early part of the present century he observed the want of travelling accommodation and formed plans for serving the country by a regular system of passenger-cars. He succeeded in inducing the different postmasters (who, up to the year 1830, had the conveyance of mails in their own hands, getting certain allowances for the service from Government, and then arranging for carriage in the cheapest way possible) to let him carry their mails. This he did at a cheap rate, stipulating, however, that he should not be required to run his cars at any inconvenient time for passenger traffic. On the amalgamation of the English and Irish Offices in 1830, Mr. Bianconi, who had now established a good reputation, entered into contracts with the general authorities to continue the work, though on a larger scale than ever, the extent of which may be judged by the fact that in 1848 he had 1,400 horses employed. The growth and extent of railway communication necessarily affected his establishment, but, with unabated activity, Mr. Bianconi directed his labours into new districts when his old roads were invaded by the steam-engine and the rail. He is described to have been "ready at a moment's notice to move his horses, cars, and men to any district, however remote, where any chance of business might show itself." A year or two ago this indefatigable man was still busy, and held several postal contracts; his establishment (1860) consisting of 1,000 horses, and between sixty and seventy conveyances, daily travelling 3,000 or 4,000 miles and traversing twenty-two counties.

[63] *Memorials of his Time*, vol. i. p. 341.

[64] Dr. Cleland, in his *Statistical Account of Glasgow*, tells us that before this time, viz. in 1787, the course of post from London to Glasgow was by way of Edinburgh, *five* days in the week. Only five mails arrived in Glasgow from London on account of no business being transacted at the Edinburgh Office on Sundays. It now occurred, however, to some one of the astute managers of the Post-Office, that the *sixth* mail, which the Sunday regulations of the Edinburgh Office prevented being passed through that medium, might be sent by the mail-coach to Carlisle, while a supplementary coach should travel every sixth night between Carlisle and Glasgow. This was done, and the result was the saving of an entire day between London and Glasgow. The other mails continued, as usual, for twelve months longer, it having taken the authorities the whole of that time to discover that the five mails, which required *five* days to reach Glasgow by way of Edinburgh, might, like the sixth, be carried by way of Carlisle, in *four* days. Dr. Cleland, however, does not seem to have perceived that there might be some other reason for adhering to the old route, such as increased outlay, &c.

[65] *Life of Robert Owen. Written by himself.* London, 1857.

[66] Smiles' *Lives of the Engineers*.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] *History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace*, vol. i. p. 257.

[69] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 62.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE TRANSITION PERIOD AT THE POST-OFFICE.

It must not be supposed that the improvements in mail-conveyance were the only beneficial

changes introduced into the Post-Office during the fifty years which we have designated as the mail-coach era. It is true that, compared with the progress of the country in many other respects, the period might be termed uneventful. Still, there are incidental changes to chronicle of some importance in themselves, and likewise important in their bearing on the present position of the Post-Office. If we retrace our steps to the year 1792, we shall find, for instance, that in that year an entirely new branch of business was commenced at the General Post-Office. We refer to the origin of the Money-Order establishment. The beginnings of this system, which, as the reader must be aware, has of late years assumed gigantic proportions, were simple and unassuming in the extreme. The Government of the day had expressed a desire for the establishment of a medium by which soldiers and sailors might transmit to their homes such small sums as they could manage to save for that purpose. Three officers of the Post-Office jointly submitted a scheme to make a part of the Post-Office machinery available in this direction, and a monopoly was readily conceded to them. The undertaking was further favoured with the sanction of the Postmasters-General. The designation of the firm was to be "Stow & Co.," each of the three [Pg 95] partners agreeing to find a thousand pounds capital. The stipulations made were, that the business should be carried on at the cost and at the risk of the originators, and that they, in return, should receive the profits. It was agreed, also, that they should enjoy the privilege of sending all their correspondence free of postage—no inconsiderable item saved to them. Contrary to anticipations, the proceeds were considerable—not so much on account of the number of transactions, as on the high commission that was charged for the money-orders. Their terms were eightpence for every pound; but if the sum exceeded two pounds, a stamp-duty of one shilling was levied by Government in addition. No order could be issued for more than five guineas; and the charge for that sum amounted to four shillings and sixpence, or nearly five per cent. When it is considered that the expense did not end here, but that a letter containing a money-order was subjected to *double postage*, it cannot be wondered at that those who dealt with the three monopolists were few in number, and only persons under a positive necessity to remit money speedily. Such a system, it will be admitted, could not of itself be expected to foster trade. When the general public were admitted to the benefits of the Money-order Office—as they were some few years after the establishment of the office—it does not appear that the business was greatly increased. Almost from the commencement, the managers drew yearly proceeds, which varied but slightly from year to year, averaging about 200*l.* each. While, on the one hand, this office was seen to be a most useful institution, good in principle, and likely, if properly managed, to contribute largely to the general revenue of the Post-Office; on the other hand, it was clearly stationary, if not retrograde in its movements. In 1834, the attention of practical men was more immediately called to the question by a return which was asked for by the House of Commons, for a detailed account of the poundage, &c. on money-orders of each provincial post-office, and the purpose or purposes to which the monies were applied. The Postmaster-General [Pg 96] replied, that the Money-order Office was a private establishment, worked by private capital, under his sanction; but he could give no returns, because the accounts were not under his control. In 1838, a new Postmaster-General, Lord Lichfield, sought and obtained the consent of the Treasury to convert the Office into a branch under his immediate direction. In that year the chief Money-order Office commenced business in two small rooms at the north end of St. Martin's-le-Grand, with a staff of three clerks. Though the charges were reduced to a commission of sixpence for sums under two pounds, and of one shilling and sixpence for sums up to five pounds, the new branch was worked at a loss, owing to the high rates of postage and the double payment to which letters containing enclosures were subjected. After the introduction of penny postage, the change was so marked, that the immense success of this branch establishment may be considered as entirely owing to the reduction of postage-rates. Had the penny-postage scheme done no more for the nation than assisted the people in the exercise of a timely prudence and frugality, stimulating them, as it can be proved, to self-denial and benevolence, it would have done much. But we are anticipating an important era. Soon after the passing of the Penny-postage Act, the commission on money-orders was reduced to threepence instead of sixpence, and sixpence for any amount above two pounds and under five pounds. In 1840, the number of money-order transactions had increased to thousands, in the place of hundreds under the old *régime*. The money passed through the office in the advent year of cheap postage amounted to nearly half a million sterling, the Post-Office commission on the sum exceeding 6,000*l.* The rate of increase, subsequently, may best be shown by taking a month's work ten years afterwards. Thus, during one month of 1850, twice as many orders were taken out and paid as were issued and paid during 1840, the particulars of which year were given above. The same rate of increase has continued up to the present moment. During the year 1862, the number of orders had, in [Pg 97] round numbers, risen to more than seven and a half millions, or a money-value exceeding sixteen millions sterling, the commission on the whole amounting to more than one hundred and thirty-six thousand pounds.[70]

By the statute of Queen Anne, letters might be brought from abroad by *private ships* under certain distinctly-specified regulations. On the contrary, no law existed enabling the Postmaster-General to *send* bags of letters by the same medium until 1799, when an Act was passed with this object. Masters of such ships refusing to take bags were subjected to heavy penalties.[71] The postage of letters so sent (on account of the slowness of transit in the majority of cases) was fixed at half the usual rates. This Act is the foundation of the ship-letter system, by means of which, besides the regular packet communication, letters are forwarded to all parts of the world. At the same period the Government rigorously adhered to the law as laid down with regard to letters *brought* by private vessels. A case was tried in 1806 in the Court of King's Bench—"King *v.* Wilson"—in which the defendant—a merchant who had had letters brought from the Continent in a ship of his own, and pleaded that he had a right to do so—was cast in heavy damages, and told

that "all and every such letters, as well as others," must pass through the Post-Office in the usual way.

In the year 1814, the business of the Post-Office had increased so greatly, that an agitation was [Pg 98] commenced with the object of securing better accommodation for its despatch than was afforded by the office in Lombard Street. The first General Post-Office was opened in Cloak Lane, near Dowgate Hill, and removed from thence to the Black Swan in Bishopsgate Street. After the Great Fire of 1666, a General Office was opened in Covent Garden, but it was soon removed to Lombard Street, to a house which had been the residence of Sir Robert Viner, once Lord Mayor of London. It was now proposed that a large and commodious building should be specially erected in some central part of the City, and the business once more transferred. In the Session of 1814 we find a Mr. Butterworth presenting a petition to the House of Commons from four thousand London merchants, in favour of an early removal of the Post-Office from Lombard Street. He was assured, he said, that the present office "was so close and confined, as to be injurious to the health of those concerned;" he further stated, that "two guineas were expended weekly for vinegar to fumigate the rooms and prevent infectious fevers." Another hon. member stated that the access to the office was so narrow and difficult, that the mail-coaches were prevented from getting up to it to take the letter-bags. It is curious to note that even this change was contested. Counter-petitions were presented to Parliament, stating that the Lombard Street office was convenient enough, and that the movement was got up by interested parties. Many years passed before the discussions ended and the preliminary arrangements were made. Nothing could better serve to show the stationary character of the Post-Office than the fact that, year by year, and in the opinion of the authorities, the Lombard Street establishment sufficed for its wants and requirements. In 1825, however, Government acquiesced in the views of the great majority of London residents, and St. Martin's-le-Grand—the site of an ancient convent and sanctuary—was chosen for a large new building, to be erected from designs by Sir R. Smirke. It [Pg 99] was five years in course of erection, and opened for the transaction of business on the 25th of September, 1829. The building is of the Grecian-Ionic order, and is one of the handsomest public structures in London. The basement is of granite, but the edifice itself, which is 400 feet in length and 80 feet in width, is built of brick, faced all round with Portland stone. In the centre is a grand portico with fluted columns, leading to the great hall, which forms a public thoroughfare from St. Martin's-le-Grand to Foster Lane.

From the date of the opening of the new General Post-Office, improvements were proposed and carried out very earnestly. Under the Duke of Richmond, reforms in the establishment set in with considerable vigour.[72] He seems to have been the first Postmaster-General during the present century who thought the accommodation which the Post-Office gave to the public was really of a restrictive nature; that more facility might easily be given to the public; and that the system of management was an erroneous one. In 1834, the Duke of Richmond submitted a list of improvements to the Treasury Lords, in which there were at least thirty substantial measures of reform proposed. It is true that many of these measures had been strongly recommended to him by the Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry, who had sat yearly on the Post-Office and other revenue branches of the public service. The previous policy, however, of the authorities was to put on a bold front against any recommendations not originating with themselves. The Duke of Richmond had considerably less of this feeling than some of his predecessors. Thus, to take the [Pg 100] principal measure of reform concluded in his time—namely, the complete amalgamation of the Scotch and Irish Offices with the English Post-Office—we find that the twenty-third report of the Commissioners, signed by "Wallace," W. J. Lushington, Henry Berens, and J. P. Dickenson, spoke strongly on the inadequacy "of the present system of administration to reach the different parts of the country," and urging the expediency "of providing against any more conflict of opinion, and of securing a more extended co-operation, as well as unity of design, in the management of the distinct Offices of England, Scotland, and Ireland." Again, in 1831, on the recommendation of the Commission, the Postmaster-General ordered that the boundaries of the London district post—which, in 1801, became a "Twopenny Post," and letters for which post, if delivered beyond the boundaries of the cities of London and Westminster and the borough of Southwark, were charged threepence—should now be extended to include all places within *three* miles of the General Post-Office. Two years afterwards, on the recommendation of another Commission, the limits of the "Twopenny Post" were again extended to places not exceeding *twelve* miles from St. Martin's-le-Grand, and this arrangement continued till the time of uniform penny postage. The Duke of Richmond likewise appointed a daily post to France, established a number of new mail-coaches, and abolished, in great part, the system of paying the clerks, &c. of the Post-Office by fees, substituting fixed salaries in each case.[73]

In 1830, on the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the mails of the district were [Pg 101] consigned to the new company for transmission. The railway system developed but slowly, exerting little influence on Post-Office arrangements for the first few years. After public attention had been attracted to railways, many proposals were thrown out for the more quick transmission of mails, to the supercession of the mail-coach. One writer suggested the employment of balloons. Professor Babbage threw out suggestions, in his *Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*, 1832, pp. 218-221, deserving more attention, because in them we see shadowed forth two at least of the greatest enterprises of our time. After proceeding to show, in a manner which must have been interesting to the post-reformers of 1839-40, that if the cost of letter-carrying could be reduced, the result might be (if the Post-Office people chose) a cheaper rate of postage and a corresponding increase in the number of letters, he proceeded to expound a scheme which, though vague, was described in words extremely interesting, seeing that he wrote long anterior

to the time of the electric telegraph. Imagine, says he, a series of high pillars erected at frequent intervals, as nearly as possible in a straight line between two post-towns. An iron or steel wire of some thickness must be stretched over proper supports, fixed on these pillars, and terminating at the end, say of four or five miles, in a very strong support, by which the whole may be stretched. He proposed to call each of these places station-houses, where a man should be in attendance. A [Pg 102] narrow cylindrical tin case, to contain bags or letters, might be suspended on two wheels rolling upon the wire, whilst an endless wire of smaller size might be made to pass over two drums, one at each end, by which means the cylinder could be moved by the person at the station. Much more of the details follow, and our author thus concludes:—"The difficulties are obvious; but if these were overcome, it would present many advantages besides velocity." *We might have two or three deliveries of letters*[74] *every day*; we might send expresses at any moment; and "it is not impossible that a stretched wire might itself be made available for a *species of telegraphic communication yet more rapid*." After the first few years of railways, all other speculators quietly withdrew into the shade. In the Post-Office, towards 1838 and 1839, the influence of railways promised soon to be paramount, and it was now that Acts were passed in Parliament "to provide for the conveyance of mails by railways."

In 1836, Sir Francis Freeling, the Secretary of the Post-Office, died, when his place was filled by Lieutenant-Colonel Maberly. The latter gentleman, who was an entire stranger to the department, was introduced into the Post-Office by the Treasury for the purpose, as it was stated, of zealously carrying out the reforms which another commission of inquiry had just recommended.[75] On the premature fall of Sir Robert Peel's first Cabinet, early in the previous year, the Earl of Lichfield had succeeded to the office of Postmaster-General under Lord Melbourne. The two new officers set to work in earnest, and succeeded in inaugurating many [Pg 103] important reforms. They got the Money-order Office transferred, as we have already seen, from private hands to the General Establishment; they began the system of registering valuable letters; and, taking advantage of one of Mr. Hill's suggestions, they started a number of day-mails to the provinces. Towards the close of 1836, the stamp duty on newspapers was reduced from about threepence-farthing net to one penny, a reduction which led to an enormous increase in the number of newspapers passing through the Post-Office.

Though all these improvements were being carried out, and in many respects the Post-Office was showing signs of progression, the authorities still clung with a most unreasonable tenacity to the accustomed rates of postage, and of necessity to all the evils which followed in the train of an erroneous fiscal principle. Contrary to all experience in any other department, the Government obstinately refused to listen for a moment to any plan for the reduction of postage rates, or, what is still more remarkable, even to the alleviation of burdens caused directly by the official arrangements of the period. For example, Colonel Maberly had no sooner learnt the business of his office, than he saw very clearly an anomaly which pressed heavily in some cases, and was felt in all. He at once made a proposition to the Treasury that letters should be charged in all cases according to the exact distance between the places where a letter was posted and where delivered, and not according to the distance through which the Post-Office, *for purposes of its own*, might choose to send such letters. It may serve to show the extent to which this strange and anomalous practice was carried, if we state that the estimated reduction in the postal revenue, had Colonel Maberly's suggestion been acted upon, was given at no less than 80,000*l.* annually! The Lords of the Treasury promptly refused the concession.

In 1837 the average general postage was estimated at 9½*d.* per letter; exclusive of foreign [Pg 104] letters, it was still as high as 8¾*d.* In the reign of Queen Anne the postage of a letter between London and Edinburgh was less than half as much as the amount charged at the accession of Queen Victoria, with macadamized roads, and even with steam. Notwithstanding the heavy rates, or let us say, on account of these rates, the net proceeds of the gigantic monopoly of the Post-Office remained stationary for nearly twenty years. In 1815, the revenue derivable from the Post-Office was estimated at one and a half millions sterling. In 1836, the increase on this amount had only been between three and four thousand pounds, though the population of the country had increased immensely; knowledge was more diffused, and trade and commerce had extended in every direction. Had the Post-Office revenue increased, for instance, in the same ratio as population, we should have found the proceeds to have been increased by half a million sterling; or at the ratio of increase of stage-coach travelling, it must have been two millions sterling.

The high rates, while they failed to increase the Post-Office revenue, undoubtedly led to the evasion of the postage altogether. Illicit modes of conveyance were got up and patronised by some of the principal merchants in the kingdom. Penal laws were set at defiance, and the number of contraband letters became enormous. Some carriers were doing as large a business as the Post-Office itself. On one occasion the agents of the Post-Office made a seizure, about this time, of eleven hundred such letters, which were found in a single bag in the warehouse of certain eminent London carriers. The head of the firm hastened to seek an interview with the Postmaster-General, and proffered instant payment of 500*l.* by way of composition for the penalties incurred, and if proceedings against the firm might not be instituted. The money was taken, and the letters were all passed through the Post-Office the same night.[76] For one case which was detected, however, a hundred were never made known. The evasion of the Post-Office [Pg 105] charges extended so far and so wide that the officials began to declare that any attempt to stop the smuggling, or even to check it, was as good as hopeless. Prosecutions for the illicit conveyance of letters had, in fact, ceased long before the misdemeanours themselves.

The Post-Office was now ripe for a sweeping change. Mr. Wallace, the member for Greenock, had

frequently called the attention of the House of Commons to the desirability of a thorough reform in the Post-Office system. We find him moving at different times for Post-Office returns. For instance, in August, 1833, Mr. Wallace[77] brought forward a subject which, he said, "involved a charge of the most serious nature against the Post-Office—viz. that the Postmaster-General, or some person acting under his direction, with the view of discovering a fraud upon its revenue, has been guilty of a felony in the opening of letters." He moved on this occasion for a return of all and every instruction, bye-law, or authority, under which postmasters are instructed and authorized, or have assumed a right, to open, unfold, apply strong lamp-light to, or use any of them, or any other means whatever, for ascertaining or reading what may be contained in words or in figures in any letter, of any size or description, being fastened with a wafer or wax, or even if totally unfastened by either. At the same time he moved for a return of all Post-Office prosecutions,[78] especially for the expenses of a recent case at Stafford. In reply, the Post-Office answered in a parliamentary paper that no such instruction had ever been issued from the General Post-Office. Every person in the Post-Office was required to take the oath prescribed by the Act of 9 Queen Anne, c. 10. It was added, that "whenever it is noticed that a letter has been put into the post unfastened, it is invariably sealed with the official seal for security." In reply to the other return, the Post-Office were forced to admit that the cost of prosecuting a woman and a female child at the suit of the Post-Office at the late Stafford Assizes exceeded three hundred and twenty pounds.

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There can be no question that Mr. Wallace's frequent motions[79] for Post-Office papers, returns, statistics, detailed accounts of receipt and expenditure, &c., were the means of drawing special attention to the Post-Office, and that they were of incalculable service to the progress of reform and the coming reformer. Mr. Wallace seems to have been exceedingly honest and straightforward, though he was somewhat blunt and outspoken. He succeeded in gaining the attention of the mercantile community, though the Government honoured him with just as much consideration as he was entitled to from his position, and no more.[80] In estimating properly the penny-post system, and the labours of those who inaugurated the reform, the share Mr. Wallace had in it should by no means be lost sight of.

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FOOTNOTES:

[70] These items are exclusive of those relating to colonial money-orders.

[71] The Government can grant a release to any ship fixed for this service. It will be remembered by many readers that after the *Peterhoff* was taken by Admiral Wilkes of the United States' navy, February, 1863, the proprietors of the vessel, who had other ships on the same line (with all of which the Post-Office sent ship-letters), asked the Government for the protection of a mail-officer. On the principle of choosing the least of two evils, and rather than take such a decisive step, which might lead to troubles with the United States' Government, Earl Russell relieved the *Sea Queen* from the obligation to carry the usual mail-bag to Matamoras.

[72] The Duke of Richmond, though opposed to the Reform Bill, was a member of Lord Grey's Cabinet. Indefatigable in the service of the department over which he was placed from 1830 to 1834, he refused at first to accept of any remuneration of the nature of salary. In compliance, it is stated, with the strong representation of the Treasury Lords, as to the objectionable nature of the principle of gratuitous services by public officers, "which must involve in many cases the sacrifice of private fortune to official station," His Grace consented to draw his salary *from that time only*.

[73] The salary of the Secretary to the Post-Office in the last century was 600*l.* a-year, and a commission of 2½ per cent. on the produce of the mail-packets.—(Vide *Pitt's Speeches*, vol. i. p. 53-5, Debate of June 17, 1783.) In 1830 the Secretary's salary was 300*l.* a-year, but what with compensations, fees, and other emoluments, his annual income is stated to have amounted to no less than 4,560*l.*—(*Mirror of Parliament*, 1835). The clerks, according to a Parliamentary return, were paid small salaries, regulated on different scales, but their income consisted principally of emoluments derived from other sources. The *established* allowances, charged on the public revenue, consisted of sums for postage, stationery, payment in lieu of apartments, and for continuing indexes to official books. The remaining emoluments, of course not chargeable against the revenue, arose from *fees on deputations*, commissions, expresses, profits on the publication of the *Shipping* and *Packet Lists*, payments for franking letters on the business of the Land-Tax Redemption, and for the Tax-Office, &c. and from Lloyd's Coffee House for shipping intelligence, &c. There were, besides, other gratuities for special services.

[74] We give the following simply to show the vagaries of clever, scientific men. Speaking of London, the Professor said:—"Perhaps if the steeples of churches, properly selected, were made use of—as, for instance, St. Paul's—and if a similar apparatus were placed at the top of each steeple, and a man to work it during the day, it might be possible to diminish the expense of the twopenny post, and make deliveries every half-hour over the greater part of the metropolis." P. 221.

[75] Evidence of Colonel Maberly before the *Select Committee on Postage*, 1843, p. 170.

[76] Mr. Matthew Devonport Hill. 1862.

[77] *Mirror of Parliament.* Barrow. 1833.

[78] Now and then the House was enlivened and amused by even Post-Office discussions. Thus, in the discussion on the above motion, Mr. Cobbett complained that a letter of his,

which "was not only meant to be read, but to be printed," had never been received by him, nor could he get any satisfaction out of the Post-Office authorities. He advised all honourable members who had complaints to make against the Post-Office, to make them at once to the House, without having any interview with Ministers. For his own part, with regard to letters being opened, he felt sure that the Post-Office read all the letters it cared to read; so he took care to *write accordingly*. He didn't care about his letters being read, provided they were allowed to go on, as he addressed them.

Mr. Secretary Stanley (the present Lord Derby) thought it would be a subject of deep regret that any negligence on the part of the Post-Office had prevented the elaborate lucubrations of the hon. member for Oldham from appearing in the *Register* on the appointed Saturday.

Mr. Cobbett. It never appeared at all.

Mr. Secretary Stanley was grieved. He felt sure, however, that the hon. member spends too much time over the midnight oil not to have kept a copy of his precious essay. He protested against hon. members taking up the time of the House with complaints against a department which managed its work very well.

[79] Some of his motions must have been far from palatable to the powers that were, and we confess to thinking some of them wanting in charity and good taste. For example, September 7, 1835, we find him moving for a return, to supplement another which had been sent in imperfectly drawn up, which should show "what the special services are for which Sir Francis Freeling receives 700*l.* a-year, the number of rooms allotted to him at the General Post-Office, and how often he resides there. Also the number allotted to the Under-Secretary; whether the whole or part, and what parts are furnished at the public expense; also the annual sum for coals and candles, for servants, &c.; also the probable expense of expresses, messengers, and runners, passing between the Post-Office and the Secretary at his private residence," and a number of other items still more trifling.

[80] *The Quarterly Review*, for October, 1839, speaking of his motions for different papers, says, "What *grounds* he had for making them could only be imagined. They were, in fact, the kind of random motions with which a member *fishes for abuses, but is still more anxious to catch notoriety*." The italics are not ours.

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CHAPTER VII.

SIR ROWLAND HILL AND PENNY POSTAGE.

Miss Martineau, in her history of the *Thirty Years' Peace*, narrates a somewhat romantic incident to account for Mr. Hill's original relation to our subject, tracing the fiscal reform with which his name is indissolubly connected to the "neighbourly shilling" well laid out of a "pedestrian traveller in the Lake District." Unluckily for the historian, the incident never happened to Mr. Hill. The repeated motions of Mr. Wallace in the House of Commons are proved beyond dispute to have brought home the subject to the consideration of many thoughtful minds, and amongst those, to one who had scholarly leisure and philosophical ingenuity to bring to its service.

Born in 1795, and for many years a tutor in his father's school near Birmingham, Mr. Rowland Hill was, at this time, the secretary of the Commissioners for conducting the Colonization of South Australia, upon the plan of Mr. Edward Gibbon Wakefield. At this post, according to the testimony of the commissioners themselves, Mr. Hill laboured unweariedly, "evincing," as they said, "considerable powers of organization." Mr. Hill, in one place,[81] gives a clear account of the way he prepared himself for the work he took in hand, when once his attention was arrested by the subject. "The first thing I did was to read very carefully all the reports on post-office subjects. I then put myself in communication with the hon. member for Greenock, who kindly afforded me much assistance. I then applied to the Post-Office for information, with which Lord Lichfield was so good as to supply me. These were the means I took to make myself acquainted with the subject." In January, 1837, Mr. Hill published[82] the results of his investigations, and embodied his scheme in a pamphlet entitled *Post Office Reform: its Importance and Practicability*. This, the first edition, was circulated privately amongst members of the legislature and official men; the second edition, published two months afterwards, being the first given to the world. The pamphlet, of which we will here attempt a *résumé*, immediately created a sensation; especially so in the mercantile world. Mr. Hill may be said to have started with the facts to which we have already adverted[83], namely, that the Post-Office was not progressing like other great interests; that its revenue, within the past twenty years, instead of increasing, had actually diminished, though the increase of population had been six millions, and the increase in trade and commerce had been proportionate. The increase in the ratio of stage-coach travellers was still more clear; but this fact need not be pressed, especially as one smart quarterly reviewer answered, that, of course, the more men travelled, the less need of writing.

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From the data which Mr. Hill was enabled to gather—for accounts of any sort were not kept as accurately at the Post-Office then as now, and there were no accounts of the number of inland letters—he estimated the number of letters passing through the post. He then took the expenses of management and analysed the gross total amount. He proved pretty clearly, and as nearly as necessary, that the *primary distribution*, as he termed the cost of receiving and delivering the letters, and also the cost of transit, took two-thirds of the total cost of the management of the Post-Office. Of this sum, the amount which had to do with the *distance* letters were conveyed, Mr. Hill calculated at 144,000*l.* out of the total postal expenditure of 700,000*l.* Applying to this

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smaller sum the estimated number of letters—deducting franks and taking into account the greater weight of newspapers—he gave the apparent *average* cost of conveying each letter as less than one-tenth of a penny. The conclusion to which he came from this calculation of the average cost of transit was inevitable, and that was, that if the charge must be made proportionate (except, forsooth, it could be shown how the postage of one-tenth or one-thirty-sixth of a penny could be collected) it must clearly be uniform, and for the sake of argument, and not considering the charge as a tax, or as a tax whose end was drawing near, any packet of an equal weight might be sent throughout the length and breadth of the country at precisely the same rate.

The justice and propriety of a uniform rate was further shown, but in a smaller degree, by the fact that the relative cost of transmission of letters under the old system was not always dependent on the distance the mails were carried. Thus, the Edinburgh mail, the longest and most important of all, cost 5*l.* for each journey. Calculating the proportionate weight of bags, letters, and newspapers, Mr. Hill[84] arrived at the absolute cost of carrying a newspaper of an average weight of 1½ oz. at one-sixth of a penny, and that of a letter of an average weight of ¼ oz. at one-thirty-sixth of a penny. These sums being the full cost for the whole distance, Mr. Hill assumed, fairly enough, that the same rating would do for any place on the road. It was admitted on all hands, that the chief labour was expended in making up, opening, and delivering the mails; therefore the fact whether it was carried one mile or a hundred made comparatively little difference in the expenditure of the office. The expenses and trouble being much the same, [Pg 111] perhaps *even less* at Edinburgh than at some intermediate point, why should the charges be so different? But the case could be made still stronger. The mail for Louth, containing as it did comparatively few letters, cost the Post-Office authorities, as the simple expense of transit, one penny-farthing per letter. Thus, an Edinburgh letter, costing the Post-Office an infinitesimal fraction of a farthing, was charged one shilling and three-halfpence to the public, while a letter for Louth, costing the Post-Office fifty times as much, was charged to the public at the rate of tenpence! Nothing was clearer, therefore, that if Mr. Hill's propositions were opposed (and his opponents did not advocate the payment according to the actual cost of transit), that those who were adverse to them must fall into the absurdity of recognising as just an arrangement which charged the highest price for the cheapest business! At first sight it looked extravagant, that persons residing at Penzance or near the Giant's Causeway, at Watford or Wick, should pay equal postage for their letters. The intrinsic *value* of the conveyance of a letter, it must be admitted, is a very different thing from its *cost*, the value being exactly equal to the time, trouble, and expense saved to the correspondents, of which, perhaps, the only *measure* appeared to be the actual distance. Looked at more narrowly, however, in the clear light of Mr. Hill's investigations, it became obvious that it was really "a nearer approximation to perfect justice"[85] to allow distant places to feel the benefits of the measure; passing over the little inequalities to which it might give rise; while all might pay such a sum as would cover the expenses in each and every case.[86]

Mr. Hill succeeded likewise in proving many of the facts adverted to in the preceding chapter. He [Pg 112] showed that the high rates were so excessive (not only varied according to distance, but doubled if there was an enclosure, with *fourfold* postage if the letter exceeded an ounce in weight) as greatly to diminish, where they did not absolutely prevent, correspondence. Not only so, but the high rate created an illicit traffic, involving all classes of the country in the meshes of a systematically clandestine trade. These facts and their results on the public revenue shine out of the pamphlet as clear as noonday.

But this was not all. The expenses of the department, or the *secondary distribution*, might be much reduced by simplifications in the various processes. The existing system resulted in a complicated system of accounts, involving great waste of time as well as offering inducements to fraud. The daily work of exposing letters to a strong light, in order to ascertain their contents, also offered a constant temptation to the violation of the first duty of the officers of the State, in respect to the sanctity of correspondence. If, instead of charging letters according to the number [Pg 113] of sheets or scraps of paper, a weight should be fixed, below which, whatever the contents of a letter, a certain rate be charged, much trouble would be saved to the office, not to speak of any higher reason. Again, he suggested that if anything could be done to expedite the delivery of letters by doing away with the collection of postage from door to door, a great object would be gained; that five or six times the number of letters might be delivered with the existing machinery, and this even in less time than under the old system. The only requisite was, that some plan for the prepayment of letters should be devised, so that the Post-Office might be relieved from the duty of charging, debiting, &c. and the letter-carriers from collecting the postage. The Post-Office authorities had had the question of prepayment, by means of some kind of stamp or stamped covers, under consideration prior to this time. The Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry deliberated on the measure in the early part of 1837 (after Mr. Charles Knight had suggested a penny stamp, or stamped cover, for collecting the now reduced postage on newspapers), considering it very favourably. Hence it arose that that part of the proposals relating to prepayment by stamped labels or covers, formed part of Mr. Hill's scheme, and was considered with it.

Mr. Hill, in his able pamphlet, exhausted the subject. By a variety of arguments, he urged upon the nation a trial of his plans—begged for an unobstructed and cheap circulation of letters, expressing his most deliberate conviction,[87] that the Post-Office, "rendered feeble and inefficient by erroneous financial arrangements," was "capable of performing a distinguished part

in the great work of national education," and of becoming a benefaction and blessing to mankind. He left the following proposals to the judgment of the nation:—(1) A large diminution in the rates of postage, say even to one penny per letter weighing not more than half an ounce. (2) Increased speed in the delivery of letters. (3) More frequent opportunities for the despatch of letters. And (4) Simplification in the operations of the Post-Office, with the object of economy in the management. The fundamental feature in the new scheme was, of course, the proposal that the rate of postage should be uniform, and charged according to weight.

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No wonder that the scheme, of which, in our own order, we have just attempted an outline, roused feelings of delight and approbation from the people at large, throughout the length and breadth of the land. Still less is it a matter of surprise that the Government and the Post-Office authorities, in charge of the revenue, should stand aghast at the prospect of being called upon to sanction what they considered so suicidal a policy. Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster-General at the time, speaking for the Post-Office authorities, as to its practicability, described the proposal in the House of Lords,[88] "of all the wild and visionary schemes which I have ever heard of, it is the most extravagant." On a subsequent occasion, his opinion having been subjected for six months to the mellowing influence of time, he is less confident, but says that, if the plan succeeds (in the anticipated increase of letters), "the walls of the Post-Office would burst—the whole area on which the building stands would not be large enough to receive the clerks and the letters."[89] On the one side, many well-known names[90] were ranked in opposition, who believed that the scheme, among other drawbacks, would not only absorb the existing revenue, but would have to be supported by a ruinous subsidy from the Exchequer. On the other side of the question, however, there were many intelligent writers and great statesmen ready to advocate the sacrifice of revenue altogether, if necessary, rather than not have the reform; while an immense number believed (and Mr. Hill himself shared in this belief) that the diminution would only be temporary, and should be regarded as an *outlay* which, in the course of years, would yield enormous profits. "Suppose even an average yearly loss of a million for ten years," says a celebrated economist of the period; "it is but half what the country has paid for the abolition of slavery, without the possibility of any money return. Treat the deficit as an outlay of capital. Even if the hope of ultimate profit should altogether fail, let us recur to some other tax ... any tax but this, certain that none can operate so fatally on all the other sources of revenue. Letters are the *primordia rerum* of the commercial world. To tax them at all is condemned by those who are best acquainted with the operations of finance." Nor was Mr. Hill to be cried down. He admitted, as we have said, that his plans, if carried out, would result in a diminution of revenue for a few years to come. On the reliable *data* which he had collected, he calculated that, for the first year, this decrease might extend to as much as 300,000*l.*; but that the scheme would pay in the long run, and pay handsomely, he had no manner of doubt whatever. His case was strengthened by all previous experience. The number of letters would increase in the ratio of reduction of postage. In 1827, the Irish postage-rates were reduced, and an immediate increase of revenue to a large extent was the result. The rate for ship-letters was reduced in 1834. In four years the number increased in Liverpool from fifteen to sixty thousand; in Hull from fifteen to fifty thousand. The postage of letters between Edinburgh and the adjacent towns and villages was reduced in 1837 from twopence to a penny. In rather more than a year the number of letters had more than doubled.

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Mr. Hill's proposals were instantly hailed with intense satisfaction, especially by the mercantile and manufacturing classes of the community. Whatever might be said in Parliament, public opinion in the country was decided on the question, that if the success of the new scheme was sufficient to cover the charges of the Post-Office establishment, it ought by all means to be carried out. Scarcely ever was public sympathy so soon and so universally excited in any matter. The progress of the question of post-reform was in this, and some other respects, very remarkable, and shows in a strong light how long a kind of extortion may be borne quietly, and then what may be accomplished by prompt and conjoint action. Before Mr. Hill's pamphlet appeared no complaints reached the Legislature of the high rates of postage. During the year in which it did appear five petitions reached the House of Commons, praying that its author's scheme might at least be considered. In the next year 320, and in the first half of the year 1839 no fewer than 830, petitions were presented in favour of the measure. Within a few, the same number were sent up to the House of Lords. During the agitation, it is calculated that no less than 5,000 petitions reached St. Stephen's, including 400 from town-councils and other public bodies—the Common Council of London, and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, among the number.

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During the month of February, 1838, Mr. Wallace moved for a Select Committee of the Commons to investigate and report upon Mr. Hill's proposals; but the Government resisted the motion.[91] They intimated that the matter was under their consideration, and they intended to deal with it themselves. But the community were dissatisfied. They continued to petition till Ministers were compelled to show a greater interest in the subject, which they did "by proposing little schemes, and alterations, and devices of their own, which only proved that they were courageous in one direction, if not in another."[92] Meanwhile, the "Merchandise Committee"—formed of a number of the most influential and extensive merchants and bankers in London, with Mr. Bates, of the house of Baring & Co. for chairman—was called into existence through the manifested opposition to reasonable reform. Large sums were subscribed by this committee for the purpose of distributing information on the subject by means of pamphlets and papers, and for the general purposes of the agitation. So great and irresistible, in fact, was the pressure applied in this and other ways, that the Government found it impossible any longer to refuse an inquiry. A month or

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two after Mr. Wallace's motion, Mr. Baring, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, proposed a Committee "to inquire into the present rates or modes of charging postage, with a view to such reduction thereof as may be made *without injury to the revenue*; and for this purpose, to examine especially into the mode recommended, of charging and collecting postage, in a pamphlet by Mr. Rowland Hill." It was noticed that most of the members nominated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer were favourable to the Government, all but two—Lord Lowther and Sir Thomas Fremantle—having voted for the Ballot. The Conservatives did not grumble, however, as on this subject the Government was conservative enough. The Committee sat sixty-three days, concluding their deliberations in August, 1838. They examined all the principal officers of the Post-Office and the Stamp Department, and eighty-three independent witnesses of different pursuits and various grades. The Post-Office authorities were specially invited to send any witnesses they might choose; and as the Postmaster-General and the Secretary of the Post-Office objected to the penny rate as likely to be ruinous to the revenue, and to the principle of uniformity as unfair and impossible, we may be certain that the witnesses sent were judiciously chosen. The examination was by no means *ex parte*, but seems to have been carried on with the greatest fairness. Those members of the Committee who were particularly pledged to the protection of the revenue, as well as Lord Lowther—who had a thorough knowledge of the subject from having sat on a previous Commission—appear to have missed no opportunity of sifting the opinions and the statements of each witness. The members of the Committee did their work, altogether, with zeal, great discrimination, and ability. The plan and the favourable witnesses stood the scrutiny with wonderful success; and Mr. Hill himself bore up, under what George Stephenson regarded as the greatest crucial test to which mortal man can be subjected, with tact and firmness, fully proving, in evidence, the soundness of the conclusions on which judgment had to be passed.

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We may say here, as we have not before referred to the circumstance, that it was necessary to make it clear to the Committee, the amount of increase in correspondence necessary to the success of the scheme. In opposition to the views of official men,[93] Mr. Hill held that a fivefold increase in the number of letters would suffice to preserve the existing revenue, and he hazarded a prediction that that increase would soon be reached. As regarded the means of conveyance, he showed that the stage-coaches, &c. already in existence could carry twenty-seven times the number of letters they had ever yet done; and this statement passed without dispute. The evidence was clear and convincing as to the vast amount of contraband letters daily conveyed; and no less certainly was it shown that, if Mr. Hill's schemes were carried out, the temptation to evasion of postage would be at once abolished, inasmuch as there would then be no sufficient inducement to resort to illegal mediums. A Glasgow merchant stated before the Committee, that he knew five manufacturers in that city whose correspondence was transmitted illegally in the following proportions, viz.—(1) three to one; (2) eighteen to one; (3) sixteen to one; (4) eight to one; and (5) fifteen to one. Manchester merchants—among whom was Mr. Cobden—stated that they had no doubt that four-fifths of the letters written in that town did not pass through the Post-Office. No member of the Committee had any idea of the extent to which the illicit conveyance of letters was carried. A carrier in Scotland was examined, and confessed to having carried sixty letters daily, on the average, for a number of years—knew other carriers who conveyed, on an average, five hundred daily. He assured the Committee that the smuggling was alone done to save the postage. "There might be cases when it was more convenient, or done to save time, but the great object was cheapness." The labouring classes, especially, had no other reason. "They avail themselves of every possible opportunity for getting their letters conveyed cheaply or free." In his opinion, the practice could not be put a stop to until the Post-Office authorities followed the example that was set them in putting down illicit distillation in Scotland. "I would reduce the duty, and that would put an end to it, by bringing it down to the expense of conveyance by carriers and others." Mr. John Reid—an extensive bookseller and publisher in Glasgow—sent and received, illicitly, about fifty letters or circulars daily. "I was not caught," he said, "till I had sent twenty thousand letters, &c. otherwise than through the post." He constantly sent his letters by carriers; he also sent and received letters for himself and friends, inclosed in his booksellers' parcels. Any customer might have his letters so sent, by simply asking the favour. It also came out in evidence, that twelve walking-carriers were engaged exclusively in conveying letters between Birmingham and Walsall and the district, a penny being charged for each letter. The most curious modes of procedure, and the oddest expedients[94] for escaping postage, were exhibited during the sitting of the Committee. One, largely patronized by mercantile houses, consisted in having a number of circulars printed on one large sheet, when, on its arrival at a certain town, a mutual friend or agent would cut it up, and either post or deliver the parts. Nay, matters had been brought to such a state, that a leading journal, commenting on the matter of illicit letter-conveyance just previous to the sittings of the Committee, went the length of saying, that, "*fortunately* for trade and commerce, the operation of the Government monopoly is counteracted by the clandestine conveyance of letters."... "The means of evasion are so obvious and frequent, and the power of prevention so ineffectual, that the post has become only the *extraordinary*, instead of the usual, channel for the conveyance of letters." Notwithstanding this testimony, the evidence of the Post-Office officials on this and the other heads of inquiry betrayed fully the usual degree of official jealousy of interference, and quite an average amount of official partiality. Thus, Colonel Maberly argued, that if the postage of letters were reduced to a penny it would not stop smuggling: in which case they might as well have smuggling under the one system as the other. But his zeal on this point overcame his discretion. "For," he continued, "1,000 letters might still be sent as a coach-parcel for seven shillings, whereas the Post-Office charge for them would be four guineas." But the gallant colonel seems altogether to have forgotten that the item of *delivery* is, after all, the chief item in all Post-Office charges. A few

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more examples of the statements of the authorities may here be given. Thus, the Secretary said, relative to an increase of letters, that "the poor were not disposed to write letters" (10,851). He thought that, during the first year, the letters would not double, even if franking were not abolished (2,949). "If the postage be reduced to one penny, I think the revenue would not recover itself for forty or fifty years." Lord Lichfield said that he had ascertained that each letter then cost "within the smallest fraction of twopence-halfpenny" (2,795). With regard to the principle of the uniform rate, Colonel Maberly thought it might be "desirable, but impracticable" (10,939). "Most excellent for foreign postage, but impracticable for inland letters" (3,019). He also said that the public would object to pay *in advance* whatever the rate (10,932-3).

The Committee next had their attention called to still more important facts, viz. that the number of letters conveyed illegally bore no proportion to the number which were not written at all on account of the high rates of postage. On the poor the Post-Office charges pressed grievously, and there seemed no other course open to them than that, if their letters could not be received without the payment of exorbitant rates, they must lie in the hands of the authorities. It is only necessary to compare the income of a labouring man with his pressing wants to see that it was idle to suppose that he would apply his little surplus to the enjoyment of post-letters other than in cases of life and death. The Committee were absolutely flooded with instances in which the Post-Office charges seriously interfered with the wants and reasonable enjoyments of the poor. On the general question involved, nearly all the witnesses, of whatever rank or grade, evidenced that the public, to an enormous extent, were deterred from writing letters and sending communications, which otherwise, under a cheaper tariff, they would write and send. That this part of the case was proved may be concluded from the language of the Committee themselves:—"The multitude of transactions which, owing to the high rates of postage, are prevented from being done, or which, if done, are not announced, is quite astonishing. Bills for moderate amounts are not drawn; small orders for goods are not given or received; remittances of money are not acknowledged; the expediting of goods by sea and land, and the sailing or arrival of ships not advised; printers do not send their proofs; the country attorney delays writing to his London agent, the commercial traveller to his principal, the town-banker to his agent in the country. In all these, and many other cases, regularity and punctuality is neglected in attempts to save the expenses of exorbitant rates of postage." [Pg 122]

On all the other parts of the scheme, and on the scheme itself as a whole, the Committee spoke no less decisively. Generally and briefly, they considered that Mr. Hill's strange and startling facts had been brought out in evidence. They gave their opinion that the rates of postage were so high as materially to interfere with and prejudice trade and commerce; that the trading and commercial classes had sought, and successfully, illicit means of evading the payment of these heavy charges, and that all classes, for the self-same reason, corresponded free of postage when possible; that the *rate* of postage exceeded the *cost* of the business in a manifold proportion; and that, altogether, the existing state of things acted most prejudicially to commerce and to the social habits and moral condition of the people. They conclude, therefore,—

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1. That the only remedy is a reduction of the rates, the more frequent despatch of letters, and additional deliveries.

2. That the extension of railways makes these changes urgently necessary.

3. That a *moderate* reduction in the rates would occasion loss, without diminishing the peculiar evils of the present state of things, or giving rise to much increased correspondence, and,

4. That the principle of a low, uniform rate, is *just in itself*, and when combined with prepayment and collection by stamp, would be exceedingly convenient and highly satisfactory to the public.

So far, their finding, point by point, was in favour of Mr. Hill's scheme. They reported further that, in their *opinion*, the establishment of a penny rate would not, after a temporary depression, result in any ultimate loss to the revenue. As, however, the terms of their appointment precluded them from recommending any plan which involved an immediate loss, they restricted themselves to suggesting an uniform *twopenny* rate.

The Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry,—consisting of Lord Seymour, Lord Duncannon, and Mr. Labouchere,—who were charged with an "inquiry into the management of the Post-Office," had already concluded their sittings, and had decided upon recommending Mr. Hill's plan as far as it concerned the "twopenny post" department; that being the only branch then under consideration. "We propose," say they, and the words are significant, "that the distinction in the rates and districts, which now applies to letters delivered in the twopenny and threepenny post, shall not in any way affect correspondence transmitted under stamped covers; and that any letter not exceeding half an ounce shall be conveyed free within the metropolis, and the district to which the town and country deliveries extend, *if inclosed in an envelope bearing a penny stamp*."

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With these important recommendations in its favour, the scheme was submitted to Parliament. It had met with so much approval, and the subject seemed so important, that the Government took charge of the measure. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had the project of a uniform rate of postage embodied in a Bill, which passed in the session of 1839. This Act, which was affirmed by a majority of 102 members, conferred temporarily the necessary powers on the Lords of the Treasury. Many of the Conservative party opposed the Government proposals. Sir Robert Peel's

chief argument against the change was, that it would necessitate a resort to a direct tax on income. In order, however, to strengthen the hands of the Government, now that the question was narrowed in all minds to the single one of revenue, the majority in the House of Commons pledged themselves to vote for some *substituted* tax, if, upon experiment, any substitute should be needed.—(*Hansard*, vol. xlix.)

No one out of Parliament, at any rate, who read Mr. Hill's pamphlet attentively, but was convinced of the practicability of the measure, and the careful perusal of the evidence collected by the Committee appointed, determined any waverer as to the necessity of its being adopted. Still there existed serious misgivings in the country as to the steps which the Melbourne administration must soon announce. That there were some few objections to Mr. Hill's plan, and some difficulties about it, cannot be doubted; the nation at large had decided for it, however, and some of the principal men in the country, not favourable to the existing ministry, decided for it also. The Duke of Wellington was "disposed to admit that that which was called Mr. R. Hill's plan, was, if it was adopted as it was proposed, of all the plans, that which was most likely to be successful."[95] The Duke of Richmond pressed upon the ministers, that if they gave their sanction to any uniform plan, it should be to Mr. Hill's, "for that alone, and not the twopenny postage, seems to me to give hope of ultimate success."[96]

On the 12th of November, 1839, the Lords of the Treasury issued a minute, under the authority of the Act before referred to, reducing the postage of all inland letters to the uniform rate of *fourpence*. [Pg 125]

The country, generally, was greatly dissatisfied. Mr. Hill's measure was what was required, and the fourpenny rate was in no respect his plan, nor did it even touch the question of the *practicability* of the uniform postage proposed by the reformer. This quarter measure of the Government did not even suffice to exhibit the benefits of a low rate of postage; was consequently a most improper test, and likely to be prejudicial to the interest of the penny post. The increase of letters was in no place more than fifty per cent., whilst the decrease in the Post-Office revenue was at the rate of forty per cent. In London, for instance, the diminution of receipts was at the lowest computation, 450*l.* a day, and the number of letters were only just doubled. The plan did not abolish the franking system. It did not abolish smuggling, inasmuch as a letter might be sent illicitly for a penny. How, therefore, it was argued, can it be expected that in the interior of the country, at any rate, and without Custom House officers, or any other responsible officers, a duty of 300 per cent. can be levied on the carriage of an article so easily transported as a letter? For a few weeks all was dissatisfaction. More than that, business men trembled for the success of the whole scheme, and lest the Government should return to the old *régime*. The Treasury Lords were convinced, however, that they had made a mistake, and they resolved to give the measure a full and fair trial. On the 10th of January, 1840, another minute was issued, ordering the adoption of a uniform penny rate. By adopting Mr. Hill's plan, the Government simply placed itself in the position of a trader, who declared that he intended for a time to be satisfied with a part of his former profits; but hoped eventually to secure himself against loss by increased business, greater attractiveness, and diminished cost of management. In six months, the policy of the Government was acknowledged on all hands to be the correct one, for on the 10th of August the Treasury had its minute confirmed by the Statute 3 & 4 Vict. chap. 96. The *Quarterly Review*,[97] as an exception to the general feeling, stigmatizes the measure "as one of the most inconsiderate jumps in the dark ever made by that very inconsiderate assembly." It is "distinguished by weakness and rashness," &c. But the judgment of posterity is sadly against the reviewer. [Pg 126]

A Treasury appointment was given to Mr. Hill to enable him to work out his plans, or, in the wording of the said appointment, "to assist in carrying into effect the penny postage." He only held his office about two years, for when the Conservative party came into power in 1841, he was politely bowed out of it on the plea that his work was finished; that his nursling had found its legs, and might now be taken into the peculiar care of the Post-Office authorities themselves. A study of the past history of the Post-Office might have enlightened the minds of the members of the Executive Government as to the advisability or otherwise, of leaving entirely the progress of Post-Office improvement in the hands of the authorities. Mr. Hill intreated the new premier, Sir Robert Peel, to let him remain at any pecuniary sacrifice to himself, but his entreaties were unavailing. He must watch his scheme from a distance.[98]

Speaking of the hindrances which Mr. Hill met with in official circles, we are reminded of a pamphlet which appeared shortly after this period, evidently from some Post-Office official, "*On the Administration of the Post-Office*." This precious pamphlet has been long consigned to well-merited oblivion, and we only rescue it for a moment from the limbo of all worthless things, to show the spirit which then actuated some of those in office. It reminds us forcibly of the criticism which Mr. Palmer's scheme called forth from the leading spirits of the Post-Office of his day. The pamphlet, illogical and abusive throughout, laid it down as a principle that "the Post-Office is not *under any obligation* to convey the correspondence of the public." Again, that "the Post-Office is a Government monopoly for the benefit of the public revenue, and exists for the *sole* purpose of profit." Then there are praises for the old, and abuses for the new *régime*. "The celerity, the certainty, the security with which so vast a machine executed such an infinite complexity of details, were truly admirable!" Mr. Hill comes in for a good share of detraction. He is counselled to leave his "pet scheme" to the "practical men" of the Post-Office. In the following flowery language he is recommended "to behold it (his project) as a spectator from the shore, viewing his little bark in safety, navigated by those who are practically best acquainted with the chart, wind, [Pg 127]

and waves."

Mr. Hill's popularity outside the Post-Office contrasted favourably with the estimation in which he was held inside. The whole community had become impressed with the value of his measures and the important services he had rendered. Spurred on to exertions by the treatment he had [Pg 128] received at the hands of an administration, which, to use the fine expression of Lord Halifax in reference to another public benefactor, "refused to supply the oil for a lamp which gave so much light," a public subscription was opened throughout the country, which, joined in by all classes, was quickly represented by a handsome sum. The money, which amounted to over thirteen thousand pounds, and which was only considered an expression of national gratitude, and by no means a full requital for his services, was presented to him at a public banquet got up in London under the auspices of the "Merchandise Committee." In an address which accompanied the testimonial, Mr. Hill's measure of reform was pronounced one "which had opened the blessings of a free correspondence to the teacher of religion, the man of science and literature, the merchant and trader, and the whole British nation—especially the poorest and most defenceless portions of it—a measure which is the greatest boon conferred in modern times on all the social interests of the civilized world." Mr. Hill's bearing on the occasion in question is described as most modest and unassuming. He expressed his gratitude for the national testimonial in few but telling phrases. He delicately alluded to his proscription from office, regretting that he could not watch the progress of his measure narrowly, and pointed out improvements which were still necessary to give complete efficiency to his reform. Mr. Hill gave ample credit to those who had sustained him in his efforts to carry his plans through Parliament, and especially named Messrs. Wallace and Warburton, members of the special Committee of 1838, Mr. Baring the Ex-chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lords Ashburton and Brougham.

We shall have frequent occasion as we advance, to mention Mr. Hill's name in connexion with Post-Office history during the past twenty years; but we may here notice the remaining particulars of Mr. Hill's *personal* history. On the restoration of the Whigs to power in 1846, Mr. Hill was brought back into office, or rather first placed in office at St. Martin's-le-Grand, as [Pg 129] secretary to the Postmaster-General, the present Marquis of Clanricarde. In 1854, on Colonel Maberly's removal to the Audit Office, Mr. Hill attained the deserved honour of Secretary to the Post-Office under the late Lord Canning—the highest fixed appointment in the department, and second only in responsibility to that of Postmaster-General. In 1860 Mr. Hill was further honoured with the approval of his sovereign, and few will question it, when we say it was a worthy exercise of the royal prerogative, when he was called to receive the dignity of Knight Commander of the Bath.

The arduous exertions, extending over a quarter of a century, and the ever-increasing duties of the Secretary of the Post-Office have, within the last few years, begun to tell upon the physical system of Sir Rowland Hill, and have more than once caused him to absent himself from the post which he has made so honourable and responsible. During the autumn of last year he obtained leave of absence from active duty for six months—his place being filled by Mr. Tilley, the senior assistant secretary of the Post-Office—a step which was generally understood to be preparatory to his resignation, should no improvement be manifest in his health. Now (March, 1864) his retirement is announced, and he leaves us and passes "not into obscurity, but into deserved repose." May he be long spared to enjoy the rest and quiet which he has so well earned, and the gratitude and sympathy which must be universally felt for him. His early work, that would have been Herculean, even if he had not been assailed by foes without and foes within, must have caused him immense labour of hand and labour of brain; the carrying out also of many important subsequent measures, which may be said to have followed as necessary corollaries of his great reform, must have occasioned him an amount of bodily and mental toil and excitement of which the "roll of common men" have neither experience nor conception. Not to speak of his services to commerce, Sir Rowland Hill, more than any living individual, has succeeded in drawing close the [Pg 130] domestic ties of the nation, and extending in innumerable ways the best interests of social life. He deserves well of his country, and we are only giving expression to a feeling which is uppermost at this moment in most men's minds, when we add the hope that a debt of gratitude may soon be discharged by some gracious national tribute.[99]

The Executive Government, on its part, has shown a just and highly appreciative estimate of Sir Rowland Hill's remarkable services in the provision which has been made for him on his retirement. By a Treasury minute, dated March 11th, 1864, advantage is taken of the special clause in the Superannuation Act, relating to extraordinary services, to grant him a pension of three times the usual retiring allowance. The language in which this resolution is couched—doubtless from the pen of Mr. Gladstone—is unusually complimentary for this class of official documents. After recounting Sir Rowland Hill's eminent services—the facts of which are based upon a statement just presented by the veteran reformer himself, (see Appendix H)—and stating the amount of his pension if treated on the ordinary superannuation allowance, the Lords of the Treasury say that they consider the present a fitting case for special arrangement. "Under the circumstances, it may justly be averred that my Lords are dealing on the present occasion with the case not merely of a meritorious public servant, but of a benefactor of his race; and that his fitting reward is to be found not in this or that amount of pension, but in the grateful recollection of his country. But my Lords discharge the portion of duty which belongs to them with cordial satisfaction, in awarding to Sir Rowland Hill for life his full salary of 2,000*l.* per annum." Lord Palmerston has further given notice that he will move in the House of Commons, that the pension [Pg 131] be continued to Lady Hill, in the event of her surviving her husband.[100]

One thing only mars the gracefulness of the minute in question. A vague and indefinite attempt is made towards partitioning the merit of the original suggestion of the penny postage scheme between Sir R. Hill and some other nameless projector or projectors. On the contrary, we have not been more definitely led to any conclusion in the range of postal subjects which have claimed our attention, than to the one which gives to Sir Rowland Hill the entire merit of the suggestion, and the chief merit in the carrying out, of penny-post reform. It would, of course, have been impossible to carry out and perfect the system without the cordial assistance and co-operation of the other principal officers of the Post-Office; for the past twenty years that assistance seems to have been faithfully rendered; and Sir Rowland Hill, in retiring, pays a just tribute to those who have laboured to promote the new measures, and into whose able hands they have now fallen.

FOOTNOTES:

[81] *Select Committee of Postage*, 1843, p. 133.

[82] Miss Martineau, quoting from the *Political Dictionary*, vol. ii. p. 563, says that Mr. Hill first offered his scheme to the Government of Lord Melbourne before it was presented to the country. However this may be, Mr. Hill makes no mention of the fact in his frequent appearances before Committees of the House of Commons, &c.

[83] *Post-Office Reform*, p. 2, third edition.

[84] *Post-Office Reform*, p. 14, third edition.

[85] *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich*, edited by Matthew Davenport Hill. London, 1851, p. 317.

[86] *The Westminster Review*, July, 1860, p. 78, in an able but exceedingly *ex parte* article on "The Post-Office Monopoly," doubts whether Mr. Hill's system is a near approximation to perfect justice, being, in its opinion, "by no means the *summum bonum* of letter-rates." "A charge of one penny for the carriage of all letters of a certain *weight* within the United Kingdom, irrespective of distance, is eminently arbitrary."... "No one in London who has written two letters, one to a friend residing in the same town as himself, and another to one in Edinburgh, can have failed, in affixing the stamps to them, to observe the unfairness of charging the same sum for carrying the one 400 yards and the other 400 miles, when the cost of transmission must in the one case be so much more than in the other." These quotations plainly show that Mr. Hill's early arguments have been lost upon the reviewer. If Mr. Hill demonstrated one thing more plainly than another, it was that the absolute cost of the transmission of each letter was so infinitesimally small, that if charged according to that cost, the postage could not be collected. Besides, it is not certain that the one letter would cost the Post-Office more than the other. Moreover, to the sender the value of the conveyance of the local letter was equal to its cost, or he would have forwarded it by other means. No doubt a strong argument might be based on these grounds, as to the justice of a lower rate for letters posted and delivered in the same town. Such a measure might be supported on Mr. Hill's principles; but the apparent anomaly is surely no argument against a State monopoly of letter-carrying.

[87] *Post-Office Reform*, p. 8.

[88] *Mirror of Parliament*, 15th June, 1837.

[89] *Ibid.* 18th December, 1837.

[90] Rev. Sydney Smith, Mr. McCullagh.

[91] Hansard, xxxviii. p. 1099.

[92] Miss Martineau, vol. ii. p. 429.

[93] Lord Lichfield said it would require a twelvefold increase, "and I maintain," said he, "that our calculations are more likely to be right than his."—(*Report*, 2821.)

[94] Mr. Hill related some of these in his pamphlet. Thus, at page 91, we read:—"Some years ago when it was the practice to write the name of a Member of Parliament for the purpose of franking a newspaper, a friend of mine, previous to starting on a tour into Scotland, arranged with his family a plan of informing them of his progress and state of health, without putting them to the expense of postage. It was managed thus: he carried with him a number of old newspapers, one of which he put into the post daily. The postmark, with the date, showed his progress; and the state of his health was evinced by the selection of the name, from a list previously agreed upon, with which the newspaper was franked. 'Sir Francis Burdett,' I recollect, denoted vigorous health." Better known is the anecdote of a postal adventure of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, already adverted to at the commencement of the present chapter. The story is told originally, in Mr. Hill's pamphlet also:—Once, on the poet's visits to the Lake district, he halted at the door of a wayside inn at the moment when the rural postman was delivering a letter to the barmaid of the place. Upon receiving it she turned it over and over in her hand and then asked the postage of it. The postman demanded a shilling. Sighing deeply, however, the girl handed the letter back, saying she was too poor to pay the required sum. The poet at once offered to pay the postage, and in spite of some resistance on the part of the girl, which he deemed quite natural, did so. The messenger had scarcely left the place, when the young barmaid confessed that she had learnt all she was likely to learn from the letter; that she had only been practising a pre-conceived trick: she and her brother having agreed that a few hieroglyphics on the back of the letter should tell her all she wanted to know, whilst the letter would contain no writing. "We are so poor," she added, "that we have invented this manner of corresponding and franking our letters."

[95] Select Committee on Postage, 1843.

[96] *Ibid.*

[97] October, 1859, Art 9. See also Raikes' *Diary*, vol. iii.

[98] "Lord Lowther," so Mr. Hill was told, "was a steady friend to Post reform, and was well acquainted with the department." Without doubt the new Postmaster-General's feelings, however ridiculous, were consulted in this matter. Mr. Hill's anxiety for the general scheme, and for subsequent minor proposals, was quite natural. When refused the Treasury appointment, he asked to be taken into the Post-Office there to see his plans worked out. Lord Lowther, when he comes to speak on the proposal, somewhat indignantly asks the Treasury Lords if "the character and fortunes of the thousands employed in the Post-Office are to be placed at the mercy of an *individual* who confesses that he is 'not very familiar with the details of the methods now practised.'" "It is easy to imagine," continued Lord Lowther, "the damage the community might sustain from *his tampering* with a vast machine interwoven with all the details of Government and necessary to the daily habits and events of this great Empire!" The matter is not one of "detail," but of "principle;" if their Lordships want this or that carried into execution, they have only to say so, and Lord Lowther will see that it is done, "though it may be in opposition to my own opinion."

[99] We find that Birmingham, at which town Sir Rowland Hill spent some of the earlier years of his life, has been the first to move in the matter. At a meeting held March 3, a statue was voted to cost 2,000*l.* to be placed in the new public hall. A petition to the House of Commons was likewise adopted.

[100] This motion has twice been deferred, owing, it is said, to representations made by members of both sides of the House of Commons. A few days ago, an influential deputation from the House met the First Lord of the Treasury at his official residence, the members of which strongly urged, that in place of the deferred pension to Lady Hill, a Parliamentary Grant, sufficient though reasonable, be made to Sir Rowland Hill at once. It is considered certain that, when the House resumes after Easter, Lord Palmerston will propose a grant, most probably, of 30,000*l.*

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CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY RESULTS OF THE PENNY-POSTAGE SCHEME.

There are, of course, two aspects in which to contemplate the measure of penny-post reform. The first relates to its social, moral, and commercial results; the second views it in its financial relationship. When the system had been in operation two years, it was found that the success of the scheme in its first aspect had far surpassed the most sanguine expectations ever formed of it by any of its advocates. As a financial measure, it cannot be said to have succeeded originally. In this latter respect it disappointed even Mr. Hill, who, though he never mentioned the date when the revenue derivable from the Post-Office would be recovered under the new system, was very emphatic in his assurances that the loss during the first year would not exceed 300,000*l.* Calculating upon a fourfold increase of letters, in his pamphlet[101] he estimated the net revenue, after deducting for franks and newspapers, in round numbers at 1,300,000*l.*; a sum only 300,000*l.* less than the revenue of 1837. We do not say that Mr. Hill originally calculated on recovering the absolute *net* revenue by the collection of postage; but any deficiency which might continue after the scheme was fairly tried, he expected to see supplied, eventually, by increased productiveness in other departments of the revenue, which would be benefited by the stimulus given to commerce by improved communication.[102] Before the Parliamentary Committee he was [Pg 133] equally explicit:[103] when asked, if, on a fivefold increase, there would still be a deficiency on the net revenue, he answered in the affirmative, to the extent of, he should think, 300,000*l.* He again, however, stated his conviction that the deficit would be made up by the general improvement of trade and commerce in the country. It is true that events proved that the falling off in the *gross* revenue was considerably in excess of all the calculations which had been made: but even under this head, much may be said; and in considering the different results of penny postage, we expect to be able to point out that the scheme had intrinsic qualities in it, which, under proper treatment, must have made it in all respects a success. Mr. Hill met another Parliamentary Committee in 1842, when his recommendations—in their principal features, at any rate—had been acted upon for nearly two years. In the course of this further investigation—to the circumstances attending which we shall presently allude—much information relative to the carrying out of the measure, its successes, and failures, was elicited.

It was shown beyond all dispute, that the scheme had almost entirely prevented breaches of the law, and that if any illicit correspondence was carried on, it was simply and purely in matters where the question of speed was involved; that the evils, amounting to social prohibitions, so prevalent before the change, had been, for the most part, removed. Commercial transactions, relating even to very small amounts, were now managed through the post. Small orders were constantly transmitted; the business of the Money-order Office having increased almost *twenty-fold*—first, from the reduction of postage in 1840, and then from the reduction of the fees in November of the same year. These orders are generally acknowledged. Printers send their proofs without hesitation;[104] the commercial traveller writes regularly to his principal, and is enabled [Pg 134] for the first time to advise his customers of his approach; private individuals and public institutions distribute widely their circulars and their accounts of proceedings to every part of the land. Better than any account that we might give of the reception of this boon by the country, and the social and commercial advantages which were immediately seen to follow from it, we may

here give some account of the correspondence which flowed in upon Mr. Hill between 1840-1842, and which he read to the select committee appointed to try the merits of his scheme. Ten times the weight of evidence, and far more striking instances of the advantages of the penny-post scheme might *now* be adduced, but it must be remembered that we are here speaking merely of first results, and when the scheme had been but two years in operation. Numbers of tradesmen wrote to say how their business had increased within the two years. One large merchant now sent the whole of his invoices by post; another increased the number of his "prices current" by 10,000 per annum. Messrs. Pickford and Co. the carriers, despatched by post *eight* times the number of letters posted in 1839; whilst the letters, had they been liable to be charged as per single sheet, would have numbered 720,000 in 1842 from this one firm, against 30,000 letters in 1839. In this case we have an exemplification of the correctness of the argument upon which Mr. Hill built his scheme; for the increase of money actually paid for postage was at the rate of 33 per cent. Mr. Charles Knight, the London bookseller, said the penny postage stimulated every branch of his trade, and brought the country booksellers into almost daily communication with the London houses. Mr. Bagster, the publisher of a Polyglot Bible in twenty-four languages, stated to Mr. Hill that the revision which he was just giving to his work as it was passing through the press would, on the old system, have cost him 1,500*l.* in postage alone, and that the Bible could not have been printed but for the penny post. Secretaries of different benevolent and literary societies wrote to say how their machinery had been improved; conductors of educational establishments, how people were everywhere learning to write for the first time in order to enjoy the benefits of a free correspondence, and how night-classes for teaching writing to adults were springing up in all large towns for the same object. Mr. Stokes, the honorary secretary of the Parker Society—composed of the principal Church dignitaries and some intelligent laymen—which has done so much for ecclesiastical literature by reprinting the works of the early English reformers, stated that the Society could never have come into existence but for the penny postage. One of the principal advocates for the repeal of the Corn Laws subsequently gave it as his opinion, that their objects were achieved *two years earlier* than otherwise would have been the case, owing to the introduction of cheap postage. After a lapse of twenty years, many more useful societies might be mentioned of which the same could be said. An interesting letter from the late Professor Henslow, the then Rector of Hitcham in Suffolk, may be given, as it contains a pretty accurate estimate of the social advantages accruing to the masses. The professor had, consequent upon the change at the Post-Office, arranged a scheme of co-operation for advancing among the landed interest of the county the progress of agricultural science. After stating that the mere suggestion of such a thing had involved him in a correspondence which he could not have sustained if it had not been for the penny postage, he goes on to say: "To the importance of the penny postage to those who cultivate science, I can bear most unequivocal testimony, as I am continually receiving and transmitting a variety of specimens by post. Among them, you will laugh to hear that I have received three living carnivorous slugs, which arrived safely in a pill-box! That the penny postage is an important addition to the comforts of the poor labourer, I can also testify. From my residence in a neighbourhood where scarcely any labourers can read, much less write, I am often employed by them as an amanuensis, and have frequently heard them express their satisfaction at the facility they enjoy of now corresponding with distant relatives. The rising generation are learning to write, and a most material addition to the circulation of letters may soon be expected. Of the vast domestic comfort which the penny postage has added to homes like my own, I need say nothing more." Miss Harriet Martineau bore testimony to the social advantages of the measure in the neighbourhood where she resided. A celebrated writer of the period[105] gives it as his opinion, that "the penny-post scheme was a much wiser and more effective measure than the Prussian system of education" just then established. "By the reduction of the postage on letters," adds he, "the use and advantage of education has been brought home to the common man (for it no longer costs him a day's pay to communicate with his family). A state machinery of schoolmasters on the Prussian system would cost far more than the sacrifice of revenue by the reduction of postage. This measure will be the great historical distinction of the reign of Victoria. Every mother in the kingdom who has children earning their bread at a distance lays her head on the pillow at night with a feeling of gratitude for this blessing." Almost all now living, who shared the benefits of the scheme at this early date, could probably relate some anecdote which circumstances had brought to their knowledge as to the operation of penny postage *on the poorer classes especially*. Thus, the then Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, visiting the Shetland Islands in 1842, writes:[106] "The Zetlanders are delighted with cheap postage. The postmaster told me that the increase in the number of letters is astonishing.... Another gentleman who is well acquainted with the people told me, that although the desire of parents to keep their offspring at home is unusually strong in Zetland, yet that cheap postage has had the effect of reconciling families to the temporary absence of their members, and has thus opened to the islanders the labour-market of the mainland." An American writer,[107] in an admirable pamphlet on cheap postage, says: "The people of England expend now as much money as they did under the old system; but the advantage is, they get more service for their money, and it gives a spring to business, trade, science, literature, philanthropy, social affection, and all plans of public utility." Joseph Hume, writing to Mr. Bancroft, then American minister at the court of St. James's, 1848, says: "I am not aware of any reform, amongst the many which I have promoted during the past forty years, that has had, and will have, better results towards the improvement of the country socially, morally, and politically." And Mr. Hill himself, in addressing the Statistical Society in May, 1841,[108] made a statement which was neither an idle nor a vain boast, when he assured them that "the postman has now to make long rounds through humble districts where, heretofore, his knock was rarely heard."

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We have yet the second, or financial, aspect of the measure to consider. In two years a tolerably correct idea might be formed as to the results of the scheme financially; but it would certainly not be fair to attempt any full estimate of such a thorough reform within a more circumscribed period. Not that this was not attempted. Colonel Maberly discovered, at the end of the *first week*, that Mr. Hill's plan had failed, at any rate, as a question of revenue. No doubt the wish was father to the thought. He not only thought so, however, but proceeded to take timely action and shield himself and his congeners against some probable future attack. In his own words, he charged [Pg 138] "the officials to take care that no obstacle was thrown in the way of the scheme, so as to give a colour to the allegation"—which the prophetic colonel was only too sure would be made—"that its failure was owing to the unwillingness of the authorities to carry it fairly into execution."[109]

In the first year of penny postage, notwithstanding all the confident prophecies to the contrary from those who might have been supposed to have had means of judging, the net proceeds of the Post-Office were between four and five hundred thousand pounds, whilst the number of letters actually sent was *tripled*. Against a million and a half yearly revenue of the previous year, there certainly appeared an enormous deficit; but till all other arguments were exhausted, it ought not to have been considered either evidence or proof of the failure of cheap postage. In the first instance, the Post-Office authorities said the scheme would not pay its expenses: a year sufficed to prove their mistake. It was then said that the revenue sacrificed would never be recovered, and accidental circumstances, of which we shall presently speak, favoured for a time this view: the argument, however, was based on erroneous views, as subsequent events have sufficiently shown. Bad as things appeared, there were, nevertheless, many significant signs at the end of two years that the *gross* revenue under the old would soon be reached under the new system, and even prospects that the past *net* revenue might still be recoverable. Both these anticipations have now been entirely realized. With a tenfold—nay, in many cases, a hundredfold—gain to different classes of the community—with the Post-Office supplying more situations by thousands than under the *ancien régime*, the old gross revenue was passed in 1850-1, and the net revenue was reached last year. Moreover, every complaint under this head has long since been silenced. Many considerations went to hinder the early growth of the revenue; and it is to some of these [Pg 139] considerations that we must now turn for a moment.

It is of primary importance that the reader should remember that Mr. Hill, in his pamphlet and elsewhere, expressed a decided opinion that the maintenance of the Post-Office revenue depended upon the carrying out of *all his plans*.[110] In a speech which he delivered at Wolverhampton, September 7th, 1839, he said: "The mere reduction in the rates of postage will, of course, greatly increase the number of letters; but much will still depend on the extent to which the facilities for despatching letters are improved by a careful employment of the many economical and speedy modes of conveyance which now exist, and by a solicitous attention to all the minute ramifications of distribution. If, on the one hand, due attention is paid to the increasing demands of the public for the more frequent and more speedy despatch of letters, and, on the other hand, pains are taken to keep down the cost of management, though some temporary loss of revenue will arise, I see no reason to fear that the loss will be either great or permanent." Mr. Hill's proposals, it will be remembered, were embraced under four principal heads. The first, a uniform and low rate of postage, was fully carried out; but it was the only part of the measure which was realized at this time. The second, increased speed in the delivery of letters; and the third, consisting of provisions for greater facility in the despatch of letters, were not attempted, or, if attempted, only in the slightest degree. With regard to the simplifications of the operations of the Post-Office, which formed the fourth great item, little or nothing was done, though that little was rendered easy of accomplishment by the uniformity of postage-rates. Not only was the scheme not fairly worked, and the improvements only partially carried out, but they were crippled in their operation by officials who, if not hostile, were half-hearted and far from anxious for a successful issue. The natural difficulties in the way of the measure were numerous [Pg 140] enough without the addition of official opposition. Trade was flourishing when the Postage Bill was carried; it was fearfully depressed in the first year of penny postage. It is well, as Miss Martineau points out, that none foreknew the heavy reverse which was at hand, and the long and painful depression that ensued after the passing of the Act, for none might then have had the courage to go into the enterprise.

This circumstance, accounting, as it does, for some of the deficit in the first and second years, also served to test the real principles of the reform.[111] Mr. Hill's plan, though given over to the apathy and *vis inertiæ* of the authorities—to "the unwilling horses of the Post-Office," as Mr. Baring subsequently designated them—really worked well, though at a loss, when everything else was working ill. Moreover, the tendency of cheap communication to improve the general revenue of the country was clearly apparent so early as 1842; and this is a fact which ought not to be lost sight of for a moment. The reduction of postage-rates was to the community a reduction of taxation; the capital released was driven into other and perhaps more legitimate channels. The Exchequer lost revenue from one source, but it gained it in other ways, as a consequence on the outlay at the Post-Office. In 1842, there was an acknowledged loss to the Post-Office revenue of 900,000*l.* In the same year, no serious defalcation appeared in the general accounts of the country, notwithstanding the extent of the depression in trade.

There were special as well as general considerations entering into the question of the acknowledged deficiency in the revenue. It is clear that Mr. Hill—who did not foresee that so much money would be sacrificed, and who was sanguine of recovering it at no distant date—likewise could have had but an indefinite idea of the vast amount of extra machinery which would [Pg 141]

be called into operation by the full development of his plans; the extent of the measures that must follow if the country was to be equally privileged with cheap correspondence; and the concessions that would have to be granted when the wedge was driven in by this, his principal measure. As one only of the causes leading to the extra heavy expenses of the Post-Office department, we may mention the changes in the system of mail-conveyance consequent on the introduction of railways. Dating from 1838, railways had been gradually absorbing all the stage-coach traffic. Mr. Hill, when making his original proposals, calculated that the number of chargeable letters might be increased twenty-four fold without overloading the mails, and without any material addition to the sums paid to contractors. So great and important—we would almost say vital—was the question of *speed* to the Post-Office, that railways were almost immediately brought into requisition, although the cost of the carriage of the mails was, at the outset, doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled! Many striking examples of the great difference in the cost of the two services are furnished in different Post-Office Reports. For instance:[112] In 1844, a coach proprietor in the North of England actually *paid* to the Post-Office Department the sum of 200*l.* annually for what he regarded as the privilege of conveying the mails, twice a-day, between Lancaster and Carlisle. Now the Post-Office *pays* the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway the sum of 18,000*l.* annually for the same service. The items of charges for mail-conveyance by railway at the present time—if they could have been known by any means, or even guessed at, by the enterprising post-reformer of 1837—might have had the effect of deterring him from offering his suggestions when he did. Certain it is, that the proposals would have had small chance of [Pg 142] success, if those who had charge of the fiscal concerns of the country could have known that the sum which would have to be paid by the Post-Office to railway companies alone, in the year 1863, would not fall far short of the whole amount standing for the entire postal expenses of 1839.

In 1842 Mr. Hill left the Treasury, and was thus cut off from all active supervision of his measures. The Post-Office authorities found a friend in Mr. Goulbourn, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was known to sympathise with their views. It had been arranged that Mr. Hill should continue his services for some short time longer in his improvised place at the Treasury Offices. The divergence in the views of the new chiefs and the reformer made his position more and more unpleasant. On his being bowed out of office, Mr. Hill petitioned the House of Commons. The petition—which was presented by Mr. Baring, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer—described briefly the Post-Office measures of 1839; his own appointment to the Treasury; the fact of his appointment being annulled; the benefit of the new measures in spite of their partial execution; the obstructive policy of the Post-Office officials; and thus concludes:—

> "That the opinion adopted by Her Majesty's Government, that the further progress in Post-Office improvements may be left to the Post-Office itself, is contrary to all past experience, and is contradicted by measures recently adopted by that establishment.
>
> "That, notwithstanding the extreme depression of trade which existed when the penny rate was established, and has prevailed ever since; and notwithstanding the very imperfect manner in which your Petitioner's plans have been carried into effect, the want of due economy in the Post-Office, the well-known dislike entertained by many of those persons to whom its execution has been entrusted, and the influence such dislike must necessarily have upon its success, yet the results of the third year of partial trial, as shown by a recent return made to the House of Lords, is a gross revenue of two- [Pg 143] thirds, and a net revenue of one-third, the former amount.
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> "That your Petitioner desires to submit the truth of the foregoing allegations to the severest scrutiny, and therefore humbly prays your honourable House will be pleased to institute an inquiry into the state of the Post-Office, with the view of adopting such measures as may seem best for fully carrying into effect your Petitioner's plans of Post-Office improvement, and thus realizing the undoubted intentions of the Legislature."

The prayer of the petition was granted, and its proceedings are duly chronicled.[113] The object of this committee was "to inquire into the measures which have been adopted for the general introduction of a penny rate of postage, and for facilitating the conveyance of letters; the results of such measures, as far as relates to the revenue and expenditure of the Post-Office and the general convenience of the country; and to report their observations thereon to the House." Before proceeding to give any account of the further measures brought under discussion in connexion with this committee, we must give, in a few sentences, a *résumé* of the principal improvements which had actually been carried out during the interval of the sittings of the two committees.

1. The uniform rate of one penny for a letter not above half an ounce, with weight adopted as the standard for increase of charge.

2. The value of a system of prepayment was established,[114] the necessary facility being afforded by the introduction of postage-stamps. Double postage was levied on letters not [Pg 144] prepaid *in London only*.

3. Day-mails were established on the principal railway-lines running out of London, thus giving some of the principal towns in the provinces one additional delivery, with two mails from the metropolis in one day.

4. An additional delivery was established in London, and two were given to some of the suburbs.

5. Colonial and foreign rates for letters were greatly lowered, the inland rates—viz. the rates paid for those letters passing through this country—being abandoned altogether in some cases, as Mr. Hill had recommended.

6. The privilege of franking, private and official, was abolished, and low charges made for the transmission of parliamentary papers.

7. Arrangements were made for the registration of letters.

8. The Money-order Office was rendered available to a fourfold extent. And—

9. The number of letters increased from 75 millions in 1838-9, to 219 millions in 1842-3.[115]

This was certainly a large instalment of the improvements which the promoters of penny-post reform hoped to see realized; but, at the same time, it was only an instalment. The committee for which Mr. Hill had petitioned must now judge for themselves whether all had been done that might and ought to have been done to enhance the merits of the measure, and make it as profitable to the country as possible. In addition, it was requisite that they should consider several further suggestions which Mr. Hill had, since the introduction of his plan, proposed as likely to improve it, as well as hear him on some of the objections that had been raised to it. Thus, with regard to the latter, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Goulbourn) had stated; just before the committee was appointed, that "the Post-Office did not now pay its expenses." This statement was startling, inasmuch as Colonel Maberly himself had given 500,000*l.* or 600,000*l.* as the [Pg 145] proceeds of the penny postage rates in the advent year of the measure. But Mr. Hill resolved the difficulty. The inconsistency was explained quite simply, that in a return furnished by the Post-Office, the whole of the cost of the packet-service—a little over 600,000*l.*—was charged against the Post-Office revenue. Though the cost of the packets had not been charged against the Post-Office for twenty years previously, this new item was here debited in the accounts to the prejudice of the scheme; and Mr. Goulbourn, who disclaimed any hostility to the new measure, thought himself justified, under the circumstances, in making the statement in question.

Again: It was strongly and frequently urged that correspondence was less secure than under the old system. It was said by the Post-Office officials, that the system of prepayment operated prejudicially against the security of valuable letters. Under the old *régime* it was argued, the postman was charged with a certain number of unpaid letters, and every such letter, so taxed, was a check upon him. "What security," it was now asked, "can there be for the delivery of letters for which the letter-carriers are to bring back no return?" With prepaid letters, it was said, there was great temptation, unbounded opportunity for dishonesty, and no check. To some extent, and so far as letters containing coin or other articles of value were concerned, there were some grounds for these remarks. It is a great question whether, in the case of valuable letters, the dishonest postman would be discouraged from a depredation by the thought that he would have the postage of the letter to account for; but still, freedom from all such considerations, under the new system, would clearly seem to increase the risks which the public would have to run. Previously to the penny postage era, all letters containing, or supposed to contain, coin or jewellery, were registered gratuitously at the Post-Office as a security against their loss. Under the new system, it was considered impracticable to continue the service, and the Post-Office [Pg 146] authorities, with the sanction of the Treasury, dropped it altogether. The Money-order Office was available; the fees had been greatly reduced, and the officials, in warning persons against sending coin in letters, strongly recommended that this Office should be used for the purpose. Still, the number of coin-letters increased, and the number of depredations increased with them, to the great prejudice of the measure. Mr. Hill, whilst in the Treasury, recommended a system of registration of letters, which appears to have been somewhat similar to a plan proposed by the Post-Office authorities themselves in 1838. A system of registration was the result; but the rate of charge of one shilling per letter was enough in itself to render the entire arrangement nugatory. In October, 1841, Lord Lowther proposed to the Treasury that they should let him put down the evil in another way, viz. that they should allow him to use his powers, under the 3 & 4 Vict. c. 96, sec. 39, to establish a *compulsory* registration of letters supposed to contain coin or jewellery, and to make the charge for such compulsory registration a shilling per letter. The Treasury Lords referred the proposal to Mr. Hill. He concurred in the opinion of the Postmaster-General, and thought the principle of compulsory registration quite fair. He pointed out, however, in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, many objections to the plan, and contended that, so long as the registration fee was fixed at the high rate of a shilling, inducements enough were not held out to the public to register their letters *voluntarily*. Mr. Hill, therefore, suggested that the fee should be at once lowered to sixpence, to be reduced still further as soon as practicable. The public, under a lower rate, would have little excuse for continuing a bad practice; but if it was continued, restrictive measures might *then* be tried, as the only remaining method of protecting the public from the consequences of their own imprudence. The sixpenny rate would, he thought, be remunerative; nor would the letters increase to a much greater number than that reached under [Pg 147] the old system when they were registered gratuitously. This subject was still under discussion when the special committee was granted, when, of course, all the proposals relative to the registration of letters were laid before it and investigated. Strong objections were made to Mr. Hill's proposition to lower the rate. It was contended that the number of registered letters would so increase, that other Post-Office work could not be accomplished. The Postmaster-General, for example, contested the principle of registration altogether, admitting, however, that it was useful in reducing the number of ordinary letters containing coin, and the consequent temptations to the officers of the Post-Office. Like many of the additional proposals, this subject was left

undecided; but no one at this date questions the propriety of the recommendations made under this head. The charge for registration has, within the last few years, been twice reduced, with benefit to the revenue, and no hindrance to the general efficiency of the Post-Office. Not only so, but the compulsory registration clause is now in active operation.

We cannot enter far into the minutiæ of the Committee's deliberations. Mr. Hill endeavoured to show that economy in the management of the Post-Office had been neglected. The number of clerks and letter-carriers which had sufficed for the complex system that had been superseded, must more than suffice for the work of the Office under his simplified arrangements: yet no reduction had been made. Economy, he said, had been neglected in the way contracts had been let; in the manner railway companies were remunerated for carrying mails. He computed that the sum of 10,000*l.* a-year had been paid to these companies for space in the trains that had never been occupied. He also endeavoured to show that the salaries of nearly all the postmasters in the country needed revision; that the establishments of each should also be revised. The changes under the new system, taken together with the changes which railways had made, had had the effect of increasing the work of some offices, but greatly decreasing that of many more. He [Pg 148] proposed that there should be a complete revision of work and wages; that postmasters should be paid on fixed salaries; and that all perquisites, with the exception of a poundage on the sale of postage-stamps, should be given up. Late-letter fees had, up to the year 1840, been received by the postmasters themselves. Under the Penny Postage Act, however, these fees went to the revenue, and compensation, at a certain fixed rate, was granted to the postmasters in lieu of them. Mr. Hill stated that the amount of compensation granted was generally too much, and was to be accounted for on the ground that the postmasters had, in all the cases, made their own returns.

Mr. Hill's principal recommendations to this Committee were—

> (1) The plan of a cheap registration of letters. (2) That *all* inland letters should be prepaid (care being taken that postmasters should be supplied with a sufficient stock of postage-stamps), and double postage charged for all unpaid letters. (3) Reduction in the staff of officers till the number of letters increased to five or sixfold; that the London officers should be fully and not only partially employed; and that female employment might be encouraged in the provinces. (4) Simplification in the mode of assorting letters. (5) The adoption of measures to induce the public to facilitate the operations of the Post-Office—by giving complete and legible addresses to letters, by making slits in house-doors, and other means. (6) The establishment of a greater number of rural post-offices, till, eventually, there should be one set up in every village. (7) All restrictions as to the weight of parcels to be removed, and a book-packet rate to be established, with arrangements for conveying prints, maps, &c. &c. That railway stations should have post-offices connected with them, and that letter-sorting should be done on board the packets, were among his miscellaneous suggestions.

With especial reference to the London Office, Mr. Hill recommended (1) the union of the two [Pg 149] corps of general and district letter-carriers; (2) the establishment of district offices; (3) an hourly delivery of letters instead of one every two hours, the first delivery to be finished by nine o'clock.

Nearly the whole of these recommendations were combated by the officers of the Post-Office during their examination—and successfully so—though it is certainly remarkable that, in the face of their opinions, the great majority of the proposals have subsequently been carried out with unquestioned advantage to the service. It would be a weary business to relate the objections made, and the exceptions taken to each recommendation as it came up to be considered. Of course the *non possumus* argument was frequently introduced. Colonel Maberly said it was an impossibility that there should be hourly deliveries in London. A post-office in every village was thought equally absurd. We need only add, that the labours of the Committee led to little practical result. They decided, by a majority of four, not to report any judgment on the matter. Though this result must have been eminently unsatisfactory to Mr. Hill, especially on account of their not having expressed themselves on his grievances, yet, by refusing to exonerate the Post-Office from the charges which he had brought against it, the Committee may be said to have found for the reformer. With regard to Mr. Hill's further suggestions, they refer to the evidence, and, "entertain no doubt that his propositions will receive the fullest consideration" from the Treasury and the Post-Office. So they did eventually, after some weary years of waiting. Fifty years before, Mr. Palmer, writing to Mr. Pitt, said, "I have had every possible opposition from the Office." Mr. Hill might truly have said the same. Thus it is that history repeats itself, and "the thing which hath been, it is that which shall be."

FOOTNOTES:

[101] *Post-Office Reform*, p. 26.

[102] *Results of the New Postal Arrangements*, read before the Statistical Society of London, 1841.

[103] Second Report, p. 365.

[104] The reader of such books as Cowper's *Life and Letters*, and Moore's *Correspondence*, will find that the means of obtaining franks, or carriage for their manuscripts or proofs, gave the poets frequent uneasiness, and lost them much time. So with many needy

literary men, in what Professor de Morgan somewhat absurdly calls the "Prerowlandian days." The Professor himself gives an instance of an author sending up some dry manuscripts to him, under cover to a member of Parliament, expressing a hope, we think, that the representative would feel some interest in the subject.

[105] Laing's *Notes of a Traveller*.

[106] *Fraser's Magazine*, September, 1862.

[107] Mr. Joshua Leavitt.

[108] Page 96.

[109] Select Committee on Postage, 1843, p. 246.

[110] Parliamentary Committee, *Third Report*, p. 64.

[111] "The first result of the scheme amply vindicated the policy of the new system, but it required progressive and striking evidence to exhaust all opposition."—*Ency. Brit.* Eighth Edition.

[112] Postmaster-General's *First Report*.

[113] Select Committee on the Post-Office, 1843.

[114] In the last month of high charges, of two and a half million letters passing through the London Office, nearly two millions were unpaid, and few more than half a million paid. Twelve months afterwards, the proportion of paid to unpaid letters was entirely changed, the latter had run up to the enormous number of five and a half millions; the former had shrunk to about half a million.

[115] Select Committee on Postage, 1843, p. 93.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE POST-OFFICE AND LETTER-OPENING.

It will be fresh in the memory of many readers, that the year 1844 revealed to the public certain usages of the Government, and a branch of post-office business—previously kept carefully in the dark—which went far to destroy the confidence of the nation in the sanctity of its correspondence. In the session of 1844, Mr. Thomas S. Duncombe presented a petition from Mr. W. J. Linton, M. Mazzini, and two other persons residing at 47, Devonshire Street, Queen's Square, complaining that their letters were regularly detained and opened at the Post-Office. The petitioners declared that they "considered such a practice, introducing the spy-system of foreign states, as repugnant to every principle of the British constitution, and subversive of that public confidence which was so essential to a commercial country." The petitioners prayed for an inquiry, and Mr. Duncombe supported their prayer. Sir James Graham, then Home Secretary, got up in the House and stated that, as regarded three of the petitioners, their letters had not been detained; as for the case of M. Mazzini, a warrant had been obtained from the Home-Office to stop and open the correspondence of that person. He had the power by law and he had exercised it. "The authority," said Sir James, "was vested in the responsible Ministers of the Crown, and was intrusted to them for the public safety; and while Parliament placed its confidence in the individual exercising such a power, it was not for the public good to pry or inquire into the [Pg 151] particular causes which called for the exercise thereof."[116] He hoped that the House would confide in his motives, and that they would not call upon him to answer any further inquiries. The speech of the Home Secretary added fuel to the flame. Had Sir James Graham entered more fully into the subject, and gone into the real state of the law, it is probable that the subject might have been allowed to drop. Not only was the slightest explanation of the principle adopted refused by the Home Secretary, but that refusal was given somewhat cavalierly. Public attention was thus roused; the most exaggerated rumours got abroad; it was openly stated by the press that a gigantic system of espionage had been established at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and now no mere general assurances of its unreality could dispel the talk or stop newspaper extravagances. Sir James Graham was abused most unreasonably. There was hardly a public print or public speaker in the kingdom that did not heap insults or expressions of disgust on his name. This state of things could not continue; accordingly, we find Lord Radnor, moving soon after in the House of Lords, for a return of all the warrants which had been issued for the detention of letters during a certain period, animadverting especially upon the alleged practice of general warrants to intercept all letters addressed to a certain person instead of there being issued a separate warrant in the case of each letter.[117] This mode of proceeding, as he truly said, if acted upon, was a flagrant violation of the words of the statute. Lord Campbell expressed the same views. Lord Brougham observed that the first statute conferring this power had been framed by Lord Somers. It had been continued ever since by various Acts, and had been exercised by Sir Robert Walpole, Lord Grenville, and Mr. Fox, as well as under the administrations of Lord Grey and Lord Melbourne. If Lord Campbell's construction of the Act were correct, the sooner they had a new one the better. Lord Denman was for putting an end to the power altogether. The return was [Pg 152] granted, the Duke of Wellington approving the Home Secretary's conduct notwithstanding.

On the 24th of June, 1844, Mr. Duncombe again called the attention of the House of Commons to the subject, by presenting a petition from Mr. Charles Stolzman, a Polish refugee, complaining that his letters had been detained and opened. Mr. Duncombe contended that the Act of 1837 never meant to confer an authority upon a Minister of the Crown to search out the secrets of

exiles resident in this country at the instance of foreign Governments, but was only designed to meet the case of domestic treason. "Mr. Stolzman was a friend of M. Mazzini," said Mr. Duncombe, "and this was why his letters had been tampered with." After describing the way in which letters were opened, he concluded a most powerful speech by again moving for a committee of inquiry. He did not want to know Government secrets; he doubted if they were worth knowing; but he wanted inquiry into the practice of the Department, which he contended was unconstitutional and contrary to law. Sir James Graham, without entering into any further explanation, except saying that the law had not been violated, and that if it had, the honourable member might prove it before a legal tribunal, objected strongly, and in almost a defiant manner, to any committee. Mr. Macaulay, Lord Howick, Mr. Sheil, and Lord John Russell warmly supported the motion for an inquiry. Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, and Mr. Monckton Milnes opposed it, when it was rejected by a majority of forty-four. What party speeches failed in doing, the clamour and popular tumult outside at length accomplished. Popular ridicule settled upon the subject; pencil and pen set to work upon it with a will. Newspapers were unusually, and sometimes unreasonably, free in their comments, and all kinds of stories about the Post-Office went the round of the press. Sir James Graham had to bear the brunt of the whole business; whereas the entire Cabinet, but especially Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, ought equally [Pg 153] to have shared the opprobrium. As it was, the bearing of the Home Secretary in the House of Commons was singularly unwise and unadroit. The subject had now come to be regarded as of too great public importance to be suffered to rest; besides, it was an attractive one for the Opposition side of the House. Mr. Duncombe renewed his motion towards the end of July in the same session. It was in a slightly altered form, inasmuch as he now moved for a select committee "to inquire into a department of Her Majesty's Post-Office commonly called 'the secret or inner office,' the duties and employment of the persons engaged therein, and the authority under which the functions of the said office were discharged." Mr. Duncombe made some startling statements as to the mode and extent of the practice of letter-opening, all of which he declared he could prove if the committee was granted. The Government saw the necessity of giving way, in order that the public mind might be quieted. The Home Secretary now acknowledged, that since he was last questioned on the subject, the matter had assumed a very serious aspect, and he thought it was time that the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, should be told. Though he would have readily endured the obloquy cast upon him, even though it should crush him, rather than injure the public service; and though he had endured much, especially after the votes and speeches of the Opposition leaders—all men conversant with official duties—in favour of Mr. Duncombe's former motions, he now felt himself relieved from his late reserve, and felt bound to confess that he believed it to be impossible to maintain the power confided to him longer without a full inquiry. He would now not only consent to the committee, but would desire that it should make the fullest possible inquiry, and he would promise on his part, not only to state all he knew, but lend all the resources of his Department to attain that object. In accordance with this determination, he proposed that the Committee should be a secret one, invested with the amplest [Pg 154] powers to commence the investigation at once, and should be composed of five usually voting against the Government, viz. Sir C. Lemon, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Strutt, Mr. Orde, and the O'Connor Don; and four who generally support them, viz. Lord Sandon (chairman), Mr. T. Baring, Sir W. Heathcote, and Mr. H. Drummond. "To this committee," said Sir James, "I gladly submit my personal honour and my official conduct, and I make my submission without fear." The committee was appointed after Mr. Wilson Patten's name had been substituted for Mr. Drummond's, on account of the latter being a lawyer; and after an unsuccessful attempt to add Mr. Duncombe's name, which was rejected by 128 to 52. Its object was "to inquire into the state of the law with respect to the detaining of letters in the General Post-Office, and to the mode in which that power had been exercised, and that the Committee should have power to send for persons, papers, and records, and to report the result of their inquiry to the House." A Committee of the House of Lords was appointed at the same time. Sir James Graham's examination lasted four days, when he fulfilled his pledge to make a full and unreserved disclosure of all he knew. Almost all the members of that and former Governments were examined. Lord John Russell confessed to having done the same as Sir James Graham when he held the seals of the Home-Office, though he had not used the power so frequently. He also stated that he supported Mr. Duncombe in his previous motions for inquiry, because he thought it necessary that the public should have the information asked for. Lord Normanby had used the power in Ireland for detecting "low ribbonism, which could not be *ferretted out* by other means." Lord Tankerville testified to the existence of a warrant signed by Mr. Fox in 1782, ordering the detention and opening of all letters addressed to foreign ministers; another, ordering that all the letters addressed to Lord George Gordon should be opened. Witnesses were also brought from the Post-Office. Mr. Duncombe, on being asked for a list of witnesses to prove his allegations, refused to [Pg 155] hand in their names unless he were allowed to be present during the examination. This the Committee had no power to grant, and consequently he declined to proceed. Mr. Duncombe appealed to the House, but the decision of the Committee was confirmed.

No inconsiderable part of the Committee's time was taken up in the production and examination of records, acts, and precedents bearing on the subject. The officers of the State Paper Office and other high Government functionaries produced records and State papers of great importance, from which we learn many interesting particulars of early postal history. At some risk of being charged with anachronism, we have thought it desirable to introduce these details in the order of the *subject* under treatment.

James I. in establishing a foreign post, was more anxious that Government secrets should not be disclosed to foreign countries, "which cannot be prevented if a promiscuous use of transmitting

foreign letters and packets should be suffered," than that the post should be of use to traders and merchants. There was a motive for the jealous monopoly of postal communications; and if the proclamation from which the above is taken (Rymer's Fœdera) is not clear on the subject, the following extract from a letter written by the one of James's secretaries to the other, Lord Conway, is sufficiently explicit: "Your Lordship best knoweth what account we shall be able to give in our place in Parliament of that which passeth by letters in and out of the land, if every man may convey letters as he chooseth." Sir John Coke, the writer of the above, would seem to have got rid of the difficulty in a thorough manner, if we may believe an English letter-writer addressing a friend in Scotland, when he wrote, "I hear the posts are waylaid, and all letters taken from them and brought to Secretary Coke."[118]

During the Commonwealth, of course, letter-opening was to be expected. The very reason which [Pg 156]
Cromwell gave for establishing the posts was, that they would be "the best means of discovering and preventing many wicked designs against the Commonwealth, intelligence whereof cannot well be communicated but by letter of escript." Foreign and home letters shared an equal fate. On one occasion, the Venetian ambassador remonstrated openly that his letters had been delayed and read, and it was not denied. At the Restoration, a distinct clause in the "Post-Office Charter" provided that "no one, except under the immediate warrant of one of our principal Secretaries of State, shall presume to open any letters or pacquets not directed unto themselves."

Under the improved Act of Queen Anne, 1711, it is again stated that "no person or persons shall presume to open, detain, or delay any letter or letters, after the same is or shall be delivered into the General or other Post-Office, and before delivery to the persons to whom they are addressed, except by an express warrant in writing under the hand of one of the principal Secretaries of State for *every such opening*, detaining, or delaying." This Act was continued under all the Georges, and again agreed to in 1837, under 1 Vict. c. 32.

During the last century, the practice of granting warrants was exceedingly common; and they might be had on the most trivial pretences. It was not the practice to record such warrants regularly in any official book,[119] and few are so recorded: we can only guess at their number from the frequent mention made of them in the State trials of the period, and in other incidental ways. In 1723, at Bishop Atterbury's trial, copies of his letters were produced and given in evidence against him. A clerk from the Post-Office certified to the fact that they had passed through the post, and that he had seen them opened, read, and copied. Atterbury, as well he might, asked for the authority for this practice; and, especially, if the Secretary of State had [Pg 157]
directed that his letters should be interfered with? A majority in the House of Lords decided that the question need not be answered. It is pleasant to relate that twenty-nine peers recorded an indignant protest against this decision. One of them proposed to cross-examine the Rev. (!) Edward Willes, "one of His Majesty's Post-Office decipherers," but the majority going to a still greater length, resolved: "That it is the opinion of this House that it is not consistent with the public safety to ask the decipherers any questions which may tend to *discover the art or mystery of deciphering*."[120] Again, at the trial of Horne Tooke for high treason in 1795, a letter written to him by Mr. Joyce, a printer, was intercepted at the Post-Office, and was stated by the prisoner to be the immediate occasion of his apprehension. On his requiring its production, a duly certified copy was brought into Court by the Crown officers and given in evidence.

Twelve years after the trial of Bishop Atterbury, members of both Houses became alarmed for the safety of their correspondence, and succeeded in getting up an agitation on the subject. Several members of the House of Commons complained that their letters had been opened. Revelations were made at this time which remind us strongly of the episode of 1844, both discussions resulting in a parliamentary committee of inquiry. It was stated in the debate of 1735, that the liberty which the Act gave "could serve no purpose but to enable the idle clerks about the office to pry into the private affairs of every merchant and gentleman in the kingdom."[121] It transpired on this occasion that a regular organization existed, at enormous expense, for the examination of home and foreign correspondence. The Secretary of the Post-Office stated that the greater part of 45,000*l.* had been paid, without voucher of any kind, to Robert, Earl of Oxford, for defraying the expenses of this establishment. Among the principal annual expenses were the salaries of the [Pg 158]
chief decipherers[122] (Dr. Willes and his son), 1,000*l.*; the second decipherer, 800*l.*; the third, 500*l.*; four clerks, 1,600*l.*; doorkeeper, 50*l.*; incidental charges, but principally for seals, 100*l.* The result of the inquiry was, that the Committee condemned the practice, and the House declared that it was a breach of privilege on the part of the Government to use the power except in the exact manner described in the statute.

Whether any real improvement took place may best be judged by the following circumstances. Walpole, who doubtless carried his prerogative in those matters beyond any two Secretaries of State we could mention, lent his ear to both public and private applications alike, issuing warrants even to further cases of private tyranny. In the Report of the Secret Committee, p. 12, we find that a warrant is granted, in 1741, for what purpose may be judged by the following: "At the request of A, a warrant is issued to permit A's eldest son to open and inspect any letters which A's youngest son might write to two females, one of which that youngest son had imprudently married." And this inquisitorial spirit beginning with the highest, descended even to the lowest class of officials. A writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xviii. p. 405 (quoting from the *State Trials*, vol. xviii. p. 1369), tells us, in relation to this subject, that so little attention was paid to the requirements of the Act of Queen Anne, or the Committee of the House of Commons just referred to, the very bellmen took to scrutinizing the letters given them for their

bags. One of those functionaries was examined at the trial of Dr. Hensey in 1758, and deposed as follows: "When I have got all my letters together I carry them home and sort them. In sorting [Pg 159] them I observed that the letters I received of Dr. Hensey were generally directed abroad and to foreigners; and I, knowing the Doctor to be a Roman Catholic, advised the examining-clerk at the office to inspect his letters." This witness, in answer to the questions, "How came you to know Dr. Hensey to be a Roman Catholic?" and "What had you to do with his religion?" clinched his evidence thus: "We letter-carriers and postmen have great opportunities to know the characters and dispositions of gentlemen, from their servants, connexions, and correspondents. But, to be plain, if I once learn that a person who lives a genteel life is a Roman Catholic, I immediately look upon him as one who, by education and principle, is an inveterate enemy to my King and country."

At the beginning of the present century an improvement was carried out. It was seen that the indiscriminate issue of the warrants was stimulated and fostered by the fact that no account was kept of them. As a means of placing a necessary check upon the officers, Lord Spencer, then Home Secretary, introduced the custom in 1806, of recording the dates of all warrants granted, and the purposes for which they were issued. Since the year 1822, the whole of the warrants themselves have been preserved at the Home Office. In comparing the number of warrants issued by different Home Secretaries during the present century, we find that Sir James Graham enjoys the unenviable notoriety of having granted the greatest number, though the fact is partly explained by the commotion which the Chartists made in the north of England, 1842-3.

The revelations made in the two Committees with reference to foreign correspondence, especially that of foreign Ministers accredited at the English Court, were very remarkable, and not likely to induce confidence in our postal arrangements on the part of other powers. It was shown that in times of war whole foreign mails had been known to have been detained, and the letters almost individually examined. The Lords' Committee went so far as to say it was clear, [Pg 160] "that it had been for a long period of time and under successive administrations, up to the present time, an established practice that the foreign correspondence of foreign Ministers passing through the General Post-Office should be sent to a department of the Foreign Office, before the forwarding of such correspondence, according to the address." What the feelings of foreign Governments were at this revelation may well be imagined. They would know, of course, that the English Government, hundreds of years ago, had not scrupled to lay violent hands on the letters of their representatives, if by any possibility they could get hold of them. When Wolsey, for example, wanted possession of the letters of the ambassadors of Charles V. he went to work very openly, having ordered "a watche should be made" in and about London, and all persons going *en route* to the Continent to be questioned and searched. "One riding towards Brayneford," says an early record, "when examyned by the watche, answered so closely, that upon suspicion thereof, they searched hym, and found secretly hyd aboute hym a pacquet of letters in French." In the reign of Queen Mary, Gardiner ordered that the messengers of Noailles, the French ambassador, should be taken and searched in much the same manner.[123] Notwithstanding this, they would scarcely be prepared for the information that later Governments, with less to fear, had preferred more secret measures, establishing a system of espionage which was certainly not in accordance with the English character, or likely to subserve the interests of peace in Europe. That the arrangement with regard to foreign mails was unlawful, may be judged by the prompt action which was taken in the matter. "Since June, 1844, the Postmaster-General," so runs the Lords' Report two months later, "having had his attention called to the fact, that there was no sufficient authority for this practice, has discontinued it altogether."

The Commons' Committee reported that the letter-opening warrants might be divided into two [Pg 161] classes—(1) Those issued in furtherance of criminal justice, usually for the purpose of affording some clue to the hiding-place of an offender, or to the mode or place of concealment of property. (2) Those issued for the purpose of discovering the designs of persons known or suspected to be engaged in proceedings dangerous to the State, or deeply involving British interests, from being carried on in the United Kingdom. In the case of both classes of warrants, the mode of proceeding was nearly similar. The first were issued on the application of the law-officers; the principal Secretary of State himself determined when to issue the latter. No record was kept of the grounds on which the second class of warrants were issued. "The letters which have been detained and opened are," according to the Committee,[124] "unless retained by special order, as sometimes happens in criminal cases, closed and re-sealed *without affixing any mark to indicate that they have been so detained and opened*, and are forwarded by post according to their respective superscriptions." They then classed the warrants issued during the present century in the following way:—For thefts, murders, and frauds, 162; for treason and sedition, 77; foreign correspondence, 20; prisoners of war, 13; miscellaneous, 11; and for uncertain purposes, 89. Undoubtedly, with one class of letters, the Government were only performing a duty in applying the law as laid down in 1 Vict. c. 33. The information obtained by the warrants to find the *locale* of Chartist disaffection was described by the Committee as most valuable and useful to the Government. While the whole history of the transaction in question grates unpleasantly on English ears, there can be no doubt that in other cases—such as frauds on the banks and revenue, forgeries, murders, &c.—the power was used impartially to the advantage of individuals and the benefit of the State. Whether, however, the discoveries and the benefits were so many as to counterbalance the odium of countenancing what was so like a public crime, and which [Pg 162] violated public confidence in the Post-Office, or whether the issue of a few warrants annually, in proportion to the 40,000 committals[125] which took place yearly at that time, could by any means be called an efficient instrument of police, are vastly different questions. With regard to the

general question of letter-opening, the issue was altogether vague and uncertain. Though the *practical* end of the inquiry was, no doubt, gained, and warrants may almost be said to have ceased, still the Committees recommended Parliament to decide that the power and prerogative of opening letters, under certain given circumstances, should *not* be abrogated. They argued that, if the *right* of the Secretary of State was denied, it would be equivalent to advertising to every criminal conspirator against the public peace, that he might employ the Post-Office with impunity.[126] It was decided, in consequence of this finding, that the law should remain unaltered.

Mr. Duncombe was not satisfied. In the next session he attempted to revive the subject by calling the attention of the House to what he termed the evasive and unsatisfactory character of the report of the Secret Committee, and moving the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate the whole subject over again; but he met with little success. Sir J. Graham, Sir. R. Peel, Viscount Sandon, Mr. Warburton, Mr. Ward, and Lord John Manners, spoke against his motion, which he then withdrew. Upon this, Lord Howick tried to carry a resolution for the appointment of a Committee to inquire into the case of Mr. Duncombe's letters only. Mr. Disraeli seconded the motion, desiring not to have the Government censured, but to see the practice condemned. Mr. Roebuck believed that the country would not be content until the invidious power intrusted to the Secretary of State respecting letter-opening was absolutely abolished. Lord John Russell spoke against the motion, which was negatived by 240 to 145 members.[127] A [Pg 163] few days later Mr. Duncombe renewed his attack in another form, moving that Colonel Maberly, Secretary to the Post-Office, should attend at the bar and produce certain books connected with his office. The Home Secretary resisted the motion, grounding his objection on the reports of the Committees and the necessities of the public service. Lord John Russell and a great number of the Liberal party concurring in this view, the motion was again rejected by 188 to 113.[128] For some weeks the subject was not again noticed in Parliament, and probably would have dropped; but it was a theme on which the Press could not be induced to be silent. Fresh events occurring in Italy, owing, it was said, to the past action of the English Government at the Post-Office, Mr. Sheil gave notice of a resolution, which he moved on the 1st of April, 1845, expressing regret that Government had opened the letters of M. Mazzini, thus frustrating the political movement in Italy. Few members, however, showed any desire to prolong a desultory debate, and thirty-eight only were found willing to affirm Mr. Sheil's proposition. Mr. Wakley, a day or two afterwards, tried to revive the same discussion, but a motion which he made was negatived by three to one. On the 8th of April, 1845, Mr. Duncombe, while intimating his desire to waive personal questions, and disclaiming all party feeling, moved for leave to bring in a Bill "to secure the inviolability of letters passing through the Post-Office." He was at war with the system, not with the Government. Let the Government approach the subject in a fair and not in a party spirit. All the Ministers, however, and the chiefs of the Liberal party, again stoutly resisted any change in the law; and this long controversy was finally set at rest by an adverse decision of 161 to 78.

The English people, it must be added, all along objected less to the *power* which the Government possessed in the exertion of their discretion, than to the *manner* in which that power was [Pg 164] exercised. Mr. Duncombe's statements during the earlier stages of the discussions, relating to the "secret office"—never denied—could not be forgotten by the public when they intrusted their letters to the custody of the Post-Office. The revelations in question caused a perfect paroxysm of national anger, because it was felt, throughout the length and breadth of the land, that such arrangements were repugnant to every feeling of Englishmen. Had the officers of the Government broken open letters in the same way as, under certain circumstances, the law allows the sheriff's officers to break open houses and writing-desks, there might still have been complainings, but these complainings would neither have been so loud nor yet so justifiable.[129] There was something in the melting apparatus, in the tobacco-pipe, in the forged plaster of paris seals, in the official letter-picker, and in the place where, and manner how, he did his work, utterly disgusting to John Bull, and most unsuitable to the atmosphere of England. The law, it is true, remains unaltered, but it is believed to be virtually a dead letter.

FOOTNOTES:

[116] Hansard, 1844.

[117] *Ibid.*

[118] Lang's *Historical Summary of the Post-Office in Scotland*. Postmaster-General's *Third Report*.

[119] Report of Secret Committee, 1844, p. 9.

[120] *Lords' Journal*, xxii. pp. 183-6.

[121] *Commons' Journal*, vol. xxii. p. 462.

[122] The place was not only lucrative, but in the path of promotion. We find that, for the proper performance of these very unclerical duties, the Rev. Dr. was first rewarded with the Deanery of Lincoln and afterwards with the Bishopric of St. David's.

[123] Froude.

[124] Report of Secret Committee, 1844, pp. 14-17.

[125] Report of the Secret Committee, 1844, pp. 14-17.

[126] *Ibid.* Commons' Committee.

[127] Hansard, 1844-5.

[128] *Ibid.*

[129] Among many expressions of opinion to which the inquiry on the subject gave rise, we find the following characteristic effusion from Thomas Carlyle: "It is a question vital to us that sealed letters in an English post-office be, as we all fancied they were, respected as things sacred; that opening of men's letters, a practice near of kin to picking men's pockets, and to other still viler and far fataler forms of scoundrelism, be not resorted to in England, except in cases of the very last extremity. When some new Gunpowder Plot may be in the wind, some double-dyed high treason, or imminent national wreck not avoidable otherwise, then let us open letters; not till then. To all Austrian Kaisers and such like, in their time of trouble, let us answer, as our fathers from of old have answered—Not by such means is help here for you."

[Pg 165]

CHAPTER X.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

From the year 1844 to the present time the progress of the Post-Office institution has been great and unexampled. Among Mr. Hill's minor proposals were those for the institution of day-mails, the establishment of rural posts, and the extension of free deliveries. The period between the passing of the Penny Postage Act and the year 1850 saw these useful suggestions carried out to an extent which proved highly beneficial to the public. With regard to the day-mails, Mr. Hill proposed that on the *morning* of each day, as well as evenings, mails should leave London after certain country and continental mails had arrived, by which means letters, instead of remaining nearly twenty-four hours in London, might be at once forwarded to their addresses, and two mails per diem be thus given to most English towns. The Earl of Lichfield would seem to have seen the useful and practicable nature of these proposals, for, being Postmaster-General at the time, he did not wait to adopt them till the passing of the Act of 1839. As early as 1838 one or two day-mails were established, running out of London. Before 1850 we find the list included those of Dover, Southampton, Bristol, Birmingham, and Cambridge. These day-mails are now established on every considerable line of railway in the kingdom. London, in 1864, possesses not only day-mails on all the lines running from the metropolis, but one to Ireland, and two by different routes into Scotland. Further, a great number of railways in the United Kingdom have [Pg 166] stipulated to take mails by any passenger-train.

Mr. Hill also contemplated the establishment of rural posts in every village. In 1840, the number of village post-offices was about 3,000. At that time nothing but "guarantee posts"—by means of which parties in the country might obtain additional accommodation on their consenting to bear the whole additional expense—were granted to new localities. Mr. Hill urged upon the Post-Office authorities the abandonment of this plan, and the gradual establishment of ordinary post-offices. He calculated that an annual outlay of 70,000*l.* would suffice to give 600 additional daily posts to neglected districts, and he pledged his word that the outlay would be remunerative. There are now more than 8,000 additional rural post-offices, the erection of which has done all for the public and the Post-Office revenue that Mr. Hill anticipated.

The extension of free deliveries, also strongly urged by Mr. Hill, has progressed fairly from that time to this. Round each provincial town there used to be drawn a cordon, letters, &c. for places beyond which had either to be brought by private messenger, or were charged an extra sum on delivery as a gratuity to the postmaster. From year to year new places have been included in these free deliveries; soon the most remote and inaccessible parts of our country—the nooks and crannies of our land—will enjoy nearly equal privileges with our large towns, more rural messengers being appointed as this work approaches completion.

In 1848, the advantages of a book-post were granted to the country. By the new rate, a single volume might be sent to any part of the United Kingdom at the uniform rate of sixpence per pound. The privileges of this book-post were gradually extended to the colonies. The railway companies, at the time and subsequently, complained loudly that the Post-Office, by establishing the book-post, had entered into an unfair competition with them. This competition was described [Pg 167] as very injurious, on account of the low rates at which books and book-packets were conveyed. It was answered, however—and in this answer the country very generally agreed—that the railway companies had no legal or equitable right to the monopoly of parcel-traffic; and if they had, the exceptions taken in the case of the book-post were only to books and printed matter intimately connected with objects such as the diffusion of knowledge and the promotion of education—matters with which the Post-Office was now most immediately concerned. The facts, however, were, that very few indeed of the packets sent by the book-post were such as had been previously sent by railway. The Post-Office, by offering its vast machinery for the transmission of such articles, especially to remote districts, gave facilities which had never before been offered, and which caused books and documents to pass through the Post-Office which otherwise, had no book-post existed, would not have been sent through any other channel. A Select Committee, which sat in 1854, on the conveyance of mails by railway, took evidence on this point, and in their report stated it as their opinion, that a large proportion of the packets sent would not have been so forwarded but for the facilities offered by the Post-Office in their distribution.

Any loss, however, which the railways might experience in this respect was more than

counterbalanced when the Executive abolished the compulsory impressed stamp on newspapers, this arrangement giving rise to a conveyance of newspaper-parcels by railway-trains to an enormous extent, and proportionately lessening the work and profits of the Post-Office.

The year 1849 is principally remarkable for the agitation which existed with respect to Sunday labour at the General Post-Office. Previous to this year no work was allowed in the London establishment, but now an arrangement was proposed to receive the mails as on other days, officers attending, though not during the period of Divine service, to assort and dispose of the [Pg 168] letters received. Public meetings were held in London and many of the principal towns to protest against any increase of the Post-Office work. Public opinion in the metropolis was pretty unanimous against any change; in the provinces it was more divided. The authorities gave way before the force of opinion, and the London office has remained closed ever since on the first day of the week. In the country different arrangements are made. In Scotland, and in one or two English towns, no letter-delivery takes place from house to house, a short time only being allowed for the public to apply for their letters at the post-office windows. In the majority of English towns the early morning delivery only is made. The day-mails, as a rule, do not run on Sundays. The post-offices in the major part of our English and Scotch villages are entirely closed on Sundays.

Wires having been laid down to St. Martin's-le-Grand from the different railway stations, telegraph messages were first used to expedite post-office business on the 31st of August, 1849. All important matters, such as bag or registered letter irregularities, requiring prompt notice, are made known or explained through the medium of the electric telegraph.

Commissioners were appointed from about this year to secure the services of railways on the most equitable terms, and to arbitrate for that purpose between the Post-Office and the railway companies. The Committee, on the conveyance of mails by railways, suggested this course. On the debate which followed the report of the Committee to which we have before alluded, Sir Robert Peel frankly acknowledged "the enormous error" into which he, and the House generally "had fallen when the railroad bills were under discussion. They ought to have foreseen," said he, "when these bills were before them, that they were in fact establishing a monopoly, a monopoly in respect to which there could be no future condition. They ought to have foreseen that, if the railroads were successful, other modes of internal communication would almost necessarily fall into disuse, and they ought, therefore, to have stipulated—*as it would have been perfectly just* [Pg 169] *and easy for them to have done*—that certain public services should be performed at a reasonable rate." However, as this had not been done, Parliament could only fall back upon its inherent right to say on what terms such services should be provided from time to time; for which purpose they could not do better than employ arbitration, as it was the same course pursued when the companies disputed with the owners of property the value of land compulsorily taken for railway works. Sir James Graham[130] moved a declaratory clause on the occasion, that arbitrators should take into consideration the cost of the construction of the particular lines in awarding the sums for different services. Mr. Labouchere, the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, speaking for the Government, wished the arbitrators to be wholly free, but he gave a pledge on behalf of the Post-Office that no attempt would be made to exclude the cost of construction from the consideration of the arbitrators. With this assurance, the Opposition expressed themselves satisfied.

In 1855, the Postmaster-General, the late Lord Canning, commenced the practice of furnishing the Lords of the Treasury, and through them the public, with annual reports on the Post-Office. These reports, which have been continued up to the present time, show the progress of the Department from year to year, and present to the general reader, as well as to the statistician, a vast mass of interesting information. Compared with the reports of the Committee of Revenue Inquiry or of the Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry, they are lucid and interesting in their nature. Though constructed on the same plan and little varied from year to year, they are much above the ordinary run of official documents. Lord Canning, in recommending the adoption of the plan, gave as one reason among many, that the Post-Office service was constantly expanding and improving, but that information respecting postal matters, especially postal changes, was not [Pg 170] easily accessible. This information, he believed, could be given without any inconvenience, whilst many misapprehensions, and possibly complaints, might be avoided. The public might thus see what the Post-Office was about; learn their duty towards the Department, and find out—what half the people did not then and perhaps do not even yet understand—what were the benefits and privileges to which they were justly entitled at its hands.

The Duke of Argyll succeeded Lord Canning in the management of the Post-Office in 1855, and his years of office are distinguished by many most important improvements and reforms. One important change consisted in the amalgamation of the two corps of London letter-carriers, effected soon after the installation of the Duke of Argyll at the Post-Office. The two classes of "General Post" and "London District" letter-carriers were perhaps best known before 1855, by the former wearing a red, and the latter a blue, uniform. The object of this amalgamation, for which Mr. Hill had been sedulously striving from the period of penny postage, was to avoid the waste of time, trouble, and expense consequent on two different men going over the same ground to distribute two classes of letters which might, without any real difficulty, be delivered together. The greatest objection in the Post-Office itself to completing the change, arose from the different *status* of the two bodies of men, the one class being paid at a much higher rate of wages and with better prospects than the other class. This difficulty was at length surmounted, when the benefits of this minor reform became clearly apparent in earlier and more regular deliveries of letters. Inside the Post-Office the work was made much more easy and simple, and the gross inequality

existing between two bodies of public servants whose duties were almost identical, was done away.[131]

Still more important was the division of London into ten postal districts, carried out during the year 1856. The immense magnitude of the metropolis necessitated this scheme; it having been found impossible to overcome the obstacles to a more speedy transmission of letters within and around London, or properly to manage without some change, the ever increasing amount of Post-Office business. Under the new arrangements, each district was to be treated in many respects as a separate town, district post-offices to be erected in each of them. Thus, instead of all district post-letters being carried from the receiving houses to the chief office at St. Martin's-le-Grand, there to be sorted and re-distributed, the letters must now be sent to the principal office of the district in which they were posted; sorted there; and distributed from that office according to their address. The time and trouble saved by this arrangement is, as was expected, enormous. Under the old system, a letter from Cavendish Square to Grosvenor Square went to the General Post-Office, was sorted, and then sent back to the latter place, travelling a distance of four or five miles: whereas, at present, with hourly deliveries, it is almost immediately sent from one place to the other.[132] An important part of the new scheme was, that London should be considered in the principal provincial post-offices as ten different towns, each with its own centre of operations, and that the letters should be assorted and despatched on this principle. Country letters would be delivered straightway—without any intermediate sorting—to that particular part of London for which they were destined; whilst the sorters there having the necessary local knowledge, would distribute them immediately into the postmen's walks. With respect to the *smaller* provincial towns, it was provided that their London correspondence should be sorted into districts on the railway during the journey to the metropolis. Thus, on the arrival of the different mails at the several railway termini, the letters would not be sent as formerly to the General Post-Office, but direct to each district office, in bags prepared in the course of the journey. It was a long time before this new and important plan was thoroughly carried out in all its details; but now that it is in working order, the result is very marked in the earlier delivery of letters, and in the time and labour saved in the various processes. In fact, all the anticipated benefits have flowed from the adoption of the measure. [Pg 171] [Pg 172]

In the same year a reduction was made in the rates for book-packets. The arrangement made at this time, which exists at present, charges one penny for every four ounces of printed matter; a book weighing one pound being charged fourpence. A condition annexed was, that every such packet should be open at the ends or sides, and if closed against inspection, should be liable to be charged at the unpaid letter rate of postage. This penalty was soon found to be unreasonably heavy and vexatious, and was therefore reduced to an additional charge of sixpence only. At the present time, the conditions under which such packets may be sent through the post are the same, but the fines inflicted for infringements are still further reduced.

In 1857, a new regulation provided that a book-packet might consist of any number of sheets, which might be either printed or written, provided there was nothing in it of the nature of a letter. If anything of the sort should be found in the packet on examination, it was to be taken out and forwarded separately as a letter, and charged twopence as a fine in addition to the postage at the letter rate. The packet might consist of books, manuscripts, maps, prints with rollers, or any literary or artistic matter, if not more than two feet wide, long, or deep.

In the same year, the letter-rate to all the British Colonies (which were not previously under the lower rates) was reduced to the uniform one of sixpence for each half-ounce, payable in advance. The privileges of the English book-post were also extended to the Colonies; the rate at which books &c. might be sent being threepence for every four ounces. Exceptions were made in respect to the following places, viz.—Ascension Island, East Indies, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and the Gold Coast, to which places the rate charged was fourpence for four ounces, the weight being restricted to three pounds. [Pg 173]

Another important improvement was made when, about the same time, the postage on letters conveyed by private ship between this country and all parts of the world, was reduced to a uniform rate of sixpence the half-ounce.

Nor were these reforms the only results of the wise rule of the Duke of Argyll. Through his exertions, a postal convention was concluded with France, resulting not only in a considerable reduction of postage on letters passing between the two countries, but in the lowering of the rate to all European countries, letters for which *went by way of France*. An attempt was made to arrange a postal convention with the United States during the year 1857, but like so many previous ones, it came to nothing.

The Duke of Argyll is also favourably remembered in the metropolitan offices, for having granted —to the major establishment at any rate—the boon of a Saturday half-holiday.

But perhaps his Grace laboured most arduously to bring about a more satisfactory relation between the railway companies and the Post-Office. Since the advent of cheap postage, nothing had so much impeded the progressive development of the Post-Office, as the adverse attitude of the companies who must convey the mails, now that all other modes of conveyance had been virtually superseded by the power of steam. Although the Postmaster-General failed in this instance, he is none the less entitled to the gratitude of the country for his well-meant attempt to repair the mistake which the Executive originally made in not carefully providing for the public service. Few could say that the existing law was, and is, not defective. The gain to the Post-Office

through railways is certainly enormous: besides the advantage of increased speed, they make it possible to get through the sorting and the carrying of the mails at the same time. But here the gain ends; and the cost for the service really done is heavy beyond all proportion. The cost of carrying mails by coaches averaged twopence farthing a mile; the average cost under railways is tenpence a mile, some railways charging nearly five shillings per mile for the service they render. The cost of running a train may be reckoned, in most cases, at fifteen pence per mile; and thus the Post-Office, for the use of a fraction of a train, may be said constantly to be paying at the rate of from sixty to three hundred per cent. in excess of the whole cost of running! The Postmaster-General stated that the terms upon which one railway company would undertake postal service was totally disproportionate to those of a neighbouring company. On the other hand, all the companies were alike dissatisfied, however dissimilar the contracts, or the terms imposed and agreed to.[133] Moreover, it was declared next to impossible to secure regularity and punctuality in the conveyance of mails, and to agree to amicable arbitration for the services which were done, until the Legislature should lay down reasonable laws, binding all the companies alike. A Bill was introduced into the House of Lords regulating the arrangements between the Post-Office and the different companies. Though it was carefully prepared, it was strongly opposed by the railway interest in Parliament. The opposition was all the more unreasonable, inasmuch as many of its clauses sought to remove objections to the existing law which railway companies had frequently complained of. As far as the Post-Office was concerned, it seems to have been the extent of the wish of the authorities that the question of remuneration might be based on the actual cost of running the trains, making due allowance, on the one hand, for the benefits accruing to the companies from their connexion with the mail service, and adding, on the other hand, compensation for any special extra expenses to which the companies might be subjected by the requirements of that service, *together with a full allowance for profit*.[134] The Bill also provided for the more extensive employment of ordinary passenger trains,—not, however, to the supercession of the regular mail-trains—for the *exclusive* employment of certain trains for postal purposes, for penalties, &c. The measure had been brought in late in the session, and was eventually withdrawn. The Bill itself, with its twenty-one clauses, forms part of the Appendix to the Postmaster-General's fourth report; and as the basis of arrangements between the two interests is still unsettled and uncertain, the Duke of Argyll there commends it to the careful attention of the public, as well as to the fair consideration of the railway authorities themselves.

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In 1858, on the accession of Lord Derby to power, Lord Colchester was appointed to the Post-Office without a seat in the Cabinet. Improvements continued during his short administration, both as regards inland, foreign, and colonial postages; but nothing calls for special mention here except an attempt on the part of the Post-Office to render the payment of inland letters compulsory. The plan cannot be said to have had a fair trial. Its benefits and advantages were not clearly apparent, except to those who were acquainted with the machinery of the Post-Office. While, without doubt, the principles upon which it was based were sound, the objections to the arrangement lay on the surface, and were such as could not be overcome except by the exercise of great patience on the part of the public: the measure pressed heavily on certain interests: a great portion of the less thoughtful organs of the public press manifested considerable repugnance to it, and, in consequence, the Postmaster-General was led to recommend to the Treasury the withdrawal of the order after the expiration of a few weeks of partial trial. As pointed out by Mr. Hill at the time, compulsory prepayment of letters was a part of the original plan of penny postage; it was one of the recommendations which he made having for their object the simplification of accounts, and the more speedy delivery of letters. The Secretary of the Post-Office in urging a fair trial of the measure,[135] argued that after the lapse of a few months it would be productive of good even to letter-writers, not to speak of the saving of time, trouble, and expense to the Department. He very truly added that there were no difficulties attributable to the new rule which might not be surmounted by a little care or ingenuity. As it was, the public preferred an immediate termination of the experiment to the possible and problematical advantages that might arise from its continuance; and in this instance the country was indulged by an early return to the old plan.

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In the following year, Lord Colchester was succeeded by the late Earl of Elgin as Postmaster-General, with a seat in Lord Palmerston's Cabinet. When Lord Elgin was sent on the special mission to the East in 1860, the Duke of Argyll held the joint offices of Lord Privy Seal and Postmaster-General until a permanent successor was appointed in the person of Lord Stanley of Alderley, who now (March, 1864) holds the office.

In 1859, the Money-order Office in London, and the money-order system generally, were remodelled. By a process meant to simplify the accounts, and other judicious alterations, a saving of 4,000*l.* a-year was effected, while the public were benefited by some concessions that had been much desired, such as the granting of money-orders up to the amount of 10*l.* instead of 5*l.* The money-order system was likewise extended to the colonies, the first connexion of the kind having been opened with Canada and our European possessions of Gibraltar and Malta. It has subsequently been extended to the principal British colonies, including the whole of Australia.

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Important improvements were also made in the department charged with the transmission of mails. Several accelerations—in one case a most important one—were made in the speed of the principal mail-trains; the number of travelling post-offices was increased; the construction of the whole of them was improved; and the apparatus-machinery, attached to the carriages for the exchange of mail-bags at those stations where the mail-trains do not stop, was called more and more into requisition.

Under the Earl of Elgin, the British Post-Office endeavoured to form conventions with foreign countries, the object in all cases being the increase of postal facilities. In the case of Spain and Portugal, the authorities seem to have been successful, and partially so with the German Postal Union. An attempt to renew negotiations with the United States calls for mention here. The advocates of ocean penny postage (of which so much was heard some years previously—not only a desirable, but a practicable scheme) may thus obtain some idea of the difficulty of coming to any reasonable arrangement between the two countries. We have already stated that a former Postmaster-General urged upon the Government of the United States the necessity of reduction in the rates of postage of letters circulating from one country to the other, but was unsuccessful at the time.[136] In 1859, the Postmaster-General of the United States (Mr. Holt) communicated [Pg 178] to the English Department his concurrence in the principle of a reduction in the postage of British letters from twenty-four to twelve cents, providing that England would give America the lion's share of the proposed postage! The United States' Government would agree to the change provided the new rate be apportioned as follows, viz.:—

United States' Inland Postage	3 cents.
Sea Rate of Postage	7 "
British Inland Postage	2 "

The Earl of Elgin objected to this proposal as not equitable. He argued, with perfect truth and fairness, that each country ought to be remunerated according to the value of the service it rendered, and that, whether the inland service was considered (where the three items of collection, conveyance,[137] and delivery must be taken into account), or the sea service (undoubtedly better worked and regulated with us than in America), this country had a fair claim to a larger share of postage than the United States. As, however, an unrestricted intercourse between the two countries was far more important than a nice adjustment in the revision of the postage, the English Postmaster-General would only press for equality, and proposed the following division:—

British Inland Postage	1*d.*	or	2 cents.
Sea Postage	4*d.*	"	8 "
United States' Inland Postage	1*d.*	"	2 "
	6*d.*		12 cents.

In the event of the American Government not being prepared to agree, Lord Elgin proposed that a disinterested third party should be called in, to whom the whole matter might be amicably [Pg 179] referred. To this communication no answer whatever was returned, and the English Department had to wait until the next report of the United States Post-Office was published, in order to ascertain how the proposals had been received. It was found that Mr. Holt here complained that a reasonable offer that he had made to England had been declined there, "*and for reasons so unsatisfactory*, that for the present no disposition is felt to pursue the matter further." It is sincerely to be regretted that this great improvement, which would have been gladly hailed by thousands on both sides of the Atlantic, should have been so arrested, and especially that the United States' Government should have been deaf to the proposition to send the matter to arbitrament. Unquestionably, the present results, as well as the responsibility of future exertion, lies at the door of the United States; and it is to be hoped that, in justice to the thousands whom the Americans have eagerly invited to populate their country—not to mention other considerations—they will soon renew their efforts to obtain the boon of a sixpenny postage, and be prepared to meet the mother-country on reasonable grounds with equal terms.

The postal service with Ireland being considered deficient, so much so, that frequent mention was made of the subject in the House of Commons, a new and special service was brought into operation on the 1st of October, 1860. Night and day mail-trains have, on and from that date, been run specially from Euston Square Station to Holyhead, and special mail-steamers employed, at enormous expense, to cross the Channel. Letter-sorting is carried on not only in the trains, but on board the packets; nearly all the Post-Office work, including the preparation of the letters for immediate delivery at London and Dublin respectively, being accomplished on the journey between London and Dublin, and *vice versâ*—a journey which is now accomplished in about twelve hours. By means of this new service, a great saving of time is also effected on the arrival [Pg 180] and departure of most of the American and Canadian mails. It cannot but be interesting to the reader who may have followed us as we have endeavoured to trace the progress of post communication in this country, to know how much is really possible under the improved facilities of our own day. A better instance could not be afforded than that occurring at the beginning of the year 1862, when the important news on which depended peace or war was hourly expected from the United States. Before the packet was due, the Inspector-General of Mails took steps to expedite the new Irish mail service, to the greatest possible extent, in its passage from Queenstown to London, and the result is so clearly and accurately given in the *Times* of the 8th of January, 1862, that we cannot do better than quote the account entire:—

"The arrangements for expressing the American mails throughout from Queenstown to London, which we described as being so successfully executed with the mails brought by the *Africa* last week, have been repeated with still more satisfactory results in the case of the mails brought by the *Europa*. These results are so exceptional that we record them in detail. The *Europa* arrived off Queenstown, about five miles from the pier, at 9 P.M. on Monday night. Her mails and the

despatches from Lord Lyons were placed on board the small tender in waiting, and arrived at the Queenstown Pier at 10.5 P.M., at which point they were transferred to an express steamboat for conveyance by river to Cork. Leaving Queenstown Pier at 10.10 P.M., they arrived alongside the quay at Cork at 11.15 P.M. and thirteen minutes afterwards the special train left the Cork station for Dublin, accomplishing the journey to Dublin (166 miles) in four hours and three minutes, *i. e.* at a speed of about 41 miles an hour, including stoppage. The transmission through the streets between the railway termini in Dublin and by special train to Kingstown occupied only thirty-six minutes, and in four minutes more the special mail-boat *Ulster* was on her way to Holyhead. The [Pg 181] distance across the Irish Channel, about sixty-six statute miles, was performed by the *Ulster*, against a contrary tide and heavy sea, in three hours and forty-seven minutes, giving a speed of about seventeen and a half miles an hour. The special train, which had been in waiting for about forty-eight hours, left the Holyhead Station at 8.13 A.M., and it was from this point that the most remarkable part of this rapid express commenced. The run from Holyhead to Stafford, 130½ miles, occupied only 145 minutes, being at the rate of no less than fifty-four miles an hour; and although so high a speed was judiciously not attempted over the more crowded portion of the line from Stafford to London, the whole distance from Holyhead to Euston, 264 miles, was performed by the London and North-Western Company in exactly five hours, or at a speed of about 52⅔ miles an hour, a speed unparalleled over so long a line, crowded with ordinary traffic. The entire distance from Queenstown Pier to Euston Square, about 515 miles, was thus traversed in fifteen hours and three minutes, or at an average speed of about thirty-four and a quarter miles an hour, including all delays necessary for the several transfers of the mails from boat to railway, or *vice versâ*.... By means of the invention for supplying the tender with water from a trough *in transitu*, the engine was enabled to run its first stage of 130½ miles, from Holyhead to Stafford, without stopping."

During the session of 1860-1, an Act was passed through Parliament for the establishment of Post-Office Savings' Banks on a plan proposed by Mr. Sykes, of Huddersfield.

In order to encourage the registration of letters containing coin or valuable articles, the registration fee was reduced, in 1862, from 6*d.* to 4*d.* each letter. At the same time, the plan of compulsory registration of letters was revived, and applied to all letters passing through the *London Office* which contained, or were supposed to contain, coin. Last year the plan was found to have been so successful in its results, that it was extended to *all inland letters*. The public may judge of the benefits and blessings of this proscriptive measure—to the officers of the Post-Office [Pg 182] at any rate—when we state that the convictions for letter-stealing, since the plan was fully adopted, have been reduced more than ninety per cent.

In 1862, the Pneumatic Conveyance Company set up a branch of their operations at the Euston Square Station, London. The Post-Office took advantage of this new mode of conveyance to send the mail-bags to the North-Western District Office from this important railway terminus. The work is, of course, accomplished with marvellous expedition. The machinery for other localities is in course of construction, and may ultimately extend all over the metropolis, to the supercession, as far as the Post-Office is concerned, of the existing mail-vans.

During the month of May, 1863, a Postal Congress—the first of the kind—originated, we believe, by Mr. Rasson of the United States, assembled at the *Bureau des Postes*, in the Rue Jean Jacques, Paris, under the presidency of the French Postmaster-General, M. Vandal. The object of the Congress was "the improvement of postal communication between the principal commercial nations of the world." As we find that the little republic of Ecuador was represented, the postal affairs of *little* kingdoms were also not overlooked. Each civilized nation was asked to send a delegate, and all the most important States responded. Mr. Frederic Hill, brother of Sir Rowland Hill, and Assistant Secretary, was the English representative; the President represented France; M. Metzler, Prussia; Mr. Rasson, the United States; M. Hencke, Hamburg, &c. &c. The prepayment of foreign letters was one of the most difficult subjects discussed. The Congress came to the conclusion that it would be best to leave it optional with the writer of the letter whether the postage should be paid to its destination, or paid on receipt; in the latter case, however, it was thought desirable that a moderate additional postage should be charged. Another important matter was settled in a conclusive manner. It was first decided that the postage of [Pg 183] foreign letters should be regulated by weight: it then became highly necessary, in order to the carrying out of this decision, that the postage should be calculated by a common standard; hence the following resolution, which was agreed to—"The metrical decimal system, being of all systems of weighing that which is best suited to the requirements of the postal service, it is expedient to adopt it for the international postal relations, to the exclusion of every other system." Other subjects of lesser importance, such as the route of foreign letters, the division of postage rates, the transmission of coin in letters (which they agreed to allow), were discussed very fully and, we are assured, very amicably. The Congress seems to have arrived at a good understanding of the principles of postal reciprocity, and good will doubtless be the result. The Postal Congress of last year was a Peace Congress of the most efficient kind, and in every sense of the term.

Within the last ten years the facilities offered to letter-writers by the Post-Office have materially increased. Four thousand additional persons have had to be employed in the service, one half, at least, of whom are engaged on account of the facilities and improvements in question, whilst the remainder may be said to have been required by the gradual increase of work in the establishment. The establishment of mid-day mails, increasing the number of daily deliveries in almost every provincial town; the acceleration of night-mails, allowing more time for posting in

some places, and earlier deliveries in all; the increase in the number of village posts, to the extent of between three and four hundred every year; the gradual extension of free deliveries; the establishment of pillar letter-boxes as receptacles for letters; reductions in the rate of foreign and colonial letters, and also in the registration fee for home letters; the division of London, and to some extent other large towns, like Liverpool, into districts; and above all, the establishment of thousands of new savings' banks on safe principles, in connexion with improved money-order offices; are some of the principal advantages and facilities to which we refer. The past ten years [Pg 184] have been years of great, gradual, and unexampled improvement. Nor is there anything but progress and advancement in prospect. The fact is, that the Post-Office is capable of infinite extension and growth: besides it belongs to the nation, and the people will expect the development of the utmost of its utilities. At the present time the experiment is being tried whether, without impairing its efficiency or the performance of its more proper business, the Post-Office can undertake the distribution of stamps; and it is not impossible, considering that it has at its command an organization which penetrates the entire kingdom, as no other private or public institution does, that the Stamp Department may be transferred to the control of the Postmaster-General.

Further, there is no doubt but that Mr. Gladstone's Bill, if passed through Parliament, "to amend the law relating to Government Annuities," will have a most important effect upon the Post-Office institution.[138] It is true that under the Savings' Bank Act any person may purchase a deferred annuity through the Post-Office, only the clause making it necessary to pay the purchase-money in one sum has a direct deterrent effect upon the measure. The provisions of the new Bill, on the contrary, allow the purchase-money to be paid in even weekly instalments. Equally important is the second part of the Bill, which empowers the Government to assure a person's life for 100*l.* It is proposed to draft all this extra business on to the Post-Office establishment, and no interest, except the insurance company interest, is likely to say nay. Until assurance or other companies can appoint agents, and open out offices in every town and village, the Government is likely to have a monopoly of any business it chooses to undertake.

FOOTNOTES:

[130] *Life of Sir James Graham.* By Mr. T. MacCullagh Torrens, vol. ii.

[131] Postmaster-General's *First Report*, p. 35.

[132] So late as the year 1842, a letter posted at any London receiving-house after *two* in the afternoon was not delivered at Islington until the next morning.—Postmaster-General's *Second Report*.

[133] See Address by the late Mr. Robert Stephenson on his election to the Presidency of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1855, given in the Appendix to the larger edition of Mr. Smiles' *Life of George Stephenson*, and also a reply to it from the Inspector-General of Mails.—Postmaster-General's *Second Report*, pp. 45-55.

[134] Appendix to Postmaster-General's *Second Report*, p. 51.

[135] *Fifth Report*, Appendix, pp. 43-8.

[136] During the progress of one of these negotiations the following memorandum, written by Mr. Bancroft, American Minister, is so characteristic of his people that we are tempted to amuse our readers with its reproduction entire.—Postmaster-General's *First Report*, Appendix, p. 83. "Approved as far as 'the rate for sea.' What follows is superfluous and objectionable. Make your rates (England) to your colonies and possessions, and foreign countries, what you please, high or low, one sea-rate or a dozen, or none at all; one inland rate or a dozen, or none at all. What your people pay we are willing to pay, but not more, and *vice versâ*. Our security is, that we pay what your people pay from the same place for the same benefit, and *vice versâ*."

[137] In America letters are certainly carried much greater distances, at the uniform charge of three cents, than with us for a penny; but it must be borne in mind that there are no official deliveries of letters in the United States.

[138] It is possible that this useful measure may be delayed. However it is, the Post-Office machinery is ready for this incidental application, and it is surely thrifty to make the most of available resources, though they may have been originally provided for very different purposes.

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PART II.

DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE POST-OFFICE.

"It has often struck me that some pains should be taken to make the main features of the Post-Office system intelligible to the people."—*Speech of Mr. Rowland Hill at Liverpool*, 1847.

PREFATORY.

[Pg 186]

It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the importance of the postal regulations of this country. Every section of society, and, to some extent, every individual, participates in the benefits—commercial, social, and moral—bestowed by our cheap Post-Office. It is not our purpose here to urge the value and utility of the Post-Office institution—which most of our readers gratefully admit—but rather to furnish some general information relative to the organization and ordinary working of the Department, sensible that an intelligible account of the principal features in the system will increase the interest already felt in the Post-Office, as a mighty engine spreading the influences of commerce, education, and religion throughout the world. The Postmaster-General for 1854, in starting an annual report of the Post-Office, stated that "many misapprehensions and complaints arise from an imperfect knowledge of matters which might, without any inconvenience, be placed before the public;" and also, "that the publicity thus given will be an advantage to the Department itself, and will have a good effect upon the working of many of its branches."

Endeavouring to exclude all matter that is purely technical, and presenting the reader with no more statistical information than is necessary to a proper understanding of the subject, and only premising that this information—for the correctness of which we are alone responsible—has been carefully collated from a mass of official documents not easily accessible, and others presented to the public from time to time, we will first describe—

CHAPTER I.

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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE POST-OFFICE.

The Post-Office being a branch of the public service, instituted by statute, is, of course, under the control of the Government of the country in every respect. The principal Acts of Parliament which now regulate the Post-Office are those of 1 Vict. c. 32-36, entitled "An Act to repeal the several laws relating to the Post-Office;" "An Act for the management of the Post-Office;" "An Act for consolidating the laws relative to offences against the Post-Office;" one to which we have previously referred, 2 Vict. c. 98, "An Act to provide for the conveyance of mails by railway;" 3 & 4 Vict. c. 96, "An Act for the regulation of the duties of Postage." Besides these more important Acts, there are others of later date relating to the Money-order Office, colonial posts, and, more recently, one relating to the Post-Office Savings' Banks.

According to the latest returns,[139] there are 11,316 post-offices in the United Kingdom, of which 808 are head-offices, and 10,508 sub-offices. To these must be added a great number of road letter-boxes, making a total of 14,776 public receptacles for letters, or more by 10,000 than the total number before penny postage. The total number of letters passing through the Post-Office during the year 1863 was 642,000,000, or, in the proportion of letters to population, no less than 22 to each person in the three kingdoms. As contrasted with the last year of dear [Pg 188] postage, the number of letters show an *eightfold* increase. The distance over which the mails travel with this enormous amount of correspondence, in the United Kingdom alone, is nearly 160,000 miles per day. Of the mails conveyed by railway, a distance of 50,000 miles is accomplished every working-day; 72,000 miles per diem are traversed on foot; and the rest are carried by mail-coaches, mail-carts, and steamboats.

The gross revenue of the Post-Office for the year 1863 was, in round numbers, 3,800,000*l.*, being more by nearly a quarter of a million sterling than the proceeds for the year 1862. Of this enormous total, England contributed upwards of 3,000,000*l.*, the remainder having been raised from Ireland and Scotland. To this sum should be added a further item of 130,000*l.* for the impressed stamp on newspapers sent through the post, the charges for which are collected by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. The actual expenditure of the Department, including the expenses of mail-packets (great part of which appertain to the Admiralty), amounted, in round numbers, to 3,000,000*l.* The amount of all the items belonging exclusively to Post-Office charges is, however, less than two and a quarter millions. The net revenue of the Post-Office for 1863 may, therefore, be stated at 1,790,000*l.*; or, counting the whole of the packet expenses—which mode of reckoning, however, would lead to erroneous notions of the financial success of penny postage—to a clear revenue of 900,000*l.*

At the end of 1862, the staff of officers employed in the British Post-Office numbered 25,380. Of this number 25,285 were engaged in the British Isles, 73 in foreign countries (as agents collecting the British share of foreign postage), and 22 in the colonies.[140] Of the *employés* at home, between 3,000 and 4,000 are attached to the London Office alone, while the remainder, [Pg 189] including more than 11,000 postmasters, belong to the establishments in the various towns and villages of the United Kingdom. The entire staff is under the immediate control of the Postmaster-General, assisted by the General Secretary of the Post-Office in London. The service of the three kingdoms, notwithstanding this direct control, is managed in the respective capitals, at each of which there is a chief office, with a secretarial and other departmental staffs.[141]

The Postmaster-General, the highest controlling authority at the Post-Office representing the Executive, is now always a peer of the realm, a member of the Privy Council, and generally, though not necessarily, a Cabinet Minister. Of course he changes with the Government. As we have seen in the origin of the office, he holds his appointment by patent granted under the Great

Seal. The Postmaster-General has in his gift all the postmasterships in England and Wales where the salary is not less than 120*l.* per annum (all under that sum being in the gift of the Treasury Lords), and to those in Ireland and Scotland where the salary is 100*l.* and upwards. Besides this amount of patronage, now dispensed to officers already in the service, he has the power of nomination to all vacancies in the General Post-Offices of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin.[142]

The following noblemen have occupied the position of Postmaster-General during the last forty [Pg 190] years, or since the joint Postmaster-Generalship was abolished in 1823,[143] viz. Earl of Chichester (1823), Lord Frederick Montague (1826), Duke of Manchester (1827), Duke of Richmond (1830), appointed Postmaster-General of Great Britain and Ireland the year after; [Pg 191] Marquis of Conyngham (July, 1834), Lord Maryborough (December, 1834), Marquis of Conyngham again (May, 1835), Earl of Lichfield (June, 1835), Viscount Lowther (September, 1841), Earl St. Germains (June, 1846), Marquis of Clanricarde (July, 1846). Still more recently, we find the Earl of Hardwicke, Viscount Canning, Duke of Argyll (twice), Lord Colchester, the Earl of Elgin, and Lord Stanley of Alderley.

The Secretary of the Post-Office holds the highest fixed appointment in the establishment, and may be regarded, therefore, as the responsible adviser of the Postmaster-General. The principal secretaries during the century have been Francis Freeling, Esq. (1797), created a baronet in 1828; Lieut.-Colonel William Leader Maberly (1836); Rowland Hill, Esq. (1856), knighted in 1860; and, as at present, John Tilley, Esq. (1864).[144]

The chief office in London is divided into six principal departments, each under the charge of a chief officer. These heads of departments are severally responsible to the Postmaster-General for the efficiency and discipline of their respective branches. Something like the same arrangement, though on a much smaller scale, is preserved in the less-important chief offices of Edinburgh and Dublin. The branches in question consist of—(1) The Secretary's Office; (2) The Solicitor's Office; (3) The Mail Office; (4) The Receiver and Accountant-General's Office; (5) The Money-order Office; and (6) The Circulation Office.

1. *The Secretary's Office* exercises a general *surveillance* over all the other departments of the Post-Office, including, of course, all provincial offices. It is the medium of communication with [Pg 192] the Lords of the Treasury, and also with the public. All important matters originating in other branches, or in country offices, pass through this office to the Postmaster-General, returning through the same channel. In 1763, the secretaries of the Post-Office had one clerk and two supernumerary clerks assigned to them. Now, the three secretaries are assisted in their duties by one chief clerk, one principal clerk for foreign and colonial business, sixteen senior clerks, and thirty-eight clerks in other two classes. There is also a force of nineteen supplementary clerks, five official paper-keepers, and nineteen messengers.[145]

2. *The Solicitor's Office*, as its name implies, deals with the law business of the Post-Office. It gives employment to a solicitor, an assistant-solicitor, and four clerks.

3. *The Mail Office* has to do with all matters connected with the transmission of mails, whether the conveyance be by railroad, water, or stage-coach. Attached to this office are the travelling post-offices of the country, which are under its exclusive management. The Mail Office arranges with the different railway companies for the conveyance of the mails, in the contracts for which are included provision for the employment of post-offices fitted up in railway-carriages; it also looks to the proper performance of each post-office contract embracing mail-conveyance. The staff of the Mail Office comprises an inspector-general of mails, a deputy inspector-general, two principal clerks, and twenty-one clerks in three classes. The connexion between the Mail Office in London and its important adjuncts, the travelling post-offices, is kept up by a staff of five inspectors of mails (three employed in England, one in Scotland, and one in Ireland), a supervisor of mail-bag apparatus, and several subordinate officers. The travelling offices employ a force of [Pg 193] 54 clerks in three classes, and 139 sorters in four classes.

4. *The Receiver and Accountant-General's Office* takes account of the money of each department, remittances being received here from all the other branches and each provincial town in England. General accounts of revenue and expenditure are also kept, this office being charged with the examination of the postage and revenue accounts of each postmaster. All salaries, pensions, and items of current expenditure are also paid through this office. In 1763, the duties of these offices, then distinct, were performed by a receiver, an accountant, and four clerks. Now, the appointments comprise the receiver and accountant-general, a chief examiner, a chief cashier, a principal book-keeper, with forty-seven clerks in three classes, and nine messengers.

5. *The Money-order Office*, occupying a separate building in Aldersgate Street, takes charge of the whole of the money-order business of the country, in addition to doing an enormous amount of work as a money-order office for the metropolis. Of course, everything relating to this particular branch of post-office business, and also some part of the savings' bank accounts, pass through this channel. Each provincial postmaster sends a daily account of his transactions to this office. Attached to the Money-order Office, we find a controller, a chief clerk, an examiner, a book-keeper, 112 clerks in three classes, and 27 messengers.

6. *The Circulation Office* in London manages the ordinary post-office work of the metropolis. In it, or from it, all the letters, newspapers, and book-packets posted at, or arriving in, London, are sorted, despatched, and delivered. Not only so; but in this office nearly all the continental, and most part of the other foreign mails for the whole of the British Islands, are received, sorted, and despatched. Under ordinary circumstances, moreover, British letters for a great number of

places are sent in transit through London, where it is requisite they should be rearranged and forwarded. This daily Herculean labour is performed by the clerks, sorters, and letter-carriers [Pg 194] attached to the department. The ten district-offices in London, engaged with the same kind of work on a small scale, are subordinate to the Circulation Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand. The Registered Letter Branch, employing no less than fifty clerks, and the Returned Letter Branch, with the Office for Blind Letters, are parts of the Circulation Department. The *major* branch of the Circulation Office comprises the controller, a vice-controller, 15 deputy-controllers, and 251 clerks in three classes. The *minor* establishment, as it is called, employs no fewer than 2,398 persons. In this force are included 42 inspectors of letter-carriers in three classes; the rest, being composed of sorters, stampers, letter-carriers, and messengers.

To these six principal departments may now be added that for the management of the new *Post-Office Savings' Banks*. Like the Money-order Office, it occupies a separate building, in St. Paul's Churchyard. The Savings' Bank Department keeps a personal account with every depositor. It acknowledges the receipt of every single deposit, and upon the requisite notice being furnished to the office, it sends out warrants authorizing postmasters to pay withdrawals. Each year the savings' bank-book of each depositor is sent here for examination, and at the same time the interest accruing is calculated and allowed. The correspondence with postmasters and the public on any subject connected with the banks in question is managed entirely by this department. The already-existing machinery of the Post-Office has been freely called into operation, and the business of the new banks has increased the work of almost all the other branches, especially those of the Receiver and Accountant-General's and the Money-order Offices. Through the former all the investments are received, and all remittances to postmasters for the repayment of deposits are made; while the surplus revenue goes from that office direct to that of the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt. Again, and as another instance of our meaning, the Money- [Pg 195] order Office is required to undertake the examination of the general savings' bank account of each provincial postmaster. The staff of the Savings' Bank Office in London is not yet complete, nor will it be until the complete effect of the new on the old savings' bank system be seen.[146] At present, it comprises a controller, an assistant-controller, a principal clerk, ten first-class clerks (four of upper and six of lower section), fifteen second-class clerks, with a number of third-class clerks, and six messengers.

The branches of minor importance and the miscellaneous officers of the London Establishment, consist of a *Medical Department*, comprising one medical officer, one assistant medical officer, and one messenger. There are, besides, distinct medical officers attached to each of the London districts. The amount required for this service for 1863-4, including medicine (given gratuitously to all officers who are not in receipt of 150*l.* salary), is 1,715*l. A House-keeper's Department*, including a housekeeper and sixteen female servants, requiring a yearly payment of 763*l.* Six engineers, ten constables, and six firemen are also constantly employed and paid by the Post-Office. When we add to this gigantic organization no less than 516 letter-receivers in London, who receive from 4*l.* to 90*l.* a-year for partial service, the reader will have a tolerably correct idea of the establishment required to compass the amount of London postal business in the twenty-fourth year of penny postage.[147]

The Surveyor's Department is the connecting medium between the metropolitan offices and the [Pg 196] post-offices in provincial towns. The postmasters of the latter are under the immediate supervision of the surveyor of the district in which the towns are situate, and it is to this superior officer that they are primarily responsible for the efficient working and discipline of their respective staff of officers. Among the many responsible duties of the surveyors, may be mentioned[148] those of visiting periodically each office in their district, to remedy, where they can, all defects in the working of the postal system; to remove, when possible, all just grounds of complaint on the part of the public; "to give to the correspondence of their district increased celerity, regularity, and security" when opportunity offers, and to arrange for contracts with these objects. The Act of Queen Anne provided for the appointment of one surveyor to the Post-Office, whose duties it should be to make proper surveys of post-roads. Little more than a hundred years ago, one of these functionaries was sufficient to compass the duty of surveyor in England. There are now thirteen surveyors in the United Kingdom,[149] nine of whom are located in England, two in Ireland, and two in Scotland. These principal officers are assisted in their duties by thirty-two "surveyors' clerks," arranged in two classes, and thirteen stationary clerks. To this staff must also be added thirty-three "clerks in charge," in two classes, who are under the direction of the surveyors, and whose principal duty consists in supplying temporarily the position of postmaster, in case of vacancies occurring through deaths, removals, &c.

There are, in all, 542 head provincial establishments in England and Wales, 141 in Ireland, and 115 in Scotland. They vary exceedingly, no two being exactly alike, but are settled in each town pretty much in proportion to the demands of the place, its size, trade, &c. Sometimes, however, the *position* of a town—the centre of a district, for instance—gives it more importance in an official sense than it would otherwise acquire from other and ordinary circumstances. The [Pg 197] number of sub-offices attached to each town also varies greatly, according to the position of the head-office.[150] Next to the three chief offices, the largest establishments are those of Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Bristol. Among the most important offices of the second class, we may enumerate Aberdeen, Bath, Belfast, Cork, Exeter, Leeds, Hull, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Norwich, Sheffield, Southampton, and York.[151] With respect to the rest, classification would be difficult; the postmasters receiving salaries ranging from 20*l.* to 400*l.* per annum, and varying

from those where the whole of the duty of the office is performed by the postmaster himself, to others where he is assisted by a large staff of clerks and other auxiliaries.[152]

Each head-postmaster is directly responsible for the full efficiency and proper management of his office. Under the approval of the district surveyor, the sanction of the Postmaster-General, and the favourable report of the Civil Service Commissioners, the postmaster is allowed to appoint nearly the whole of his own officers, he being responsible to the authorities for their proper discipline and good conduct. Formerly, and up to as late as eight years ago, each postmaster rendered an account of his transactions to the chief office quarterly. He now furnishes weekly general accounts, and daily accounts of money-order business, besides keeping his book open to the inspection of the superior officers of the Post-Office.[153] [Pg 198]

FOOTNOTES:

[139] Postmaster-General's *Reports*, 1863, 1864, and *Revenue Estimates* for 1864-5, from which the whole of our statistics are derived.

[140] The colonial post-offices proper are not under the rule of the English Postmaster-General. All appointments to these offices are made by the Colonial Secretary, if the salary is over 200*l.*; if under that sum, by the Governors of the different colonies.

[141] An attempt was made at further centralization a few years ago, when it was proposed to reduce the chief offices of Edinburgh and Dublin to the position of offices in other large towns, a measure which had the effect of rousing the people of the sister-countries to arms. The Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry who sat in 1855 reported against the proposal, considering the present system to possess advantages to the public over those accruing from the suggested change.

[142] For information relative to the necessary qualifications, examinations, &c. of candidates for appointment in the metropolitan or provincial offices, see Appendix (C).

[143] The following list of Postmasters-General before this period, taken from a return made to the House of Commons, March 25, 1844, may not be uninteresting to some of our readers. After Sir Brian Tuke, the first "Master of the Postes," we find his successors to have been Sir William Paget, one of Henry VIII.'s Chief Secretaries of State, and John Mason, Esq. "Secretary for the French Tongue." "The fees or wages" of each of these functionaries are given at 66*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* a-year. The reader will be familiar with the Postmasters-General under Elizabeth, James I., Charles I. and the Commonwealth. Coming to the reign of Charles II. we find Philip Froude, Esq. acting for the Duke of York from 1678 to 1688.

WILLIAM AND MARY.	
Sir Robert Cotton; Thomas Frankland, Esq.	1690-1708
QUEEN ANNE.	
Sir Thomas Frankland; Sir John Evelyn	1708-1715
GEORGE I.	
Lord Cornwallis; James Craggs, Esq.	1715-1720
Edward Carteret, Esq.; Galfridus Walpole	1720-1733
GEORGE II.	
Edward Carteret, Esq.; Lord Thomas Lovel	1733-1739
Sir John Eyles; Lord Lovel	1739-1744
Lord Lovel alone (now Earl of Leicester)	1744-1759
Earl of Besborough	1759
GEORGE III.	
Earl of Egmont; Hon. R. Hampden	1762
Lord Hyde; Hon. R. Hampden	1763
Earl of Besborough; Lord Grantham	1765
Earl of Sandwich; Lord de Spencer	1768
Viscount Barrington; Hon. Henry Carteret	1782
Earl of Tankerville; Hon. H. Carteret	1784
Lord Carteret; Lord Walsingham	1787
Lord Walsingham; Earl of Chesterfield	1790
Earl of Chesterfield; Earl of Leicester	1794
Earl of Leicester; Lord Auckland	1798
Lord Auckland; Lord Charles Spencer	1801
Lord Spencer; Duke of Montrose	1804
Earl of Buckinghamshire; Earl of Carysfort	1806
Earl of Chichester alone	1814
Earl of Chichester; Marquis of Salisbury	1816

When the Earl of Salisbury died in 1823, a successor was not appointed, the joint office being abolished, principally through the exertions of the late Marquis of Normanby.

[144] See Appendix (A).

[145] For further information respecting this and all the other metropolitan offices, see Appendix (D). Extracts from the Revenue Estimates of 1864-5.

[146] The closing of the Birmingham old Savings' Bank, for example, must have greatly increased the work of the central office, and this will follow as a consequence if in other large towns the example of Birmingham be followed.

[147] Large as this staff undoubtedly is, it would have been larger but for timely changes in the system of keeping accounts. In 1855 the Civil Service Commission suggested various improvements in the organization, which resulted in a decrease of officers attached to some of the branches.

[148] Postmaster General's *Second Report*.

[149] See Appendix (A).

[150] *Head-office* is the official term given to the independent post-towns, and such as are only subordinate to one of the three metropolitan offices. *Sub-offices* are, of course, under the head-offices. *Receiving-offices*, at which letters are received, but not delivered, are also under the authority of the head-office of the neighbourhood. Those post-offices at which money-orders are issued and paid are designated *Money-order Offices*, and include all the head-offices and a large number of sub-offices, and a few receiving-offices. *Packet-Offices* are those at which the regular mail-packets (ship-letters may be received or despatched. at any port) are received and from which they are despatched. London and Southampton are packet-offices for the Continental Mails, the East and West Indies, and South America. Liverpool, and Queenstown take the United States and Canada. The mail-packets for the Cape of Good Hope and the West Coast of Africa sail to and from Devonport.

[151] For further information respecting these offices, see Appendix (D), *Revenue Estimates*; also, for a statement of the amount of postage collected in our largest towns, see Appendix (E).

[152] The staff of the largest provincial offices usually consists of clerks, sorters, stampers, messengers, letter-carriers, and rural post-messengers. The *clerks* are now principally engaged on clerical duties, attending to the public on money-order business, &c. or in connexion with registered letters or unpaid-letter accounts. In offices where the staff is smaller, the clerks also engage in sorting and despatching letters. In many small country towns females are employed as clerks. The *sorters* are principally engaged in sorting duties. *Stampers* and *messengers* do duties such as their designations denote. *Letter-carriers*—the familiar "postmen" of every household—are almost exclusively engaged in delivering letters, &c. from door to door. *Auxiliary letter-carriers* are those only partially so employed, principally on the largest, or early morning delivery. *Rural post-messengers* is the official name for "country postmen," who make daily journeys among the villages and hamlets surrounding each town, delivering and taking up letters on their way.

[153] For fuller information on this head, see Appendix, to the Postmaster-General's *First Report*, pp. 71-4. The following forms part of a later Document (*Ninth Report*, 1862-3), and is interesting enough to be quoted entire: "Owing to the successful measures which the Department has adopted by means of bonds, frequent supervision, and care in the selection of persons admitted into the service, and afterwards promoted therein, very few losses have occurred, of late years at least, through defalcation. More than twenty years ago, however, a postmaster who owed the office 2,000*l.* but who had given security for only a part of that sum, absconded, leaving an unpaid debt of upwards of 1,000*l.* The recovery of the debt had long been considered hopeless, but a short time ago a letter was unexpectedly received from the postmaster's son enclosing a remittance in payment of part of his father's debt, and expressing a hope that after a time he should be able to pay the remainder—a hope which was soon realized, every farthing of the debt having now been discharged, in a manner most creditable to the gentleman concerned."

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CHAPTER II.

ON THE CIRCULATION OF LETTERS.

In order to give the reader a proper idea of the channel through which ordinary correspondence flows—the circulation of letters in the Post-Office system—it will be necessary to devote a long chapter to the subject. We therefore propose to post an imaginary letter in the metropolis for a village in the far away North, following it from its place of posting till we finally see it deposited in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed.

THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

The General Post-Office, the great heart of the English postal system, is a fine and, now that so many district offices are opened in London, very convenient building. On the ground-floor the different offices attached to the Circulation and Mail departments are located. Upstairs we find the Secretary's department, that of the Receiver and Accountant-General, and other branches of the Circulation Office. Approaching the large hall of the General Post-Office, through one of the three-columned porticoes, we post our letter, and as it is now nearly six o'clock P.M. we stand aside, for a few minutes only, to witness one of the most stirring scenes in the metropolis. Throughout the day, one side of the hall presents a busy enough scene, and its boxes, open for

the receipt of correspondence for all parts of the world, are constantly beset with people. Not [Pg 200]
only do these huge slits still gape for letters, but the large windows, closed through the day, are thrown wide open as a quarter to six chimes from the neighbouring clocks. It is then that an impetuous crowd enters the hall, and letters and newspapers begin to fall in quite a literary hail-storm. The newspaper window, ever yawning for more, is presently surrounded and besieged by an array of boys of all ages and costumes, together with children of a larger growth, who are all alike pushing, heaving, and surging in one great mass. The window, with tremendous gape, is assaulted with showers of papers which fly thicker and faster than the driven snow. Now it is that small boys of eleven and twelve years of age, panting, Sinbad-like, under the weight of huge bundles of newspapers, manage somehow to dart about and make rapid *sorties* into other ranks of boys, utterly disregarding the cries of the official policemen, who vainly endeavour to reduce the tumult into something like post-office order. If the lads cannot quietly and easily disembogue, they will whiz their missiles of intelligence over other people's heads, now and then sweeping off hats and caps with the force of shot. The gathering every moment increases in number and intensifies in purpose; arms, legs, sacks, baskets, heads, bundles, and woollen comforters—for whoever saw a veritable newspaper-boy without that appendage?—seem to be getting into a state of confusion and disagreeable communism, and "yet the cry is still they come." Heaps of papers of widely-opposed political views are thrown in together; no longer placed carefully in the openings, they are now sent in in sackfuls and basketfuls, while over the heads of the surging crowd were flying back the empty sacks, thrown out of the office by the porters inside. Semi-official legends, with a very strong smack of probability about them, tell of sundry boys being thrown in, seized, emptied, and thrown out again *void*. As six o'clock approaches still nearer and nearer, the turmoil increases more perceptibly, for the intelligent British public is fully alive to [Pg 201]
the awful truth that the Post-Office officials never allow a minute of grace, and that "Newspaper Fair" must be over when the last stroke of six is heard. *One*, in rush files of laggard boys who have purposely loitered, in the hope of a little pleasurable excitement; *two*, and grown men hurry in with their last sacks; *three*, the struggle resembles nothing so much as a pantomimic *mêlée*; *four*, a Babel of tongues vociferating desperately; *five*, final and furious showers of papers, sacks, and bags; and *six*, when all the windows fall like so many swords of Damocles, and the slits close with such a sudden and simultaneous snap, that we naturally suppose it to be a part of the Post-Office operations that attempts should be made to guillotine a score of hands; and then all is over so far as the outsiders are concerned.

Among the letter-boxes, scenes somewhat similar have been enacted. Letters of every shape and colour, and of all weights have unceasingly poured in; tidings of life and death, hope and despair, success and failure, triumph and defeat, joy and sorrow; letters from friends and notes from lawyers, appeals from children and stern advice from parents, offers from anxious-hearted young gentlemen, and "first yesses" or refusals from young maidens; letters containing that snug appointment so long promised you, and "little bills" with requests for immediate payment, "together with six-and-eightpence;" cream-coloured missives telling of happy consummations, and black-edged envelopes telling of death and the grave; sober-looking advice notes, doubtless telling when "our Mr. Puffwell" would do himself the honour of calling on you, and elegant-looking billets in which business is never mentioned, all jostled each other for a short time; but the stream of gladness and of woe was stopped, at least for one night, when the last stroke of six was heard. The Post-Office, like a huge monster, to which one writer has likened it, has swallowed an enormous meal, and gorged to the full, it must now commence the process of digestion. While laggard boys, to whom cartoons by one "William Hogarth" should be shown, are
muttering "too late," and retiring discomfited, we, having obtained the requisite "open sesame," [Pg 202]
will make our way to the interior of the building. Threading our course through several passages, we soon find ourselves among enormous apartments well lit up, where hundreds of human beings are moving about, lifting, shuffling, stamping, and sorting huge piles of letters, and still more enormous piles of newspapers, in what seems at first sight hopeless confusion, but in what is really the most admirable order. In the newspaper-room, men have been engaged not only in emptying the sacks flung in by strong-armed men and weak-legged boys, but also in raking up the single papers into large baskets, and conveying them up and down "hoists," into various divisions of the building. Some estimate of the value of these mechanical appliances, moved of course by steam power, may be formed from the fact that hundreds of tons of paper pass up and down these lifts every week. As many of the newspapers escape from their covers in the excitement of posting, each night two or three officers are busily engaged during the whole time of despatch, in endeavouring to restore wrappers to newspapers found without any address. Great as is the care exercised in this respect, it will occasionally happen that wrong newspapers will find their way into loose wrappers not belonging to them, and under the circumstances it would be by no means a matter of wonder if—as has been more than once pointed out—Mr. Bright should, instead of his *Morning Star*, receive a copy of the *Saturday Review*, or an evangelical curate the *Guardian* or *Punch*, in place of his *Record* paper.

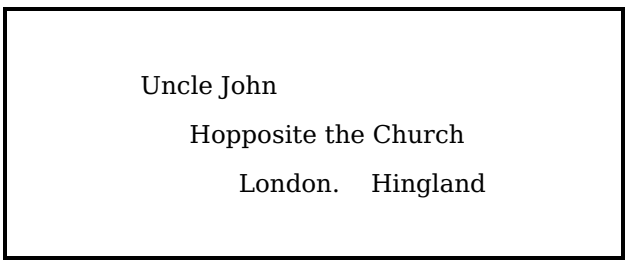
In the letter-room the officers are no less busily engaged: a number of them are constantly at work during the hours of the despatch, in the operation of placing each letter with the address and postage label uppermost, so as to facilitate the process of stamping. In the General Post-Office the stamping is partly effected by machinery and partly by hand, and consists simply in
imprinting upon each letter the date, hour, and place of posting, while at the same time the [Pg 203]
Queen's head with which the letter is ornamented and franked gets disfigured.[154] It will easily be imagined that a letter containing a box of pills stands a very good chance of being damaged under this manipulation, as a good stamper will strike about fifty letters in a minute. Unpaid letters are kept apart, as they require stamping in a different coloured ink and with the double

postage. Such letters create much extra labour, and are a source of incessant trouble to the Department, inasmuch as from the time of their posting in London to their delivery at the Land's End or John O'Groat's, every officer through whose hands they may pass has to keep a cash account of them. The double postage on such letters is more than earned by the Post-Office. All unfastened and torn letters, too, are picked out and conveyed to another portion of the large room, and it requires the unremitting attention of several busy individuals to finish the work left undone by the British public. It is scarcely credible that above 250 letters daily are posted *open*, and bearing not the slightest mark of ever having been fastened in any way; but such is the fact. A fruitful source of extra work to this branch of the office arises through the posting of flimsy boxes containing feathers, slippers, and other *récherché* articles of female dress, pill-boxes containing jewellery, and even bottles. The latter, however, are detained, glass articles and sharp instruments of any sort, whenever detected, being returned to the senders. These frail things, thrown in and buried under the heaps of correspondence, get crushed and broken, yet all are made up again carefully and resealed.

When the letters have been stamped, and those insufficiently paid picked out, they are carried away to undergo the process of sorting. In this operation they are very rapidly divided into "roads," representing a line of large towns: thus, letters for Derby, Loughborough, Nottingham, Lincoln, &c. might be placed in companionship in one division or "road," and Bilston, Wednesbury, Walsall, West Bromwich, &c. in another. When this primary divisional sorting is [Pg 204] finished, the letters are divided and subdivided over and over again, with the exception of those for the various travelling sorting-carriages upon the different lines of railway, which remain in divisions corresponding with various portions of the country through which the several mail-trains run. It is into one of these divisions that our own letter falls, to be seen again, however, when we come to describe the Travelling Post-Offices. During the time occupied in making up the mails, the Circulation Branch of the General Post-Office presents a busy scene, yet retains the utmost order and regularity. Hundreds of men are engaged in the various operations of sorting and sub-sorting, yet all proceeds really noiselessly, and as if the hundreds and thousands of letters representing the commerce and intelligence of the English people could not be treated too carefully. Every now and again the sorter pauses in his rapid movements, and places a letter on one side. In some cases this signifies that he has detected a letter containing a *coin* of some sort; and when such letters have been posted without being registered by the sender, the Department takes this duty upon itself, charging a double fee on delivery. The number of letters of this class detected in London alone during the first six months after the plan was brought into operation, was upwards of 58,000. Letters which cannot be read, or letters imperfectly addressed, are also thrown on one side and conveyed to another part of the Circulation Branch, where gentlemen whose extraordinary faculty of discernment have gained them the singularly inappropriate name of "blind officers" sit in state.

THE BLIND LETTER-OFFICE

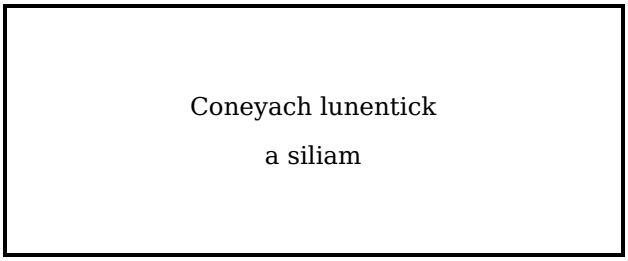
is the receptacle for all illegible, misspelt, misdirected, or insufficiently addressed letters or packets. Here the clerk or clerks, selected from amongst the most efficient and experienced officers, guess at what ordinary intelligence would readily denominate insoluble riddles. Large numbers of letters are posted daily with superscriptions which the sorters cannot decipher, and [Pg 205] which the great majority of people would not be able to read. Others, again, are received with perhaps only the name of some small village, the writers thinking it a work of supererogation to add some neighbouring town, or even a county. Numberless, for instance, are the letters bearing such addresses as "John Smith, gardener, Flowerdale," or "Throgmorton Hall, Worcestershire." Circulars, by the thousand, are posted in London and other large towns without hesitancy, and with the greatest confidence in the "final perseverance" principle of the Post-Office people, with addresses not more explicit than the foregoing. Many country gentlemen would seem to cherish the idea that the names of their mansions should be known equally far and near from their manorial acres, and somehow they seem to inoculate their correspondents with the same absurd notion. If, however, it be possible to reduce the hieroglyphics on some strange letter to ordinary every-day English, or find, from diligent search in his library of reference, information relative to imperfectly-addressed letters (information which might have been given much more easily by the senders), our readers may be sure that the cunning gentleman of the Blind Office, justly known for his patience and sagacity, will do it, unless, indeed, the letter be "stone blind," or hopelessly incomplete. As a genuine example of stone-blind letters, take the following, the first of a batch which has been known to pass through the blind-room of the General Post-Office:—



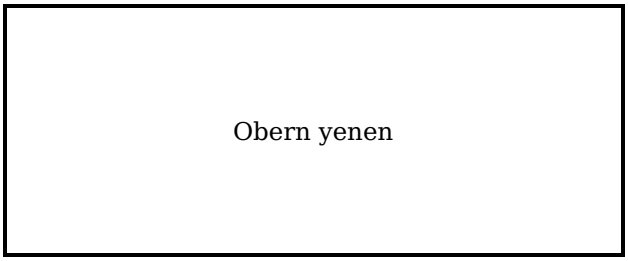
It would certainly have been a wonderful triumph of skill to have put this letter in a fair way for delivery: for once the blind officer would acknowledge himself beaten; and then the Dead Letter [Pg 206]

Officers would endeavour to find "Uncle John's" *relative*, intimating to the said relative that greater explicitness is needed if "Uncle John" must be found.

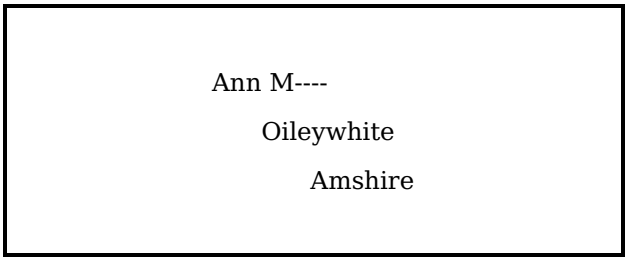
But they manage better with the next letter in the batch.



is part of the address of a letter which the sorter no doubt threw away from him with some impatience. The blind officer, however, reads it instantly, strikes his pen, perhaps, through the address, and writes on the envelope, "Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum," and passes it out for delivery.

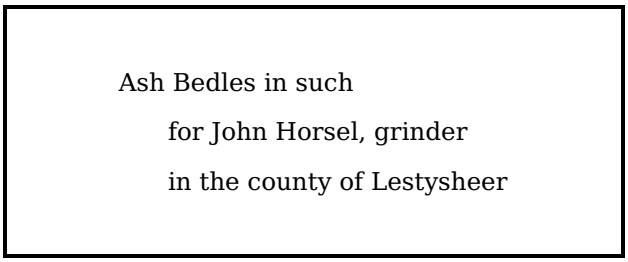


is seen in an instant to be meant for "Holborn Union." "Isle of Wight" is, in like manner, written on a letter improperly addressed as follows:—



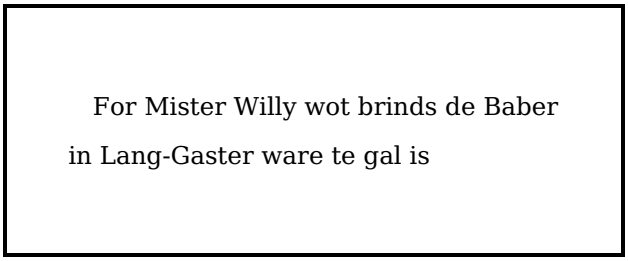
The probability is that the last-mentioned letter will come back to the Dead Letter-Office, on account of no town being given in the address; still, the usual course is to send it out to the local district designated, there being always the possibility that certain individuals may be locally known. [Pg 207]

"*Ashby-de-la-Zouch*" is a town to spell which gives infinite trouble to letter-writers; but the Post-Office official is especially lenient and patient in cases of this kind. There are fifty different ways of spelling the name, and few letters, except those of the better classes, give it rightly spelt. "Hasbedellar-such" is the ordinary spelling among the poor living at a distance.



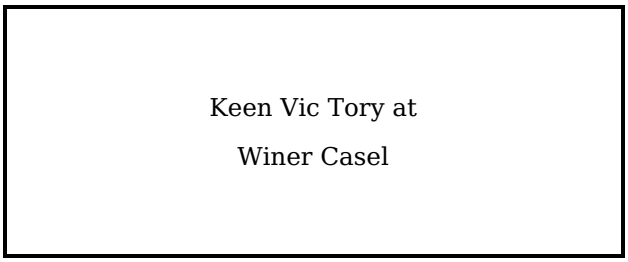
is a copy of a veritable address meant for the above town.

The blind letter officers of an earlier date succumbed before the following letter:—



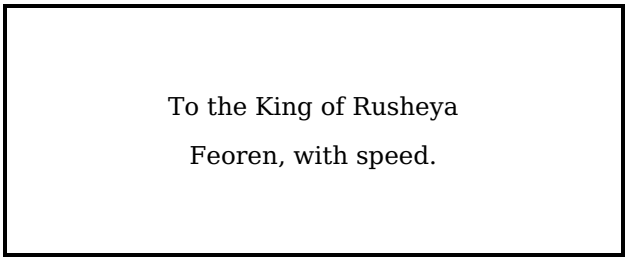
but the dead letter officers were enabled from the contents to make out that it was meant for the editor of a Lancaster paper, "where the gaol is." The communication enclosed was an essay written by a foreigner against public schools!

The blind officers are supplied with all the principal London and provincial directories, court guides, gazetteers, &c.; and by the help of this, their library of reference, added to their own [Pg 208] experience and intelligence, they are generally able to put again into circulation without the necessity of opening them, five out of six of all the letters which are handed over to them. The addresses of some letters are at once seen to be the result of mistake on the part of senders. Letters addressed "Lombard Street, Manchester," "St. Paul's Churchyard, Liverpool," both obviously intended for London, are sent out for trial by the letter-carriers at what are believed to be their real destinations. (See *Ninth Report*.) Letters, again, for persons of rank and eminence, dignitaries of the Church, prominent officers of the army or navy, whose correct addresses are known, or can be ascertained, are immediately sent out for delivery to their right destination, however erroneously directed, without question or examination of contents. The following strange letters, meant for the eye of royalty, would not be impeded in their progress in any way:—



and another—

would go to Windsor Castle without fail; while the following, posted in London at the breaking-out of the Polish Insurrection, would find its way to St. Petersburg as fast as packet could carry [Pg 209] it:—



When the letter-carriers and the blind officers have expended all their skill upon certain letters in vain, the next step is to send them to

THE DEAD-LETTER OFFICE.

in order that they may be returned to the writers, provided any clue can be obtained from the contents as to their whereabouts. The branch in which this work is accomplished is now a very

considerable establishment, employing at least a score more clerks, &c. than in the days of the old postage. In 1763, just a hundred years ago, the records show that two clerks only were engaged in opening "*dead and insolvent letters*." Now, nearly fifty officers are employed in the same duties. Nor are these duties by any means so only in name. Last year considerably over two millions of letters were returned to their writers through the Dead-Letter Office from failures in the attempts to deliver them. "Three-quarters of the non-deliveries," says the Postmaster-General, "were on account of the letters being insufficiently or incorrectly addressed, nearly 11,000 letters having been posted *without any address at all*."

In every provincial post-office in England and Wales a dead or returned letter-bag is now forwarded daily to London, containing all the letters which, from any cause, cannot be delivered. Each letter bears on its front, written prominently in red ink, the reason of its non-delivery. Thus, if the addressee cannot be found, or should have left the town, the words "Cannot be found," or [Pg 210] "Gone—left no address," are written respectively. On the arrival of these bags in London, inclosed in the larger bags containing the general correspondence, they are at once passed to the "returned-letter branch," as the Dead-Letter Office is called, where no time is lost in opening them. Every letter received is first examined by an experienced and responsible officer, to make sure that it has been actually presented according to its address, and that the reasons assigned on the cover of the letter are sufficient to account for its non-delivery. In doubtful cases, before the letter is opened, the directories and other books of reference, of which there is a plentiful supply in this office, are consulted, and should it be found or thought that there has been any oversight or neglect, the letter is re-issued, with proper instructions, by the first post. About 300 letters are thus re-issued daily, many of which ultimately reach the persons for whom they are intended.

When it has been fully ascertained that nothing further can be done to effect the delivery of an imperfectly or improperly addressed letter, it only remains to have it sent back to the writer. This is done, if possible, without the letter being opened. By an arrangement of ten years' standing, if the returned letter has the writer's name and address embossed on the back of the envelope, impressed on the seal, or written or printed anywhere outside, it will not be opened, but forwarded back according to this address. We may point out here, however, that this arrangement, excellent and satisfactory as it is, has sometimes led to serious mistakes and confusion; so much so, in fact, that the Postmaster-General, in his report for 1861, appealed to the public on the subject. It would appear that the practice of using another person's embossed envelope is on the increase. When such a letter, according to the arrangement, is forwarded to the supposed writer, it has frequently fallen into the wrong hands (the master and merchant instead of the clerk or other servant), and grievous complaints have been made on the subject. The remedy, of course, lies with letter-writers themselves. If there are no outward marks to [Pg 211] indicate the sender, the letter is then opened, and, if a suitable address can be found inside, the letter is inclosed in the well-known dead-letter envelope and forwarded according to that address. If a letter should be found to contain anything of value, such as bank-notes, drafts, postage-stamps, the precaution is taken of having a special record taken of it, and it is then sent back as a registered dead letter. Money to the value of 12,000*l.* or 14,000*l.* is annually found in these returned letters. Of this sum about 500*l.* per annum falls into the public exchequer, on account of no address being found inside, and no inquiry being made for the missing letters. A vast number of bank post-bills and bills of exchange are likewise found, amounting in all, and on the average, to something like 3,000,000*l.* a-year. These bills, however, as well as money-order advices, always afford some clue to the senders, even supposing no address should be given inside the letter, and inquiries are set on foot at the bankers and others whose names may be given in the paper transactions. Forty thousand letters reach the English returned branch each year containing property of different kinds. Many presents, such as rings, pins, brooches, never reach their destination, and are never sent back to the sender, because they are often unaccompanied with any letter. These articles, of course, become the property of the Crown.

Postmasters of Irish towns send their "dead and insolvent letters" to Dublin, and the residuum of the local Scotch post-towns are sent to Edinburgh. In both these capitals, this particular class of letters is dealt with in exactly the same manner as in the London office. We are assured that the letters themselves, and the articles found in the Scotch and Irish dead letters, illustrate no little the characters, the feeling, and habits of the two people. The Scotch have, comparatively speaking, the fewest dead letters; and as the writers are generally careful to give their addresses inside the letters, little trouble is said to be experienced in returning them, if it is necessary. The [Pg 212] Irish dead letters are more numerous than either the English or the Scotch. This mainly arises from the circumstance of the nomadic habits of a considerable portion of the Irish people: owing also to the same circumstance, it is impossible to return many of the letters to the writers. The Scotch dead letters rarely contain coin or any very valuable enclosures, while of articles of jewellery, such as usually form presents or tokens of affection, we are told there is a "lamentable deficiency." The Irish dead letters, on the contrary, "are full of little *cadeaux* and small sums of money," illustrating at the same time both the careless and the affectionate nature of the people.

Letters which can neither be delivered nor returned through the Post-Office are, if found to be valuable and if posted in the United Kingdom, appropriated to the public revenue after a certain time; if received for delivery from a foreign State, they are sent back to the chief office of that country for final disposition. Letters posted in this country found to be of no value, are kept at the Post-Office for a month and then destroyed; foreign letters under the same circumstances are not destroyed for two months.

And now, unless we at once return from our digression, we shall not be in time to see the great night-mail despatched from St. Martin's-le-Grand. Whilst we have been occupied with a contemplation of the few waifs and strays of our national correspondence, the great bulk of that correspondence has been well and carefully disposed of: the letters and newspapers which we saw two hours ago as a mass of inextricable confusion, are now carefully stowed away in their respective bags, and not a letter or newspaper can be found. The hall clock is silently approaching the hour of eight, when the bags must all be sealed and ready to leave the place. At five minutes before that time, all is still bustle and activity; five minutes perhaps after that hour the establishment is nearly deserted. "Everything is done on military principles to minute time." "The drill and subdivisions of duties are so perfect," adds a close observer, "that the alternations [Pg 213] are high pressure and sudden collapse." This is the more remarkable, inasmuch as the Post-Office, is subject to great variations in the amount of work to be done. Particular nights in the week, Mondays and Tuesdays for example, are known as the "heaviest," and even such events as elections, influence the labour to be performed within the same given time. During the last election for Lambeth, 40,000 circulars were posted in London in one day, and properly disposed of. On the 14th of February last, 957,000 extra letters, or valentines, passed through the Circulation Office in London. Compared with Valentine's Day 1863, there was an increase of a quarter of a million letters!

In place of the old mail-coaches waiting in the yard of the office until the work is completed inside, we have now the well-known mail-vans. As they are rapidly supplied with bags, they chase each other to the various railway stations, from which, to all points of the compass, the night-mails now depart. Half an hour afterwards, we find ourselves in one of these trains watching operations not dissimilar to those we have just left, but much more wonderful, considering how they are accomplished.

THE TRAVELLING POST-OFFICE.

The travelling post-office deserves special attention, not less on account of the interesting nature of the work performed, than because it serves many important ends in the system of which it forms a part. It is to the railway post-offices that the Department is indebted for much of the simplification of its accounts. At different points in a mail-coach journey, long stoppages used to be made in order that the "bye" and "forward" letters might get sorted; on the introduction of railways, it was seen that the number of bags must either be enormously increased, and other complications arise, or the railways could not to any extent be rendered available for post-office purposes. Just at this juncture, it was suggested that the work might be done during the journey, [Pg 214] and the obstacles were soon surmounted. Further, by means of the travelling offices, the Post-Office is enabled to offer more time for the posting of letters, and not only so, but to give the public the benefit of earlier deliveries.

The railway-mail service has now assumed quite gigantic proportions. Twenty-six years ago, when railways were only partially used for post-office purposes, a writer predicted that they would "soon become the *ne plus ultra* of rapidity," and that the Post-Office would have to take to them more and more. "In a few years," said the writer, "railways will have become so general, that scarcely a mail-coach will be left in England; certainly, none will be wanted in London." Both predictions have since been verified; for the last twenty years, railways have gradually absorbed all the mail contracts,—year by year the estimates for this service showing a corresponding increase.[155] The first railway post-office journey was made on the Grand Junction Railway, between Liverpool and Birmingham, on the 1st of July, 1837. When the line was completed to London, in January, 1838, the travelling office started from the metropolis. The following curious account of the "Grand Northern Railway Post-Office," as it was called, is culled from the *Penny Magazine*. "On the arrival of the four 'accelerators' at the Euston Station with the mails, the railway servants immediately carry the large sacks to a huge looking machine, with a tender attached to it, both at the end of the train. This caravan is the flying Post-Office, with a table for sorting letters, and holes round the walls for their reception." The carriage was certainly either an ungainly structure, or the above is a most ungainly report. "In ten minutes," continues the narrator, "the omnibuses are emptied of their contents, and the train of carriages is then *wound up* to the station at Camden Town, where the engine is attached, *and the Primrose Hill tunnel* [Pg 215] *soon prevents us hearing the thunder of their rapid progress*." The Londoner of 1864, in these days of metropolitan railways can afford to smile at this last sentence. That the change in the system of mail conveyance wrought immediate and striking improvement at the Post-Office does not admit of question. In a contemporary account, we find an interesting but wonder-stricken writer stating that "by means of the extra railway facilities, letters now pass along this line (London and Birmingham) in a space of time so inconceivably quick, that some time must elapse before our ideas become accustomed to such a rapid mode of intercourse." We learn from different works published by Mr. Charles Knight, that when the railways were extended farther northwards, the Railway Post-Office was extended with them, and was formed into sections. Thus, when the lines were continued north as far as Lancaster, there were two divisions formed, one staff of clerks, &c. to the number of eight, working between London and Birmingham, and ten between Birmingham and Lancaster.[156] There were two mails each day in both directions. The distance between London and Lancaster (241 miles) was accomplished in eleven hours and a half. The weight of the railway post-office, tender, bags, and clerks, is stated by Mr. Whishaw, in his work on railways, to have been at that period about nine tons. At that time, the expense of the service was regulated by the weight carried. At present, on the great trunk line of the London and North Western Railway Company, no fewer than eight mail-trains run daily up and down, [Pg 216]

each conveying railway post-office carriages and post-office employés. Half of these trains are run specially, the number of passengers being limited. The weight of mails running over this ground must have increased fourfold at the least, inasmuch as the number of officers have been augmented in even a greater proportion. Surprising as was the speed at which the first railway post-office travelled, and wonderful as it was thought at the time, one of the mail-trains now runs nearly double the distance between London and Lancaster during the time which used to be taken for that ground alone. *The Limited night-mail*, travelling between the Euston Square station in London, and Perth in Scotland, accomplishes the distance of 451 miles in eleven hours and a half, or about forty miles an hour including stoppages!

The railway post-office proper, is now extended over nearly every considerable line of railway in the kingdom. It comprises a number of divisions or sections, named generally from the locality through which they extend, or the railway travelled over, as the Bangor and Leeds division, the Caledonian Railway post-office. The four principal or trunk mails, three of them being divided into two sections, are (1) the North-Western Railway post-office, travelling between London and Carlisle; (2) the Irish Mail, between London and Holyhead; (3) the Great Western, between London and Exeter; and (4) the Midland, between Bristol and Newcastle-on-Tyne. Most of these divisions have *day*- as well as *night*-mails running over them daily. Four trains a-day, being two in each direction, are therefore the usual proportion of mails on the chief lines of railway. As London is the *heart* of the postal system, so these four principal mails may be termed its *main arteries*, while as veins in the great system, there are a number of smaller divisions of the railway post-office that have not been enumerated. Again, at other parts or points not important or extensive enough for travelling offices, railway trains are arranged to wait the arrival of the trunk mails; and thus, to continue the figure, our letters—the life-blood of a nation's commerce and [Pg 217] sociality—are conveyed to the remotest corners of the country.

It may be imagined that a proper control of this vast machinery, extending through almost every county in the kingdom, with its scattered staff of officials, will be difficult; but the efficient working of the whole is nevertheless as thoroughly and promptly maintained as in any other department where personal supervision is more direct. Each divisional part has distinct officers allotted to it, the number of *clerks* being regulated according to the number of mails running over the division in the course of a day, and the number of *sorters* according to the amount of sorting duties to be performed. Each mail travels under the charge of one clerk, while each division is locally superintended by one senior clerk. The entire direction, however, of all the travelling officers is vested in the Inspector-General of Mails, who also presides over the Mail Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand. We may here further state, that the *length* of the divisions—the extent of one of which forms a post-office journey or "trip"—varies slightly, averaging about 170 miles; the average *time* taken to perform the journeys being between five and six hours. As a rule, the night-mails travel during the night-time, or between eight P.M. and six A.M.; the day-mails generally speaking throughout the day.

But we must make ready for our journey, and enter more into detail. While van after van is arriving with its heavy loads of mail-bags, we have time to notice that the train standing at the great London terminus is nearly all post-office. Two or three carriages are being filled as full as possible with made-up bags, and two more, fitted up like post-offices, are simply meant for operations similar to those we have already seen at the General Post-Office, in connexion with the unfinished work which has now to be accomplished during the journey. It is with the remaining carriage only that we have to do. Seen from the outside, the office itself may still [Pg 218] answer to the description given of it twenty-five years ago by our authority above adverted to, although considerable improvements must have been made in its construction since that time. Though the structure is built with a very evident serviceable purpose, the large, heavily-painted, windowless vehicle, looks more as if intended for the conveyance of Her Majesty's horses than Her Majesty's mails; the roof, however, covered with glass, with other contrivances for the purposes of ventilation, soon convinces us that it is intended for some description of the *genus homo*. We go inside, and find it built like an ordinary saloon carriage, about twenty-two feet long, and as wide and spacious as the railway arrangements will allow. It is night-time, the reader will remember, and the interior looks warm and cheerful with its row of bright-burning moderator lamps, and, in this respect, contrasts strongly and pleasantly, as far as we are concerned, with the dimly-lighted station, through which the cold night air is rushing. The reader who is following us in this description must abstain from imagining anything like luxury in the internal fittings. Everything here is requisite for accomplishing the work in hand, but there is no provision for any kind of indulgence; and spacious as the place seems at a first glance, there is not to be found, when we come to look narrowly, a single foot of spare room. Along the whole length of one side of the carriage, and encroaching materially upon its width, a number of tiers of boxes—the "holes" of our ancient authority—are arranged for the sorting processes; the smaller ones for the letters, and the larger ones in the centre of the office—more like shelves, many of them being movable—for the newspapers and all that vast variety of articles forwarded according to the rules of book-post. Every available inch of space on the other side of the office is covered with upright pegs, in recesses sunk in the carriage-sides, upon which are hung the bags—now made of canvas, with the names of towns conspicuously painted upon them—to be used in the course of the journey. These recesses, as well as the two ends of the office, are well padded over, to secure [Pg 219] additional safety to the officers in the event of any accident.[157] Under the desks or counters, which run from one end of the carriage to the other, bags are packed, to be given out as the train arrives at the respective stations.

In less time, however, than it would take to read the foregoing, the mail has speeded miles away,

and reached, by this time, the fox-covers and game-preserves of those Hertfordshire landowners who, when the railway was projected, expressed the wish that its concoctors "were at rest in Paradise!" The train possibly "thundered" through Camden Town as it used to do in olden times, but it would be but a momentary sensation, not to speak of the inhabitants being now quite accustomed to it. The post-office work commenced when the train left the station. The bags were quickly seized by the proper sorter, cut, and their contents turned out on the desk. Then he distributes what he finds in the bags according to a pre-arranged order. The registered letters which have found their way to the office he at once transfers to the clerk on duty whose special province it is to deal with them; the bundles of ordinary letters—in one of which packets is the identical letter we ourselves posted—he hands over to his fellow-sorters, who, each standing opposite to a distinct set of boxes, labelled with the names of different towns on the route, at once sort them away. The newspapers he deals with himself. The work thus started, the scene presently becomes one of considerable animation and a pleasant-enough sort of excitement, till every bundle of letters is cut open and disposed of in the boxes. There is then a lull, but it is only temporary. It is true that the train will not stop till the county of Warwickshire is reached; but the intervening country is provided for nevertheless—arrangements having been made that at all the towns we pass the exchange of letter-bags shall be effected by means of machinery whilst the [Pg 220] train is progressing at its usual speed. The contrivance in question deserves minute description. [158] The machinery is not worked in the post-office, but in an adjoining van. By means, however, of a substantial iron gangway, the two carriages are connected, so that we can pass easily from one to the other and see the operation itself. As we do so we are evidently nearing some town, for the sorter is at that moment engaged in peering out of the window into the darkness in search of some familiar object, such as bridge, river, or cluster of trees, by means of which he is enabled to tell his whereabouts with almost mathematical precision. Whilst he is busy finding his position we will take the time to explain, that the machinery is arranged so as to secure, simultaneously in most cases, both the receipt and the despatch of bags. For the purpose of receiving bags, a large strong net is fixed to one side of the van, to be drawn down at the proper moment; and close to the door, on each side of it, securely fixed to the carriage, are hollow iron bars, inside each of which, working by means of a rope and pulley, an iron arm is fixed, upon which the bags to be delivered, securely strapped in a thick, leathern pouch, are suspended. Where the exchange has to be effected at the station we are nearing, the arrangements are just the counterparts of this. A net is spread to catch each pouch from the extended arm of the carriage, and pouches are hung from iron standards in the ground of sufficient height for the net in the train. The operation itself [Pg 221] is just commencing. The door is pushed back into the groove in which it works, and then the sorter, touching a spring that holds up the net, it is loosened from its supports, and projects over the carriage-sides; the iron arm, acting on its pulley-rope, is drawn round into the carriage, where the pouch is rapidly fastened to it by means of a catch or spring—but in such a manner that a touch from the net-apparatus at the station will bring it off—and then let down, remaining by virtue of its own weight at right angles to the door. A moment of waiting, and then all the machinery acts its assigned part properly; the pouch disappears from the arm (or arms, if the bags have been heavy enough for two to be used), and at the same moment another descends into the post-office net, and all is over and quiet as before. We mean, of course, comparative quiet, as much as is possible amid the din and endless rattle of a train speeding at the rate of forty miles an hour.

We follow the sorter as he makes his way back into the post-office carriage, carrying with him the treasures we have watched him pick up by the wayside. These new arrivals disposed of in the orthodox way, and the process repeated two or three times, there is suddenly a movement among the officers as they busy themselves in collecting from the different boxes all the letters that have been received from first to last for the bags about to be despatched at the approaching town—the first junction station. The letters in question are examined to test the correctness of the sorting, then tied up in bundles in a sharp and decisive way, then placed away carefully in the several bags, which are tied, sealed, and ready for delivery just as the train is brought to a stand. Here they are given out; fresh supplies are received from a number of large towns in the immediate district, and the train is again on its way. The bags received are at once opened; the same round of sorting, collecting, examining, is gone through; the same process of despatching for the next and all subsequent postal stages is repeated, just as we have described. Little variation is noticed, except that at certain points a much larger number of bags are thrown into the office— [Pg 222] for instance, as the train nears the more thickly populated parts of the midland counties, then the "black country," as it is called, and subsequently the manufacturing districts. At one of these points a considerable addition was made to the staff of sorters, who fell at once to work in the vacant spaces left for them. And it was not before they were required; for presently the train arrives at one of the principal mail junctions in the kingdom, where an immense number of bags wait our arrival. These bags have been brought somewhat earlier on, by other mail trains, arranged so as to effect a junction with us; these having in their turn met with other trains running across the country in transverse directions. Thus there are here, bags from towns near and towns remote, containing letters for places from which we are, as yet, hundreds of miles distant. The work, however, will be resumed with increased activity, according to the number of letters which may be forthcoming, only whatever number there may be, all must be finished in a given time. So far, the reader may imagine the duty to be one of dull routine and very monotonous; so as a rule we believe it is: there are circumstances connected with the manner of travelling, however, which conspire to make it at times somewhat varied and exceptional. One moment, and we are clattering down a hill, and the sorting partakes, to some extent, of the same tear-away speed; another time, we are panting up a line of steep gradient, and the letters find their boxes very deliberately; now, the rails are somewhat out of order, or the coupling of the

carriages has not been well attended to, or we are winding round a succession of sharp curves, and can scarcely keep our feet as the carriage lurches first to one side, then to the other; in all which cases, not only is our own equilibrium a source of difficulty to us, but we see that things proceed anything but smoothly among the letters, which refuse to go in at all, or go in with a spirited evolution, fluttering outside, and then landing at their destination upside down, or in some other way transgressing official rules in such case made and provided. Then the work is [Pg 223] accompanied to the different kinds of music, well known to "express travellers." Now the train is tearing away through a tunnel, or through an interminably long cutting of thick-ribbed stone, and then under or over a bridge. Nor is this all, nor the worst: these noises are very frequently varied by what is anything but a lively tune on the engine whistle, but which, supposing the signal lights to be against us, or Cerberus asleep at his post, is too often a round of screeching and screaming enough to waken the Seven Sleepers.

Whatever be the general character of the work, we are bent on enjoyment during this particular journey. The country through which the train is now proceeding is but thinly supplied with towns, hence the number of letters received is much smaller, and we may avail ourselves of the opportunity which this break in the character of the duty gives us, to examine more closely and from our own point of view, a few of the letters which are waiting to be despatched. The sorters also, glad of a little relaxation, have produced from their hiding places under the blue cloth-covered counter, an oval kind of swing-seat attached to it, which turns outside somewhat ingeniously upon a swivel, and seat themselves at their work.

Undoubtedly, the first thing which will strike an observer placed in circumstances like ours, is, that the Post-Office is eminently a democratic establishment, conducted on the most improved *fraternité et égalité* principles. The same sort of variety that marks society, here marks its letters; envelopes of all shades and sizes; handwriting of all imaginable kinds, written in all shades of ink, with every description of pen; names the oddest, and names the most ordinary, and patronymics to which no possible exception can be taken. Then to notice the *seals*. Here is one envelope stamped with the escutcheoned signet of an earl; another where the wax has yielded submissively to the initials of plain John Brown; and yet another, plastered with cobbler's wax, [Pg 224] with an impression that makes no figure in *Burke* or *Debrett*, but which, indeed, bears many evidences of having been manufactured with hob-nails. Then to think that Queen Victoria, and John Brown, and the cobbler aforesaid, must each find the inevitable Queen's head, without which no letter of high or low degree can pass unquestioned! Here they are—these letters—mingling for a few hours at any rate in silent but common fellowship, tossed about in company, belaboured with the self-same knocks on the head, sent to their destination locked in loving embrace, and sometimes, as in the case of the cobbler's, exceedingly difficult to part.

If we turn to consider the addresses, how amusing we find some in their ambiguity; how blundering and stupid a few more! Some say too little, others too much; some give the phonetic system with *malice prepense*, others because it is nature's own rendering and they have never known school! Sometimes (and the practice is growing) the envelope is covered with long advertisements, for the benefit and information of the Post-Office officials, we presume, in which case it is difficult to arrive at the proper address of the letter at the first or even second glance. Some give the address of the *sender* in prominent printed characters, and it is surely not a matter of wonder when the letter, as not unfrequently, happens, finds its way back to the sender. In all cases of this kind, time is of course lost to the Post-Office, and the work of examination is necessarily deliberate, hesitating, and slow. At one point, the quota of letters from the sister-isle is received, and it is then perhaps that the sorter's patience is put to the severest test. The addresses of the letters of the poorer Irish are generally so involved—always being sent to the care of one or two individuals—that they usually present the appearance of a little wilderness of words. As a specimen of the kind of letter referred to, we give our readers a copy of one which actually passed through the Post-Office some time ago, assuring them that though the following [Pg 225] is rather an *ultra* specimen, this kind of minute but indefinite address is by no means uncommon among the class referred to:—

> To my sister Bridget, or else to
> my brother Tim Burke, in care
> of the Praste, who lives in the parish
> of Balcumbury in Cork, or if not to
> *some dacent neighbour in Ireland*.

The English poor oftener, as we have already seen, show their unbounded confidence in the sagacity of the officers of the Post-Office by leaving out some essential part of the address of a letter, but very seldom writing too much. We once saw a letter addressed as follows:—"Mary H——, a tall woman with two children," and giving the name of a large town in the West of England.

The Scotch people, as a rule, attain the golden mean, and exhibit the greatest care in such matters. Nor can we wonder at this. The poorer classes are certainly better educated, and whilst seldom profuse on their letters, they are cautious enough not to leave anything of consequence

unwritten. The statistics of the Dead Letter Offices of the three countries confirm, to some considerable extent, our rough generalizations.

After all, however, the cases of blunder are exceptional; and as no really blind letters are found in the travelling offices, because no letters are posted here, little difficulty is felt, comparatively speaking, and nothing but patience and the Rosetta stone of experience are needed for the performance of the duty. The great majority of letters are like the great majority of people—ordinary, unexceptionable, and mediocre. It could not well be otherwise. In the railway post-office, however, much is learned from the habit of association. The officers, of course, take some [Pg 226] degree of interest in the towns on his ride; for, almost domesticated on the rail, he becomes a sort of denizen of those towns he is constantly passing, and sees, or fancies he does, from the letters that arrive from them, a kind of corroboration of all he has settled in his mind with regard to them. Almost every town has its distinctive kind of letters. That town we just passed is manufacturing, and the letters are almost entirely confined to sober-looking advice-cards, circulars, prices current, and invoices, generally very similar in kind and appearance, in good-sized envelopes, with very plainly written or printed addresses. Now and then a lawyer's letter, written in a painfully distinct hand, or a thick, fat, banker's letter, groaning under the weight of bills and notes, escapes from company such as we have described; but still the letters sustain the town's real character. Now we are at an old country town, with quiet-going people, living as their fathers did before them, and inheriting not only their money and lands, but their most cherished principles: their letters are just as we expected, little, quiet, old-fashioned-looking things, remarkable for nothing so much as their fewness. *Now* we are among the coal-districts, and almost all the letters have a smudged appearance, making you imagine that they must have been written by the light of pit-candles, in some region of carbon "two hundred fathoms down." *This* bag comes from a sea-bathing place, and so long as summer continues, will unmistakably remind you of sea-shore, sea-sand, and sea-anemones. *These* bags have previously had to cross a broad sea ferry, and the letters tell of salt water as certainly as if they were so many fishes. Another twenty miles, and we come to an old cathedral town with its letters looking as orthodox as any Convocation could wish; whilst that other town is clearly a resort of fashion, if we may judge from the finely scented, perfumed, elegant-looking billets that escape from its post-bag.

And thus interested and observing, we are rapidly reaching our destination. We are at the [Pg 227] terminus at last. The office is emptied of all its contents, and the bags, securely made up, are forwarded under care of other officers in different trains, proceeding far and near. Nor have we forgotten our own letter. In the vast mass of letters it holds a well-secured place, being safely ensconced in one of these very bags; and we will endeavour to be present when the bag is opened, that we may verify our assertion. Out of the carriage and once on *terra firma*, we feel a sensation of dreamy wonder that nothing has happened to us; that, considering the noise and the whirl, and the excitement of the work we have witnessed, our brain is not tied up in a knot somewhere in the head, instead of only swimming. Dusty, tired, and sleepy, we hurry through the streets for refreshment, if not repose, while the day is just breaking.

Of course, this Post-Office machinery, which we have attempted to describe, is necessarily delicate and liable to derangements, inasmuch as it has to depend to a great extent on the proper carrying out throughout the country of an infinite number of railway arrangements. Its successful working is doubtless primarily due to the special time chosen for the conveyance of mails. The ordinary traffic disposed of, the mail-trains take its place, and through the long night the best part of the Post-Office work is accomplished. The good or bad management of railway companies may assist or retard the efficiency of the Post-Office to an almost incalculable extent. The railway post-office is like a gigantic machine, one part interdependent on another, and all alike dependent on the motive power of the different contracting parties. Railway accidents are fruitful sources of discomfiture to the Post-Office Department. The mail-trains have, within the last two or three years, enjoyed an immunity from any very serious calamity of this nature: yet even when this is not the case, it very seldom happens that the Post-Office arrangements suffer, except on the particular journey wherein the accident occurred. Fresh supplies of men and *matériel* are [Pg 228] summoned with a speed that would, or ought to, surprise some other commissariat departments, and the work proceeds the next day or night as if the equilibrium had never been disturbed.

As the question whether continual railway travelling is prejudicial to health has frequently been discussed of late, it may not be out of place to instance the case of the travelling *employés* of the Post-Office, which seems to show that persons in the enjoyment of good health are benefited by railway travelling. The ratio of sickness among the Post-Office clerks and sorters engaged upon railways is certainly not greater, we are told, than among the same class of officers employed at the London establishment. The fact seems to be that, were it not that the former travel generally at night-time, are exposed to sudden changes of weather, and are, on certain emergencies, forced to travel oftener and further than the authorized limits, the ratio would be considerably less than it is. Dr. Waller Lewis, the medical officer of the Post-Office, supplies us, in a recent report, with a number of cases that have come under his immediate notice, where incessant, and even excessive railway travelling, does not seem to have been at all detrimental to the health of those so engaged. "One of our best officers," says Dr. Lewis, "states that he has no doubt that, during the period of twenty years that he has been engaged in railway duties, he travelled, on an average, a hundred miles a-day, Sundays included. All this time he not only enjoyed excellent health, but he was stouter and stronger than he has been since leaving that duty." Dr. Lewis further tells us, that it is part of his duty to examine candidates for appointment in this department of the public service, and again to examine them after they have undergone a probation varying from six to eighteen months. "In reply to my question, addressed to such

officers after a probationary term, of how they found the travelling agree with them, some stated that they had never been so well in their lives. A considerable number of them replied that they had not had an hour's illness since they commenced railway duty." Of course, these last-mentioned persons were *candidates* for appointments in a lucrative branch of the Post-Office, and their statements must be received subject to this understanding and with due caution: still, it seems certain that the general testimony borne in the travelling offices is not unfavourable to the healthiness of the employment. [Pg 229]

With regard to the question of injury to the eyesight from railway travelling, Dr. Lewis may again be supposed to speak authoritatively when he considers "it very injurious to allow the eyes to rest on external objects near at hand, such as telegraph-poles or wires, near trees or hedges, &c. whilst the train is in motion;" but, speaking of the same subject, he "does not find that in the travelling post-office much mischief is occasioned to the sight."[159] When we remember that the Post-Office work is generally performed by means of a strong artificial light, and much tedious deciphering of the addresses of letters necessarily occurs, as we have seen, during travelling, it must be admitted that the eyesight is here put to the strongest possible test.

We have now traced our letter, posted in the metropolis, through the travelling post-office into the establishment of a provincial town. We shall follow it presently, and not leave it till it is properly delivered at the rural village to which we saw it addressed; but we must take the opportunities as they occur to describe with minuteness each particular, whether bearing directly or collaterally on our subject, as well as to add now and then a timely exhortation to the reader. Thus, you are indignant, perhaps, that a certain letter you ought to have had is not to hand at the proper moment, but has suffered some delay in transit. However, just think how many letters you do get, which come to your desk as true as the needle to the pole. Just listen to the old gentleman yonder as he tells how long the same business letter from a certain old-established house used to be in arriving, and what was paid for it when it did arrive. Above all, pray think of the travelling caged officials—those wingless birds of the Post-Office—and of what they go through o' nights in order that you may have your letter or your newspaper—posted yesterday in some quiet corner of the country 500 or 600 miles away—with your buttered toast to breakfast in town! [Pg 230]

A PROVINCIAL POST-OFFICE.

Thirty years ago the arrangements in the north country town of the district to which our imaginary letter was addressed, and which we are engaged to visit, were of the most primitive kind. It has always been an important town. Even anterior to the first establishment of the British Post-Office, it was the first town in the county in which it stands. Subsequently, it was on the direct line of one of the principal mail-routes in the kingdom, and now, in these days of railroads, it is a kind of junction for the district. Postally speaking, it was, and is, a place of importance, including within its boundaries nearly a hundred villages, all deriving their letter-sustenance from it. At the period of time in question the post-office was situated in the most central part of the town, the outside of the building partaking of the ugly and old-fashioned style of the shops of that day. It was then considered quite sufficient for the business of the place that there should be a small room of about twelve feet square devoted to postal purposes; that there should be a long counter, upon which the letters might be stamped and charged, and a small set of letter-boxes for the sorting processes. Added, however, to the proper business of the neighbourhood, there used to be a kind of work done here which was confined to a few towns only on the line of mails, selected for this supplementary business on account of their central positions. The mail-coaches, as they passed and repassed northwards and southwards, stopped here for half an hour until certain necessary sorting operations could be performed with a portion of the letters. In this way our particular town held the style and designation, and with it the *prestige*, of a "Forwarding Office." [Pg 231]

The public required little attention, and got but little. Being prior to the time of postage-stamps, and we may almost add of money-orders, not to speak of savings' bank business, few applications were ever made to the officers—consisting of a postmaster, his wife, and another clerk—for anything but stray scraps of information relative to the despatch of mails. The communication with the public was anything but close, being conducted in this town—and, in fact, in all others of our acquaintance—through a trap-door in a wooden pane in the office-window. Near to it was a huge slit, being a passage to a basket, into which letters and newspapers were promiscuously thrown. The principal labour incident to the old style of postage was in regulating the amount to be paid on the different letters. Those posted in the town for the town itself were delivered for a penny; twopence was charged into the country places surrounding; letters for the metropolis cost a shilling; and Scotch letters eightpence-halfpenny at least, the odd halfpenny being the charge as a toll for the letter crossing the Tweed. The delivery of the letters in the town took place at any time during the day, according to the arrival of the mails, and it was effected by a single letter-carrier.[160] Private boxes for the principal merchants in the town, and private bags for the country gentlemen, were almost indispensable to those who cared for the proper despatch and security of their correspondence. Many gentlemen who did not arrange to have private bags (at a great yearly expense) were compelled to make frequent journeys to the town to ascertain if any letters had arrived for them. Some letters for places within a few miles of the town would be known to be at the office for days and weeks unguessed at, till perhaps some one would hear, through one of many channels, that a letter was lying at the post-office for persons of their acquaintance, and inform them of the fact. Letter-delivering in the rural districts was then a [Pg 232]

private concern, and, in consequence, those letters destined for one particular road were laid aside till a sufficient number were accumulated to make it worth while to convey them at a charge of a penny the letter.[161] Owing to the wretched system then in force, many country [Pg 233] places round a post-office were, to all intents and purposes, more remote than most foreign countries are at this hour. One letter-carrier sufficing for the wants of the town, we need scarcely say that the number of letters received was exceedingly small. Not more than a hundred letters were posted or delivered, on an average, each day, though the town was the seat of many brisk manufactories, and was, besides, in the heart of the colliery districts. *Now*, a single firm in the same town will cause a greater amount of daily postal business.

Our purpose will not allow of our describing all the attendant circumstances of the state of things existing at this early period, or more fully than we have already done the postal arrangements of the past. But there were the "*expresses*," which ought not to be forgotten. Designed to supply some sudden emergency, they were of great use where quick intelligence was urgently required. For this purpose they might be had from the post-office people at any hour, and generally they were procured through the night. A special mounted messenger might be despatched, under this arrangement, with a single letter, marked "Haste! post haste!" carrying with him a way-bill, to account for the time it had taken him to perform the journey. The charge for expresses was at the rate of a shilling a mile, the speed at which they travelled averaging ten miles an hour.

Nor can we stay, much as we should like to do so, to picture the old mail-coach—its glittering appearance, its pawing horses; or to describe the royal-liveried guard, "grand and awful-looking in all the composure of a felt superiority." In the old times it used to pull up at the half-wooden inn near the post-office, and, during the half-hour allowed for postal business, was the observed of all observers. The half-hour was one of unusual bustle both at the office and at the inn; but, as soon as the time was up, the passengers would take their seats (the guard occupying a solitary [Pg 234] one at the end of the coach), the mails were thrown as a small addition to the load of bags at the top, and off the cavalcade would start, to the tune, perhaps, of the "Blue Bells of Scotland," if the mail was going northwards, or, if southwards, may be "The Green Hills of Tyrol," from the clear silver key-bugle of his Majesty's mail-guard.

Now, this is changed, and almost all postal arrangements prior to the days of Sir Rowland Hill are as so many things of the past. And into what a grand establishment the Post-Office itself is metamorphosed! The part now dedicated to the public might be part of a first-class banking establishment. Entering by a spacious doorway, with a lofty vestibule, there is accommodation for a score of people to stand in the ante-room and leisurely transact their business. Then there runs along the whole length of the first or public room a substantial mahogany counter, behind which the clerks stand to answer inquiries and attend to the ordinary daily business. There is a desk for the money-order clerk, and drawers in which postage-stamps are kept. Close by we see one or two ranges of boxes; one for callers' letters—"*the poste restante*"—and another for those who prefer to engage private boxes to having their letters delivered by letter-carriers.

Outside things are changed also. The wooden pane—nay, the window itself—has disappeared to make way for a more modern structure; and instead of the single letterbox, there are several. Late letters are now provided for in a separate box, and so also are newspapers. The principal post-office work is accomplished in an interior apartment, from which the public are studiously excluded.[162] A large table stands in the centre of the room; a smaller one, well padded with leather, stands near, and is used specially for letter-stamping; a number of letter-benches—for [Pg 235] boxes are not used much now—are arranged against three of the four walls and in the middle of the room, on which the letters and newspapers are sorted. Empty canvas bags of different sizes, with tin labels attached (if the name of the town is not *painted* on them), books, printed papers of different kinds, bundles of string, &c. make up the furniture of the apartment, and complete the appearance of it immediately prior to the receipt of the early-morning mail.

Long before the ordinary workmen in our towns are summoned from their repose, the Post-Office work in the provinces may be said to commence by the mail-cart clattering through the now silent streets to the railway station, there to await the arrival of the first and principal mail, and its first daily instalment of bags. At the given time, and only (even in the depth of winter) very occasionally late, the train emerges out of the darkness, its two shining lamps in front, into the silent and almost empty station. The process described in our account of the travelling post-office is here gone through; a rapid exchange of bags is made, and each interest goes its separate and hurried way. During the interval, and just before the mail-cart deposits its contents at the door of the post-office, the clerks and letter-carriers will have been roused from their beds, and somewhat sulkily, perhaps, have found their places in time. They look sleepy and dull, but this is excusable; the hour is a drowsy one, and half the world is dozing. The well-known sound of the mail-cart breaks the spell, however, and soon they are all thoroughly alive, nay, even interested, in the duties in which they are engaged. The bags just arrived are immediately seized by one of their number, who hurriedly cuts their throats, and then empties the contents upon the huge table in a great heap: somewhere in the heap our letter is safely deposited. The bundles of letters are quickly taken to the letter-stampers, through whose hands they must first pass. With a speed [Pg 236] and accuracy which rivals machinery,[163] an agile letter-stamper will soon impress a copy of the dated stamp of the office upon the back of a hundred letters, and this done, they are passed over to the clerks and sorters to arrange them in the different boxes, the process being repeated till the whole are disposed of. The newspapers and book-packets are taken from the table without being stamped, and sorted by the letter-carriers. As soon as the first or preliminary sorting is over, each sorter will proceed upon distinctive duties; some will prepare the letters for the letter-

carriers, by sorting each man's letters together, according to their different number. When this is done, the letters are handed to the carriers, who retire to a separate room, looking with its desks very like a small schoolroom, and there arrange them in order to deliver them from house to house. Other officers will prepare the letters for the sub-officers and rural messengers. When all the letters, &c. for a certain village are gathered up, they are counted and tied up in bundles; if any charged letters are sent, the amount is debited against the sub-postmaster of the place on a letter-bill—something like an invoice—which invariably accompanies every Post-Office letter-bag despatched from one post-town to another, or from one head office to a sub-office. If any registered letters are of the number to be sent, the name of each addressee is carefully written on the letter-bill. Private and locked bags for the country gentry still survive, and may be obtained for an annual fee of two guineas. They are attended to with some care, and are carried to their destination with the other made-up bags. When the mails are ready, they are sent from the Post-Office in various ways. Those for one or two country roads are sent to a local railway station, and taken in charge by the railway guard, who drops the bags at the different points on the line according to their address; others are carried by mail gigs under one or more private contractors, while the rest are taken by country-walking postmen, who make certain journeys during the day, returning in the evening with the letters and bags they have gathered during their travels. Of course the rural messengers take out loose letters as well; *e. g.* those for detached dwellings on their line of road. Our letter falls into the hands of one of those hard-working and deserving men.[164] The village, or rather hamlet, to which it is addressed is too small for a post-office, but a rural postman passes through it on his daily journeyings about ten o'clock each morning, delivering with scrupulous fidelity everything committed to his care. Thus, posted where we saw it last night, it passes from hand to hand all through the long night, and eventually reaches that hand for which it was intended 300 odd miles away, nearly as surely as if we had travelled to deliver it ourselves.

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But to return. While some of the officers are attending in this way to the wants of the country, others are serving the interests of the town. A hundred or two gentlemen, bankers and manufacturers, pay an extra guinea yearly in order to secure certain special privileges at the Post-Office. These privileges consist, in brief, of having their letters arranged in private boxes, each labelled with their names, and delivered from these boxes by one of the clerks as soon as the office is opened, or the moment the letter-carriers emerge from it to enter upon any of the daily deliveries of letters. Of course these letters must be prepared previously.

The office is open to the public for money-orders and for the transaction of the business of the new savings' banks at nine o'clock, and continues open on every day, except Saturdays, until six, on which day two hours longer are allowed. It is not necessary to describe the arrangements in these branches, seeing that the public are familiar from daily experience with them. It will suffice to say that separate clerks are usually delegated to these duties in our large towns, and are answerable to the postmaster for the correctness of their accounts. The same clerk attends to the sale of postage-stamps, keeping an account with the postmaster of the quantity *sold*, and also of the stamps *bought* from the public under the recent arrangement. In larger towns where one clerk is specially retained for these duties, he is known as the "window clerk," as it devolves upon him to answer all applications and inquiries.

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Throughout the day, the quietness of the post-office proper is broken in upon and varied by the arrival of some small mail. On one of these occasions, namely, on the receipt of the day-mail from London, the operations of the morning are gone over again on a small scale, and for a short time the office presents an appearance of some of its early bustle. Letters are delivered in the town, but those arriving for the country places remain at the office till the next morning.

The work of the Post-Office commences before "grey dawn," and long before the usual period of ordinary business in our towns; it lasts also far into the "dewy eve." When merchants lock up their desks and offices, and complete their last round of duties by posting their letters, the serious work of the Post-Office, for the second time during the day, may be said to begin. The hour before the despatch of the principal mail in any provincial Post-Office, thanks in great part to the dilatoriness of the public in general, is an hour of busy activity, seldom witnessed in any other branch of industry whatever. Almost at the same moment the country mail-gigs from their different rides, mail-carts from the local railway stations, the rural postmen from their walks, and the receiving-house keepers from the outskirts of the town, approach the post-office door, and speedily cause the office to groan as it were under the weight of letters and bags. All the force of the office is now engaged, and engaged with a will, if the bags are to be ready for the London night-mail due from Scotland at the railway station in sixty minutes. Again, the same round of bag-opening, checking, stamping (only now the stamps must be obliterated, as the letters are about to be despatched for the first time), and sorting, which we described in the morning, is again repeated. The sorted letters are examined, tied up in bundles of sixty or seventy each, and then despatched in the bags received at the beginning of the day from the London mail. The bags are tied, sealed, and hurried away to the station. Now, at length, the postmaster and his staff breathe freely. For a full hour they have been engaged as busily, yet as silently, as so many bees in a hive; but now that the work is finished, the thoughts of rogues, lovers, bankers, lawyers, clergymen, and shopkeepers; the loves and griefs, the weal and woes, of the town and country lie side by side, and for a few hours at least will enjoy the most complete and secret companionship. Every working day, and to some extent on Sunday, the same routine of work is prescribed and accomplished with little variation.

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In all this consists the *prose* of Post-Office life; but who shall describe its *poetry*? Scarcely a day passes in any of our provincial post-offices without some incident occurring calculated to surprise, amuse, or sadden. Very probably within a few minutes one person will have come to make a complaint that a certain letter or letters ought to have arrived, and must have been kept back; another will make an equally unreasonable request, or propound some strange inquiry which the poor post-office clerk is supposed to be omniscient enough to answer. Most often, however, the cases of inquiry disclose sorrowful facts, and all the consolation which can be [Pg 241] offered—supposing that the clerk has any of "the milk of human kindness" in him, a quality of mind or heart, much too rare, we confess, in the Post-Office service—will likely be the consolation of hope. The official sees now and then brief snatches of romance; perhaps the beginning or the end, though seldom the transaction throughout. Amusing circumstances are often brought out by requests tendered at the Post-Office, that letters which have been posted may be returned to the writers. A formal, but most essential rule, makes letters once posted the property of the Postmaster-General until they are delivered as addressed, and must not be given up to the *writers* on any pretence whatever. One or two requests of this kind related to us we are not likely soon to forget. On one occasion, a gentlemanly-looking commercial traveller called at an office and expressed a fear that he had inclosed two letters in wrong envelopes, the addresses of which he furnished. It appeared from the account which he reluctantly gave, after a refusal to grant his request, that his position and prospects depended upon his getting his letters, and correcting the mistakes, inasmuch as they revealed plans which he had adopted to serve two mercantile houses in the same line of business, whose interests clashed at every point. He failed to get his letters, but we hope he has retrieved himself, and is now serving one master faithfully.

Another case occurred in which a fast young gentleman confessed to carrying on a confidential correspondence with two young ladies at the same time, and that he had, or feared he had, crossed two letters which he had written at the same sitting. We heartily hope a full exposure followed. Writing of this, we are reminded of a case where a country postmaster had a letter put into his hand through the office window, together with the following message delivered with great emphasis: "Here's a letter; she wants it to go along as fast as it can, cause there's a feller wants to have her here, and she's courted by another feller that's not here, and she wants to know whether he is going to have her or not." If the letter was as explicit as the verbal message [Pg 242] to which the postmaster involuntarily lent his ear, no doubt the writer would not be long in suspense. These cases, however, are uninteresting compared to one related by another postmaster. A tradesman's daughter who had been for some time engaged to a prosperous young draper in a neighbouring town, heard from one whom she and her parents considered a creditable authority, that he was on the verge of bankruptcy. "Not a day was to be lost in breaking the bond by which she and her small fortune were linked to penury." A letter, strong and conclusive in its language, was at once written and posted, when the same informant called upon the young lady's friends to contradict and explain his previous statement, which had arisen out of some misunderstanding. "They rushed at once to the Post-Office, and no words can describe the scene; the reiterated appeals, the tears, the wringing of hands, the united entreaties of father, mother, and daughter for the restoration of the fatal letter." But the rule admitted of no exception, and the young lady had to repent at leisure of her inordinate haste.

We have only space to close with a graphic extract from the reminiscences of a post-office official, in which the everyday life of a country post-office is admirably described: "For the poor we were often persuaded both to read and write their letters; and the Irish especially, with whom penmanship was a rare accomplishment, seldom failed to succeed in their eloquent petitions; though no one can realize the difficulty of writing from a Paddy's dictation, where 'the pratees, and the pig, and the praiste, God bless him!' become involved in one long, perplexed sentence, without any period from beginning to end of the letter. One such epistle, the main topic of which was an extravagant lamentation over the death of a wife, rose to the pathetic climax, 'and now I'm obleeged to wash meself, and bake meself!'" The officers of the Dead-Letter Office could a tale unfold, one would think, only an essential rule of the service binds them to honourable [Pg 243] secresy. The Post-Office official often, however, and in spite of himself, learns more than he cares to know. "For," as the writer continues, "a great deal can be known from the outside of a letter, where there is no disposition to pry into the enclosure. Who would not be almost satisfied with knowing all the correspondence coming to or leaving the hands of the object of his interest? From our long training among the letters of our district, we knew the handwriting of most persons so intimately, that no attempt at disguise, however cunningly executed, could succeed with us. We noticed the ominous lawyers' letters addressed to tradesmen whose circumstances were growing embarrassed; and we saw the carefully ill-written direction to the street in Liverpool and London, where some poor fugitive debtor was in hiding. The evangelical curate, who wrote in a disguised hand and under an assumed name to the fascinating public singer, did not deceive us; the young man who posted a circular love-letter to three or four girls the same night, never escaped our notice; the wary maiden, prudently keeping two strings to her bow, unconsciously depended upon our good faith. The public never know how much they owe to official secresy and official honour, and how rarely this confidence is betrayed. Petty tricks and artifices, small dishonesties, histories of tyranny and suffering, exaggerations and disappointments were thrust upon our notice. As if we were the official confidants of the neighbourhood, we were acquainted with the leading events in the lives of most of the inhabitants."

Once more, "Never, surely, has any one a better chance of seeing himself as others see him than a country postmaster. Letters of complaint very securely enveloped and sealed passed through our hands, addressed to the Postmaster-General, and then came back to us for our own perusal

and explanation. One of our neighbours informed the Postmaster-General, in confidence, that we were 'ignorant and stupid.' A clergyman wrote a pathetic remonstrance, stating that he was so often disappointed of his *Morning Star and Dial*, that he had come to the conclusion that we disapproved of that paper for the clergy,[165] and, from scruples of conscience, or political motives, prevented it—one of 400 passing daily through our office—from reaching his hands whenever there was anything we considered objectionable in it." *[Pg 244]*

FOOTNOTES:

[154] The letters are also counted as they are struck with the stamp.

[155] See Appendix (F), in which the total sum for the year 1864-5 is given, from the *Revenue Estimates*, together with the different items to each railway company.

[156] On the arrival of the mail at Rugby, the bags for such places as Leicester, Derby, Lincoln, Leeds, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh were left: subsequently another branch of the railway post-office was started, which travelled from Rugby to York. After leaving Rugby, the mail continued its progress to Birmingham; thence by the Grand Junction Railway to Crewe, where the Irish letters were given off to go to Chester; thence to Parkside on the Liverpool and Manchester railway, where the bags for these two towns were left. The train then ran over the North Union Railway to Preston, and from Preston by the Preston and Lancaster line to Lancaster.—*Penny Magazine.* The above, with some few divergences, is now the mail route into Scotland.

[157] The construction of the offices have been entirely altered of late years with this view, being now as safe as they can well be made.

[158] The contrivance for exchanging mail-bags is now used at more than a hundred different railway-stations. At some stations it is used four, six, and eight times every working day. Mr. Ramsay, of the General Post-Office is said to have suggested the machinery in question; but his original invention was rude and somewhat unsatisfactory in application. Mr. Dicker made improvements in its construction so that it could be generally used. For his services, Mr. Dicker received from the Lords of the Treasury the sum of 500*l.* and the Postmaster-General found him a place as "Supervisor of Mail-bag Apparatus." Mr. Pearson Hill is credited with further improvements.

[159] Several individual cases of injury to the eyesight from railway travelling, or, what is still more probable, from an imperfect system of lighting, occur to us, but the general result may remain unquestioned.

[160] As the letter-carriers were not employed by Government, curious practices prevailed among them; they seem, in fact, to have performed their duties pretty much as they chose. As a picture not at all uncommon of this class of men and the style in which some of them performed their duties, a sentence from an autobiographical sketch of the period is most graphic: "One villanous old letter-carrier whom I remember was a drunken, surly, dishonest scoundrel, who used to carry the letters away from the office to a wretched den of his own, where I sometimes saw him sorting them on the floor, while he growled and snarled over them, like a dog over a heap of unsatisfactory bones." Not less graphic and true to the life of the period is the following picture of an old rural postman in the good old times, extracted from the pages of a popular work of fiction: "There was a post-office at H——, and an old fellow who stowed away the letters in any or all his pockets, as it best suited him. I have often met him in the lanes thereabouts and asked him for letters. Sometimes I have come upon him, sitting on the hedge bank, resting; and he has begged me to read an address, too illegible for his spectacled eyes to decipher. When I used to ask him if he had anything for me or for Holdsworth (he was never particular to whom he gave his letters, so that he got rid of them somehow and could set off homewards), he would say that he thought he had, for such was his invariable safe form of answer, and would then fumble in breast-pockets, waistcoat-pockets, breeches-pockets, and as a last resort in his coat-tail pockets; and at length tried to comfort me if I looked disappointed by telling me, '*Hoo* had missed this *toime* but was sure to write to-morrow;' 'Hoo' representing with him an imaginary sweetheart."

[161] We still sometimes hear reports, to the effect that deliveries in some towns are not made unless there are a certain number of letters. Of course this is never so, but it reminds us of a (reported) postal regulation in a certain British dependency, where the postman (who is a person of intelligence) always reads the letters committed to his care, and delivers them only if *important*; otherwise, it is said, he makes them wait for the following mail!

[162] The postmaster sometimes transacts his business in another separate apartment, the control of the office, when he is not immediately present, devolving on the senior clerk on duty.

[163] Machines for letter-stamping have been in use for some time in London and Paris. They are not yet perfect enough for general use.

[164] It is generally allowed that the country postmen are, as a rule, such as we have described them. Edward Capern, the Wayside Poet, at the time a rural letter-carrier between Bideford and Buckland Brewer, Devonshire, walking thirteen miles a-day, Sunday included, for 10*s.* 6*d.* a-week has described their life in the following poem:—

"O! the postman's is as blessed a life
As any one's, I trow,
If leaping the stile o'er many a mile
Can blessedness bestow.

"If tearing your way through a tangled wood,
Or dragging your limbs through a lawn;
If wading knee-deep through an angry flood,
Or a plough'd field newly sown,—

"If sweating big drops 'neath a burning sun,
And shiv'ring 'mid sleet and snow;
If drenched to the skin with rain, be fun,
And can a joy bestow!

"If toiling away through a weary week
(No six days work but seven)
Without one holy hour to seek
A resting place in heaven.

"If hearing the bells ring Sabbath chimes,
To bid us all repair
To church (as in the olden times)
And bend the knee in prayer.

"If in these bells he hears a voice
'To thy delivery!'
God says to every soul 'rejoice,'
But, postman, not to thee.

"O, the postman's is a blessed life!
And sighing heavily,
'Ha, ha,' he'll say, 'alack a-day!
Where's Britain's piety?'

"Heigho! I come and go
Through the muck and miry slough;
Heigho! I come and go
Heavy at heart and weary O!

"Heigho! Heigho!
Does any one pray for the postman? No!
No! no! no! no!
Or he would not be robbed of his Sabbath so!"

In *The Rural Postman's Sabbath*, Capern seems to breathe a more contented strain. His poetical remonstrances, probably on account of their originality, were more successful than they might have been if given in prose. The authorities raised his salary, and relieved him of his Sunday labours. Few rural postmen now travel on Sundays. The poet-postman has also had a pension granted him from the Royal Bounty Fund. In Capern's case we find literary abilities of a high order in the very lowest ranks of the Post-Office. When we have mentioned the names of Mr. Anthony Trollope, Mr. Edmund Yates, and Mr. Scudamore, we have said enough to show that they exist also in the highest ranks of the service.

[165] It is matter of notoriety, furnishing a fruitful subject for reflection and comment, that the great majority of complaints reaching the Post-Office authorities take their rise with *clergymen*. As offering a curious commentary on the Divine injunction to be merciful, and to forgive "seventy times seven," we once saw a requisition from a clergyman for the dismissal of a post-office clerk—a man with a wife and several children, by the way—on the ground that he had twice caused his letters to be missent, in each case losing the clerical correspondent a post.

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CHAPTER III.

ON THE MAIL-PACKET SERVICE.

Our home and foreign mail-packet service is a costly and gigantic branch of the Post-Office establishment. During the greater part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the service was under the control of the Post-Office authorities. We have already given many details of the packet management of the period. It was then transferred to the Board of Admiralty, in whose hands it continued up to so late as 1860. Even at the commencement of the present century, the service seems to have been carried on regardless of economy, and not without traces of that wastefulness—we might almost say corruption—in the management, which, a hundred years previously, would not have been regarded as very remarkable. The arrangements eighty years ago, were none of the best. At this period some of the vessels employed to convey mails were hired, without any tender, while some few were the property of the Crown. In 1788, the state of the marine mail service attracted parliamentary attention; for in that year we find a Committee of Fees and Gratuities reporting that the cost of the mail service had reached an unreasonable sum. They stated that for eighteen years that cost had been over a million sterling, or an average charge of 60,000*l.* annually. With regard to the manner in which the work was done, they found that many officers of the Post-Office, "even down to the chamber keepers," were owners of some of the packets employed to the exclusion of all else. This Committee, with a view to remedying [Pg 246] these and other abuses, recommended that the Government should change the system entirely—the Government share of the packets to be sold, and the entire service offered by public and competitive tender. That this advice was not acted upon, is clear from the fact that four years

afterwards, the Finance Committee urged upon the Government the necessity of complying with the recommendations of 1788. In 1810, the cost of the service had increased to 105,000*l.*; in 1814 to 160,000*l.*[166]

Steam vessels had been in successful operation for three years before they were introduced into the mail service. In 1818, the *Rob Roy* steam-packet plied regularly between Greenock and Belfast; in 1821, the year in which Crown packets were established, the Post-Office, or rather the Admiralty on behalf of the Post-Office, asked the help of steam. The Holyhead station for Ireland, and the Dover station for the Continent, were chosen for the experiment of mail-steamers. They were successful; and soon we find six steam-packets stationed at each place. Then we have the gradual introduction of mail contracts. The first of these commercial contracts was made in 1833, with the Mona Island Steam Company, to run steamers twice a week between Liverpool and Douglas, in the Isle of Man. Immediately after, the General Steam Navigation Company contracted to carry the Rotterdam and Hamburgh mails for 17,000*l.* a-year. In 1853 these mails were transferred to the Ostend route. The year 1839 was quite an epoch in the history of the packet service; Mr. Samuel Cunard of Halifax, Nova Scotia, having in that year contracted with the British Government for a fortnightly mail across the Atlantic, for the sum of 60,000*l.* a-year. The Cunard line of steamers is now universally known, and is unrivalled.

Little more than a hundred years ago, 50,000*l.* sufficed to pay for the entire mail service of the [Pg 247] period; about half that sum being the extent of the charges properly appertaining to the Post-Office. Then, only a few continental mails and an occasional packet to the colonies of North America and the West Indies, were all that had to be sustained; even those were kept up at a considerable loss.[167] At that time the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia and New Zealand were in undisputed possession of these enormous colonies; the Dutch were then the only targets for the arrows of the Caffres in South Africa; Warren Hastings and Lord Clive were children at Daylesford and Market Drayton, and little dreamt of their subsequent career in the East; while the tide of emigration which has since carried Anglo-Saxon blood and Anglo-Saxon energy into every corner of the globe had not then, to any extent, set in. That a hundred years of unequalled [Pg 248] internal progress has developed our great empire and called into life fresh and important agencies, what reflecting mind can doubt? For many recent years the packet service of the country, traversing every known sea to keep up a connexion with those whom the exigencies of life and commerce have dispersed so widely, has cost the nation something like a million sterling per annum!

In accordance with the provisions of an Act passed in the session of 1859-1860, the general control of the British packet service was transferred (on the 1st of April, 1860) to the Post-Office authorities, from whom it ought never to have been taken. It was considered that the Postmaster-General, under the Treasury, was the best judge of the requirements of the service, and could best set about reducing the enormous expenditure arising from contracts, which the Lords of the Admiralty, generally from political motives, had entered into. That this judgment was the correct one, three years have amply sufficed to prove. Contracts have been thrown open to public competition; and although many of the companies which had previously done certain services re-secured them, it was found that they had to engage to do the work at a much lower figure—in one or two cases, in fact, for half the amount they had been wont to receive. All the packet contracts, as they fall vacant, are advertised fully by the Post-Office authorities, and in sufficient time. Printed forms are issued, and intending contractors are required to fill them up, every arrangement being made to secure the efficiency of the work. Nearly all the contracts are now made terminable on twelve months' notice being given by the Postmaster-General.

Another change which the Post-Office authorities have made is a radical but a necessary one, and bids fair to make the mail-packet service, at no distant date, self-supporting, so far as the mother-country is concerned. Under the new principle already applied to India and Australia, the British colonies are required to pay *half the cost* of their respective services, the English Government *[Pg 249]* paying the remainder. The result in some instances has been an increase in postage rates, but we hope this will not long be considered necessary.

According to the Postmaster-General's *Ninth Report*—from which much of the information concerning the present state of the mail service is taken—we find that the total number of steam-ships employed in the mail-packet service, exclusive of tenders, &c., is no less than ninety-six, with an aggregate of 140,000 tons, and of 36,000 horse-power. The largest and most powerful mail-packet in the service is the Cunard paddle-wheel steam-ship *Scotia*, of 3,871 tons burden, and 1,000 horse-power. It belongs to the contractors for the North American service, Messrs. Cunard, Burns, and Maciver. The smallest packet, according to the same authority, was stated to be the *Vivid*, of 300 tons, and 128 horse-power, the property of Mr. Churchward. It is more than probable, however, that this packet is not now in the service, as Mr. Churchward's contracts have subsequently been given to the Belgian Government.

The mail-packet contracts are divided into those of the Home and those of the Foreign services. The most important home service is that for carrying the Irish mails, entered into by the City of Dublin Steam-packet Company. They are required to keep four powerful steam-vessels to ply twice a-day between Holyhead and Kingstown, for a yearly payment of 85,900*l.* This contract lasts until 1865. The least important contract in the home service, if we may judge by the terms imposed, is that for the daily conveyance of mails between Greenock and Belfast, entered into by Mr. Burns of Glasgow. Mr. Burns undertakes to perform this service in all weathers, *free of expense*, and to pay an annual sum of 100*l.* as penalty for general improper performance of the

duty!

The home contracts dwindle into insignificance before those of the foreign service. The foreign packets travel over the immense distance of 3,000,000 of statute miles each year. As the cost of [Pg 250] the whole service is nearly a million pounds annually, the average charge per mile is 6*s.* 4*d.* The average speed of the foreign packets is ten miles an hour. The principal contracts are those for the Indian and Chinese mails, entered into by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam-navigation Company, and for which the sum of 253,000*l.* is paid yearly. In this service, packets sail four times a month from Southampton, and other mails are met at Marseilles at the like intervals. A fleet of steamers, of not less than 1,100 tons, are engaged for a system of relays established in the Mediterranean, and also between Suez and Bombay, Suez and Calcutta, and Bombay and China. The Australian mails are carried out to Ceylon in the Indian packets, when, on arrival at that point, another fleet of steamers, engaged from the same company on a supplementary contract of 134,672*l.* a-year, carry them between Point de Galle and Sydney. An additional line of packets to the Antipodes, *viâ* Panama, will be run in January, 1865. The West Indian are the worst paying of all the foreign mails, costing twice as much as they yield.[168] The Royal Mail Steam-packet Company is paid the enormous sum of 270,000*l.* a-year for their conveyance. The North American mails are carried by Messrs. Cunard & Co. for the sum of 176,340*l.* a-year. Eight steam-vessels are employed by this firm, leaving Liverpool once a-week, and travelling also between New York and Nassau once a-month. Sir Samuel Cunard himself contracts for the Canadian mails, receiving the yearly sum of 14,700*l.* These supplementary packets sail from Halifax, on the arrival of the Cunard steamers from Europe, to Bermuda and St. Thomas, and also to Newfoundland. The Canadian contract costs less than any other on the foreign service.

The most distant point to which English mails are conveyed by the British packet service is [Pg 251] Auckland, New Zealand, about 15,000 statute miles from Southampton. This service is rendered by the Intercolonial Royal Mail-packet Company, with a fleet of four strong steamers, for 22,000*l.* annually. Of course, this company only performs the journeys between Sydney in New South Wales and Auckland in New Zealand. The nearest point from England is Calais, twenty-six miles from Dover.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary length of some of the journeys of the different mail packets, the Postmaster-General informs us that, except in case of accident, the packets, even when late, arrive within a few hours of their time, sometimes within a few minutes. As examples of remarkable punctuality, which is now the rule, and not the exception, he gives several instances, from which we select the following:—"The mails for the West Indies and Central America, despatched from Southampton on the 17th of September, were delivered at the Danish island of St. Thomas, distant more than 4,000 miles, at the precise moment at which they were due. On the same voyage, the mails for Jamaica and Demerara, conveyed in each case by a separate branch-packet, were delivered within a few minutes of the time at which they were due; the mails for parts of Central America and for the Pacific were delivered at Colon, on the eastern coast of the Isthmus of Panama, distant 5,400 miles, thirty minutes after time, the packet having been detained at sea that precise period by H.M.S. *Orlando*; while the mails for Chili, after having been conveyed with others across the Isthmus of Panama, were delivered at Valparaiso, distant nearly 9,000 miles from Southampton, two hours before the appointed time."

The mail packets employ a force, including officers, of more than 8,000 men. In addition to these, there is a staff of thirty-three naval officers—all officers of the royal navy, though maintained by the Post-Office—employed upon such packets as those for the Cape and the west coast of Africa, and charged with the care and correct delivery of the mails. They are further required to do all [Pg 252] they can to guard against delay on the voyage, and to report on nautical questions affecting in any way the proper efficiency of the service. Other officers, besides, are fixed at different foreign stations to direct the transfers of mails from packet to packet, or from packets to other modes of conveyance. Then, again, in growing numbers, another class of officers travel in charge of mails, such as the Indian and Australian, and on all the North American packets, who, with a number of sorters, are employed in sorting the mails *during the voyage*, in order to save time and labour in the despatch and receipt of mails at London and Liverpool respectively. There are now twenty-eight of this new class of working mail officers, who, of course, are substituted for the old class of naval agents. On the less important mail packets no naval officer is specially appointed, but the mails are taken in charge by the commander.

In past years few casualties, comparatively, have occurred in this service. The loss of the mail packet *Violet*, on her journey between Ostend and Dover, in 1856, will be remembered by many. One incident in that melancholy shipwreck deserves mention here, affording a gleam of rich sunshine amid a page of dry though not unimportant matter. Mr. Mortleman, the mail officer in charge of the bags, on seeing that there was no chance for the packet, must have gone down into the hold and have removed all the cases containing the mail bags from that part of the vessel; and further, placed them so that when the ship and all in it went down, they might float—a proceeding which ultimately led to the recovery of all the bags, except one, containing a case of despatches. On another occasion, the mail master of a Canadian packet sacrificed his life, when he might have escaped, by going below to secure the mails intrusted to him. Other cases of a similar devotion to duty have, on several occasions of exposure to imminent danger, distinguished the conduct of these public officers, proving that some of them regard the onerous duties of their position in a somewhat higher light than we find obtains in the ordinary business [Pg 253] of life.

During the last year, however, an "unprecedentedly large number of shipwrecks"[169] are on record, no less than five valuable packets having been totally lost. In the early part of the year, the *Karnak*, belonging to Messrs. Cunard and Co., was wrecked in entering Nassau harbour. Shortly after, the *Lima* struck on a reef off Lagarto Island, in the South Pacific Ocean, and went down. The only loss of life occurred in the case of the *Cleopatra*, the third packet which was lost. This last-named vessel, belonging to the African Steam-ship Company, the contractors for the Cape service, was wrecked on Shebar reef, near Sierra Leone, when an officer and four Kroomen were washed from a raft and drowned in endeavouring to reach the shore. Towards the close of 1862, the *Avon*, belonging to the contractors for the West Indian service, was wrecked at her moorings in the harbour of Colon, New Granada; and, lastly, the *Colombo* (conveying the Australian mails from Sydney) shared the same fate on Minicoy Island, 400 miles from Ceylon. The greatest loss of correspondence was caused by the failure of the last-mentioned packet, though, from the care of the Post-Office authorities, and the prompt arrangements of the contractors, the loss was not nearly so great as it might otherwise have been if the proper appliances had not been ready to hand. The mails were rescued from their ocean bed and brought to London, where every effort that skill could devise was made to restore them to their original condition. They were carefully dried, in order that the addresses of the letters and newspapers might be deciphered. When dried it was requisite that they should be handled most carefully to prevent them crumbling to pieces—so much so, in fact, that many were unfit to travel out of London without being tied up carefully, gummed, and placed in new envelopes, and re-addressed, providing that the old address could by any means be read or obtained. [Pg 254] Notwithstanding all the care and attention bestowed, a great number of letters remained, in the words of the Post-Office people, "in a hopeless state of pulp." An Australian *carte de visite*, which arrived with the rescued mails from the *Colombo*, and now before us, may have been a gem of art from one of the antipodean "temples of the sun," but we have not now the means of judging, as a yellow bit of paper, with an indistinct outline upon it, is all that remains.

FOOTNOTES:

[166] At this period the packets were worked at a considerable loss; though this large item was occasioned by the war, yet the sea-postage never amounted to half the cost of the maintenance of the mail-packets.

[167] In the American Colonies, Benjamin Franklin was the last and by far the best colonial Postmaster-General. He had forty years experience of postal work, having been appointed postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737. Mr. Pliny Miles, in his history of the Post-Office in America, *New York Bankers' Magazine*, vol. vii. p. 360, has furnished many interesting particulars of this period. It appears that Franklin notified his appointment in his own newspaper as follows: "Notice is hereby given, that the Post-Office at Philadelphia is now kept at B. Franklin's in Market Street, and that Henry Pratt is appointed riding-postmaster for all stages between Philadelphia and Newport, Virginia, who sets out *about the beginning* (!) of each month, and returns in twenty-four days, by whom gentlemen, merchants, and others may have their letters carefully conveyed." What follows is also interesting. It would seem that Franklin was somewhat unceremoniously dismissed from his post, upon which he wrote, by way of protest, that up to the date of his appointment "the American Post-Office never had paid anything to Britain. We (himself and assistant) were to have 600*l.* a-year between us, *if we could make that sum out of the profits of the office*. To do this, a variety of improvements were necessary; some of these were, inevitably, at the beginning expensive; so that in the first four years the office became above 900*l.* in debt to us. But it soon after began to repay us; and before I was displaced by a freak of the Minister's we had brought it to yield three times as much clear revenue to the Crown as the whole Post-Office of Ireland. Since that imprudent transaction," adds Franklin, with a bit of pardonable irony, "they have received from it—not one farthing!"

[168] The amount of sea-postage collected has never reached within late years to more than *half* the entire cost of the mail-packet service. In 1860, this cost was 863,000*l.* and the postage collected amounted to 409,000*l.*

[169] Postmaster-General's *Ninth Report*, p. 84.

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CHAPTER IV.

ON POSTAGE-STAMPS.

The history of postage-stamps is somewhat remarkable. First used, as many of our readers will remember, in May 1840, the postage stamp has only just passed out of its years of minority, and yet at this present moment there are more than fifteen hundred different varieties of its species in existence, and the number is increasing every month. The question as to who invented the postage-stamp would not be easily settled; it appears to be the result of innumerable improvements suggested by many different individuals. We will not enter far into the controversy, and would only urge that the discussion as to its origin has once more served to exemplify the truth of the saying of the wise man, "The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun." Post-paid envelopes were in use in France as early as the reign of Louis XIV.[170] Pelisson states that they originated, in 1653, with a M. de Velayer, who established, under royal authority, a private penny post in Paris, placing boxes at the corners of the streets for the reception of letters, which should be wrapped up in certain

envelopes. Shopkeepers in the immediate neighbourhood sold the envelopes, some of which are still extant.[171]

In England, stamps to prepay letters were most probably suggested by the newspaper duty-stamp, then, and for some time previously, in use. Mr. Charles Whiting seems to have thrown out [Pg 256] this suggestion to the Post-Office authorities in 1830.[172] Afterwards, Mr. Charles Knight proposed a stamped cover for the circulation of newspapers. Dr. Gray, of the British Museum, claims the credit of having suggested that letters should be prepaid with them, as early as 1834.[173] No steps, however, were taken in regard to any recommendations on the subject till the proposals for post reform; and, consequently, the credit of the improvement has fallen, to a considerable extent, to Sir Rowland Hill. The use of postage-stamps was scarcely part of his original scheme, though it followed almost as a matter of course: and, indeed, this public benefactor, crowned with so many well-won laurels, may easily afford to dispense with the adornment of this single one.

Mr. Hill's famous pamphlet on *Post Reform* went through three editions rapidly. In the first edition, which was published privately, we find no mention of the use of stamps—though prepayment of letters was always a principal feature in his proposals—*money payments* over the counter of the receiving-office being all that was suggested under this head. Immediately after the publication of the first edition, the members of the Royal Commission on the Post-Office, which had been sitting at intervals since 1833, called the author before them. In connexion with the subject of the prepayment of letters, the officers of the Stamp Office—Mr. Dickenson, the paper-maker, and several others—were also examined, and the subject was thoroughly discussed.[174] Almost, as it would seem, as a consequence of the proceedings before Committee, Mr. Hill, in the second edition of his pamphlet, recommended definitely the use of some kind of stamps or stamped envelopes as a means of prepayment. When the Committee of the House of Commons met in 1837-8 to investigate the merits of Mr. Hill's penny-postage scheme, they were, of course, [Pg 257] required to express an opinion as to the desirability or otherwise of prepayment by means of stamps. A favourable opinion was given on the subject, so that when the Government brought in and carried the Penny-Postage Act, a clause for their use formed a component part of it.

Though it was agreed on all hands that stamps, or stamped paper of some sort, should come into use with the advent of cheap postage, it was by no means easy to hit upon a definite plan, or, when a number of plans were submitted, to decide upon the particular one to be adopted. Stamped *paper*, representing different charges, was first suggested. Folded in a particular way, a simple revenue-stamp would then be exposed to view, and frank the letter. Another suggestion was that a stamped *wafer*, as it was called, should be used, and, placed on the back of a letter, seal and frank it at the same time. The idea of stamped *envelopes*, however, was at first by far the most popular, and it was decided that they should be the prepaying medium. Plans and suggestions for the carrying out of this arrangement being required at once, the Lords of the Treasury issued a somewhat pompous proclamation, dated August 23d, 1839, inviting "all artists, men of science, and the public in general," to offer proposals "as to the manner in which the stamp may best be brought into use." So important was the subject considered, that Lord Palmerston, the then Foreign Secretary, was directed to apprise foreign Governments of the matter, and invite suggestions from any part of the civilized world. Three months were allowed for plans, and two prizes of 200*l.* and 100*l.* were offered for proposals on the subject, "which my Lords may think most deserving of attention." The palm was carried off by the late Mr. Mulready, Royal Academician, who designed the envelopes now known by his name. These envelopes, which allegorically celebrated the triumphs of the post in a host of emblematical figures, were of two colours; the one for a penny being printed in black, and the other, for the twopenny postage, in [Pg 258] blue ink. They gave little satisfaction, however, and at the end of six months were withdrawn from use. There was little room left on the envelope for the address. They left to the common and vulgar gaze, as Miss Martineau, we think, has pointed out, emotions of the mind which had always best be kept in the background, and instead "of spreading a taste for high art," which had been hoped, they brought it into considerable ridicule.[175]

Before the postage-envelope was finally withdrawn from use, the Treasury issued another prospectus, offering a reward of 500*l.* for the best design and plan for a simple postage-*label*. It was made a condition that it should be simple, handy, and easily placed on paper, and of a design which would make forgery difficult, if not impossible. About 1,000 designs were sent in, but not one was chosen. Eventually, the ugly black stamp, said to be the joint production of some of the officers of the Stamp- and Post-Offices, was decided upon and brought into use. Two years afterwards, this black stamp was changed to brown, principally with a view to make the obliterating process more perfect, and the better to detect the dishonesty of using old stamps. For the same reasons, the colour was again changed in a short time to red, and so it has remained to the present time. The twopenny stamp has been from the first blue. Up to this date, at different intervals, six other stamps have been issued, as the necessities of the inland or foreign postage required them. The tenpenny stamp, of an octagonal shape and brown colour, is now scarcely ever used, if it be not even withdrawn from circulation. The list comprises, besides the stamps we have mentioned, the sixpenny (lilac), the shilling (green), the fourpenny [Pg 259] (vermilion), the threepenny (rose), and the ninepenny (yellow). The last two were issued only two or three years ago. The whole of the English labels bear the impression of the head of Queen Victoria, and are all of the same size and shape (if we except the tenpenny stamp), the sole difference being in the colour, and in the various borderings round the Queen's portraits. Besides these distinguishing marks, however, they all tell the tale of their own value.[176]

Soon after the introduction of postage-stamps, stamped envelopes were again proposed. This time the proposition was a very simple one, only consisting of the usual kind of stamp embossed on the right-hand corner of a common envelope; the shape to be oval, round, or octagonal, according to the value of the envelope. For the envelopes themselves, a peculiar kind of paper was prepared by Mr. Dickenson, and was considered on all hands to be the best possible preventive of forgery. This paper, which was manufactured with lines of thread or silk stretched through its substance, has been used ever since. Russia, in adopting the stamped envelope, guards against forgery by means of a large water-mark of a spread eagle running over the envelope.

The English Stamp-Office affords every facility in the matter of stamped paper and envelopes, and private individuals may indulge their tastes to almost any extent. The officers of Inland Revenue, Somerset House, will place an embossed stamp on any paper or envelope taken to them, equal to the value of any of those above mentioned, or to a combination of any of them, under the following regulations:— [Pg 260]

1st. When the stamps required do not amount to 10*l.* worth one shilling is charged, in addition to the postage stamps, for each distinct size of paper.

2d. When the stamps amount to 10*l.* worth no fee is charged if one size of paper only be sent.

3d. When the stamps amount to 20*l.* worth, no fee is charged, and two sizes of paper are allowed; 30*l.* three sizes are allowed; 40*l.* four sizes.

4th. No *folded* paper can be stamped; and therefore paper, whether intended for envelopes or letters, must be sent unfolded and without being creased.

5th. Every distinct size and form of envelope or paper must be marked so as to indicate the plan on which the stamp is to be impressed, in order that, when the envelope or letter is folded and made up, the stamp may appear in the proper position according to the rules of the Post-Office.

6th. No coloured paper can be received for stamping, nor any paper which is too thin to bear the impression of the dies.

7th. Envelopes provided by the office, with the proper stamps thereon, will be substituted for any which may be spoiled in the operation of stamping.

A recent concession made by the Board of Inland Revenue may be regarded as one of the latest novelties in the advertising world. Under the arrangement in question, the Stamp-Office permits embossed rings with the name of a particular firm, *e. g.* "Allsop & Co., Burton-on-Trent," "De la Rue & Co.," to be placed round the stamp as a border to it.

In 1844, after the *exposé* of the letter-opening practices at the General Post-Office, Mr. Leech gave in *Punch* his "Anti-Graham Envelopes," and his satirical postage envelope, afterwards engraved by Mr. W. J. Linton, and widely circulated, represents Sir James Graham sitting as "Britannia." About the same time there might have been seen in the windows of booksellers of the less respectable class, a kind of padlock envelope, exhibiting the motto, "Not to be Grahamed." [Pg 261]

For eight long years, the English people may be said to have enjoyed a complete monopoly in postage-stamps. Towards the close of 1848, they were introduced into France, and subsequently into every civilized nation in the world. Last year they even penetrated into the Ottoman Empire, and strange as it appears, when viewed in the light of Mohammedan usage, the Sultan has been prevailed upon to allow his portrait to appear on the new issues of Turkish stamps.

In pursuance of a recommendation of a select committee of the House of Commons which sat in 1852, a perforating machine was purchased from Mr. Henry Archer, the inventor, for the sum of four thousand pounds.[177] The same committee could not decide, they said, on the "conflicting evidence" whether copper-plate engraving or surface printing would best secure the stamps against forgery, but they considered that the accurate perforation of the sheets would be a valuable preventive against forgery, "inasmuch as it would be exceedingly difficult to counterfeit sheets, and sheets badly done would at once excite suspicion when offered for sale." The invention of the perforating machine is said to have been attended with considerable labour, as, undoubtedly, it was by skill and ingenuity. To the Post-Office and the public the patent was sufficiently cheap. For a number of years the stamps had to be separated from each other by knives or scissors; now one stamp may be torn from the other with ease and safety. The process of puncturing the narrow spaces round each stamp—an undertaking not so easy as it seems—is the last the sheet of stamps undergoes before it is ready for sale. [Pg 262]

With regard to the other processes, little is known out of the Stamp-Office, beyond what may be gathered from a close inspection of the postage-stamps themselves. For obvious reasons, it has never been thought desirable to publish any account of the manufacture of stamps. We may simply say that all English postage-labels are manufactured at Somerset House, and the entire establishment, which is distinct from the other branches of the Inland Revenue Department, is managed at the annual expense of thirty thousand pounds.[178] Of this sum, nineteen thousand pounds is the estimated cost for the present year, 1863-1864, of paper for labels and envelopes, and for printing, gumming, and folding. About five thousands pounds will be necessary to pay the salaries of the various officers, including five hundred pounds to the supervisor, and one hundred

pounds to the superintendent of the perforating process. Mr. Edwin Hill, a brother of Sir Rowland Hill, is at the head of the department. A large number of boys are employed at the machines, under the superintendence of three or four intelligent superintendents. The paper used for the stamps is of a peculiar make, each sheet having a water-mark of two hundred and forty crowns; the blocks used are of first-rate quality, and only subjected to a certain number of impressions. The blocks are inked with rollers as in letter-press printing. Of course, the stamps are printed in sheets, though each one is struck with the same die or punch. After the printing, and before the sheets are perforated, they are covered on the back with a gelatine matter to render the label adhesive.

Great precaution is taken in the printing of the stamps to provide against forgery. All the lines and marks, as well as the initial letters in the corner, are arranged so as to make the whole affair [Pg 263] inimitable. The best preservative, however, in our opinion, against a spurious article, is the arrangement under which stamps are sold. Only obtainable in any large quantity from the Stamp or Post-Offices, any attempt on the part of the forger to put a base article into circulation is encumbered with difficulties. Stamps, while they do duty for coin, are used almost exclusively for small transactions, and generally among people well known to each other. Other precautions are nevertheless very necessary; and besides the initial letters on each stamp—different in every one of the two hundred and forty in the sheet—which are regarded as so many checks on the forger, this pest to society would have to engrave his own die, and cast his own blocks, and find a drilling-machine, perhaps the most difficult undertaking of all. The paper, besides, would be a considerable obstacle, and not less so the ink, for that used in this manufacture differs from ordinary printer's ink, not merely in colour, but in being soluble in water.

When postage-stamps were first introduced in England, it was little thought that they would become a medium of exchange, and far less that they would excite such a *furore* among stamp collectors. The same stamp may do duty in a number of various ways before it serves its normal purpose. It may have proceeded through the post a dozen times imbedded within the folds of a letter, before it becomes affixed to one, and gets its career ended by an ugly knock on the face—for its countenance once disfigured, it has run its course. Besides their being so handy in paying a trifling debt or going on a merciful errand, the advertising columns of any newspaper will shew the reader many of the thousand and one ways in which he may turn his spare postage-stamps to account. You may suddenly fall upon a promise of an easy competence for the insignificant acknowledgment of half-a-crown's worth of this article. Friends to humanity assure you a prompt remittance of thirteen Queen's heads will secure you perfect exemption from all the ills that flesh [Pg 264] is heir to. For the same quantity another who does the prophetic strain, will tell you which horse will win the Derby, "as surely as if you stood at the winning-post on the very day." "Stable Boy," promises all subscribers of twelve stamps that if they "do not win on this event, he will never put his name in print again." Of course all this is quackery, or worse; still the reader need not be told how in innumerable *bonâ fide* cases the system of postage-stamp remittances is exceedingly handy for both buyer and vendor, and how trade—retail at any rate—is fostered by it. As a social arrangement, for the poorer classes especially, we could not well over-estimate its usefulness. Again we see a good result of the penny-post scheme. Since 1840, not only has the use of postage-stamps in this way never been discouraged (as it was always thought that fewer coin letters would be sent in consequence), but the Post-Office authorities have recently made provision for taking them from the public, when not soiled or not presented in single stamps. This arrangement is already in force at the principal post-offices, and will ultimately extend to all. In America, as will be familiar to most readers, postage-stamps have formed the principal currency of small value almost since the breaking out of the present fratricidal war. More recently, the United States Government has issued the stamps without gum, as it was found inconvenient to pass them frequently from hand to hand, after they had undergone the gelatinizing process. Under an Act, "Postage Currency, July 17th, 1862," the Federal authorities have issued stamps printed on larger sized paper, with directions for their use under the peculiar circumstances.

The obliteration of postage-labels in their passage through the post, requires a passing notice. Different countries obliterate their stamps variously and with different objects. In France they obliterate with a hand-stamp having acute prominences in it, which, when thrown on the stamp, not only disfigures, but perforates it with numerous dots placed closely together. In Holland, the word "*Franco*" is imprinted in large letters. Some countries, *e. g.* Italy, Austria, and Prussia, mark [Pg 265] on the label itself, the name of the despatching town, together with the date of despatch. In England, the purpose of the defacement marks is *primarily* to prevent the stamp being used again. It also serves to show—inasmuch as the obliterating stamp of every British Post-Office is consecutively numbered—where the letter was posted, in the event of the other dated stamp being imperfectly impressed. For this purpose the British Postal Guide gives a list of the post-towns and the official number of each. The mark of St. Martin's-le-Grand is a changeable figure in a circle, according to the time of day during which the letter has been posted and struck; for the London district offices, we have the initials of the district, and the number of the office given in an oval. The figures in England are surrounded by lines forming a circle; in Scotland by three lines at the top and three at the bottom of them; in Ireland the lines surround the figures of the particular office in a diamond shape.

It only remains to refer for a moment to the *timbromanie*, or stamp mania. The scenes in Birchin Lane in 1862, where crowds nightly congregated, to the exceeding annoyance and wonderment of policeman X—where ladies and gentlemen of all ages and all ranks, from Cabinet-ministers to crossing-sweepers, were busy, with album or portfolio in hand, buying, selling, or exchanging, are now known to have been the beginnings of what may almost be termed a new trade. Postage-

stamp exchanges are now common enough; one held in Lombard Street on Saturday afternoons is largely attended. Looking the other day in the advertisement pages of a monthly magazine, we counted no fewer than sixty different dealers in postage-stamps there advertising their wares. Twelve months ago, there was no regular mart in London at which foreign stamps might be bought; now there are a dozen regular dealers in the metropolis, who are doing a profitable trade. About a year ago, we witnessed the establishment of a monthly organ for the trade in the [Pg 266] *Stamp-collector's Magazine*; at this present moment there are no less than *ten* such publications in existence in the United Kingdom. England is not the only country interested in stamp-collecting. As might be expected, the custom originated in France, and has prevailed there for a number of years. In the gardens of the Tuileries, and also to some extent in those of the Luxembourg, crowds still gather, principally on Sunday afternoons, and may be seen sitting under the trees, sometimes in a state of great excitement, as they busily sell or exchange any of their surplus stock for some of which they may have been in search. The gathering of a complete set of postage-stamps, and a proper arrangement of them, is at least a harmless and innocent amusement. On this point, however, we prefer, in conclusion, to let Dr. Gray, of the British Museum, speak,[179] and our readers to judge for themselves. "The use and charm of collecting any kind of object is to educate the mind and the eye to careful observation, accurate comparison, and just reasoning on the differences and likenesses which they present, and to interest the collector in the design or art shown in their creation or manufacture, and the history of the country which produces or uses the objects collected. The postage-stamps afford good objects for all these branches of study, as they are sufficiently different to present broad outlines for their classification; and yet some of the variations are so slight, that they require minute examination and comparison to prevent them from being overlooked. The fact of obtaining stamps from so many countries, suggests to ask what were the circumstances that induced the adoption, the history of the countries which issue them, and the understanding why some countries (like France) have considered it necessary, in so few years, to make so many changes in the form or design of the stamp used; while other countries, like Holland, have never made the slightest change.

"The changes referred to all mark some historical event of importance—such as the accession of [Pg 267] a new king, a change in the form of government, or the absorption of some smaller state into some larger one; a change in the currency, or some other revolution. Hence, a collection of postage-stamps may be considered, like a collection of coins, an epitome of the history of Europe and America for the last quarter of a century; and at the same time, as they exhibit much variation in design and in execution as a collection of works of art on a small scale, showing the style of art of the countries that issue them, while the size of the collection, and the number in which they are arranged and kept, will show the industry, taste, and neatness of the collector."

FOOTNOTES:

[170] Fournier.

[171] Vide *Quarterly Review* for October, 1839.

[172] Report of Select Committee on Postage, vol. iv. p. 391.

[173] *Hand Catalogue of Postage-Stamps*, p. 6.

[174] Dr. J. E. Gray.

[175] The Mulready envelopes are regarded as great curiosities by stamp-collectors, and as their value rose to about fifteen shillings, a spurious imitation found its way into the market, usually to be had at half a crown. In 1862, stamp-dealers were shocked by the Vandalism of the Government, who caused, it is said, many thousands of these envelopes to be destroyed at Somerset House.

[176] Our colonies issue their own stamps, with different designs. Some of them are emblematical; the Swan River Territory using the design of a "Swan," and the Cape of Good Hope choosing that of "Hope" reclining; but they are gradually adopting the English plan of a simple profile of the sovereign. The portrait of our Queen appears on two hundred and forty varieties of stamps. Nearly all those used in the colonies, and even some for foreign governments, are designed, engraved, printed, and embossed in London, and many of them are much prettier than the products of our own Stamp-Office. The principal houses for the manufacture of colonial stamps, are Messrs. De la Rue & Co. and Perkins, Bacon, & Co. of Fleet Street. See also Dr. Gray's Handbook, p. 8.

[177] "An Abstract of Grants for Miscellaneous Services." Sums voted in supply from 1835 to 1863 inclusive, moved for by Sir H. Willoughby. In the same return we find 7,000*l.* were paid for "Foudrinier's paper-machinery"—we presume for the manufacture of Mulready's envelopes.

[178] For further information of the staff of officers, and the expenses of the Stamp-Office, see Appendix (G).

[179] *Hand Catalogue of Postage-Stamps*, Introduction, p. 5.

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CHAPTER V.

POST-OFFICE SAVINGS' BANKS.

The idea of Savings' Banks for the industrial classes was first started at the commencement of the present century. They are said to owe their origin to the Rev. Joseph Smith, of Wendover, who in 1799, circulated proposals among his poorer parishioners to receive any of their spare sums during the summer, and return the amounts at the Christmas following. To the original sum, Mr. Smith proposed to add one-third of the whole amount, as a reward for the forethought of the depositor. This rate of interest, ruinous to the projector, proves that the transactions must have been of small extent, and charity, a large element in the work. The first savings' bank really answering to the name was established at Tottenham, Middlesex, in 1804, by some benevolent people in the place, and called the Charitable Bank. Five per cent. interest was allowed to depositors, though for many years this rate was a great drain on the benevolence of the founders. In 1817, these banks had increased in England and Wales to the number of seventy-four. During that year Acts of Parliament were passed offering every encouragement to such institutions, and making arrangements to take all moneys deposited, and place them in the public funds. From 1804 to 1861, the savings' banks of the United Kingdom increased to 638.

A reference to the various deficiencies of the old banks for savings, and the steps which led to the formation of those now under consideration, will not be out of place here. We have said that, in [Pg 269] the early part of this century, successive governments offered every inducement and facility to the savings' bank scheme. Such encouragement was indispensable to their success. When first started, Government granted interest to the trustees at the rate of 4½*l.* per cent. This rate, reduced to 4*l.* as the banks became more established, now stands at 3*l.* 5*s.* per cent. Of this sum depositors receive 3*l.* per cent.; the difference paying the expenses of management. The encouragement which the Legislature has given to the savings' banks of the country since their commencement, has entailed a loss of about four and a half millions sterling on the public exchequer. From 1817 to 1841, a loss of nearly two millions sterling had been incurred by reason of the rate of interest which was allowed by Government, being greater than that yielded by the securities in which the deposits had been invested.

Savings' banks have suffered most severely from frauds in the management, and the feeling of insecurity which these frauds have engendered from time to time has gone far to mar their usefulness. Government is only responsible to the trustees for the amounts actually placed in its hands. The law, previous to 1844, gave the depositor a remedy against the trustees in case of wilful neglect or default. In 1844, the Legislature thought right to make a most important change in the law, by which trustees of savings' banks were released from all liability, except *where it was voluntarily assumed*. It remains a most significant fact, that all the great frauds with this class of banks have occurred since that date. We have, indeed, to thank only the influential gentlemen, who, as a rule, take upon themselves the management of savings' banks, that such cases have been so rare as they have.[180] [Pg 270] The known frauds in savings' banks are calculated to have swallowed up a quarter of a million of hard-earned money. The fraud in the Cuffe Street bank, in Dublin, amounted to 56,000*l.*; the Tralee bank stopped payment in 1848 with liabilities to depositors to the extent of 36,768*l.*, and only 1,660*l.* of available assets; in the same year, the Killarney savings' bank stopped with liabilities of 36,000*l.*, and assets of only half that amount. About the same time, the Rochdale bank frauds became known, and losses to the extent of 40,000*l.* were the result.

There can be no doubt that the state of the law is still most anomalous, and that the great majority of the people of this country are under the impression that there is Government security for each deposit in every savings' bank. Year by year, changes have been proposed in the Legislature for giving more security to depositors, but the body of managers have hitherto been successful in their opposition. Whilst legislation is thus deferred, the risks to the provident poor still continue. In the report of a Government Commission appointed during one of these annual discussions "on the savings of the middle and working classes," several well-known authorities in such matters, such as Mr. J. Stuart Mill, and Mr. Bellenden Kerr, expressed decided opinions of the insecurity of savings'-bank deposits. Mr. J. Malcom Ludlow spoke to the feeling of the working-classes themselves: "I should say the *great* reason why the working-classes turn away from savings' banks, is the feeling of insecurity so largely prevailing amongst them."

Mr. J. S. Mill, when asked for any suggestion on the subject, said: "I think it would be very useful to provide some scheme to make the nation responsible for all amounts deposited. Certainly the general opinion among the depositors is, that the nation is responsible; they are not aware that they have only the responsibility of the trustees to rely upon."

Some change, or some new system, had long been regarded as absolutely necessary. In 1861, the [Pg 271] number of savings' banks on the old plan was 638; yet out of this number there were no less than fourteen counties in the United Kingdom without a bank at all. Even in England, when the test was applied to *towns*, all, for instance, of a size containing upwards of 10,000 inhabitants, it was found that there were at least twenty-four without savings'-bank accommodation of any sort. Nor was this all. Even where savings' banks already existed, 355 were open only once a-week, and that for a few hours; some twice a-week; but very few—only twenty, in fact—were open for a few hours every day. When, added to all this want of accommodation and absence of facility, we remember the unsatisfactory state of the law concerning them, there can be no wonder that public attention was called to the subject from time to time. So early as 1807, Mr. Whitbread introduced a Bill into Parliament to make the money-order office at the post-office available for collecting sums from all parts of the country, and transmitting them to a central bank which should be established in London. At that time, the money-order department of the Post-Office had not arrived at the state of efficiency to which it subsequently attained, and the Bill was

withdrawn. Other proposals shared the same fate, till, in 1860, Mr. Sykes of Huddersfield, engaged in the savings' bank of that town, addressed Mr. Gladstone on the deficiencies of the existing system. Through his practical acquaintance with the old plan of working, he was able to demonstrate that increased facilities for depositing at any time, and almost at any place, were great desiderata amongst the poorer classes. The same facilities were necessary for withdrawing deposits. Mr. Sykes proposed that a bank for savings should be opened at every money-order office in the kingdom; that each postmaster should be authorized to receive deposits; and that all the offices should have immediate connexion with a central bank in London. The general principle of this scheme was at once seen to be useful and practicable, though, again, the *mode* [Pg 272] of working was evidently unsatisfactory. Mr. Sykes, for instance, proposed that all payments and withdrawals should be severally effected by means of money-orders to be drawn for each separate undertaking. Any one at all acquainted with the machinery of the money-order office was aware that this would of necessity be a slow and complex, as well as expensive plan. Mr. Sykes's idea was, that no deposit should be less in amount than twenty shillings. This arrangement, again, would have gone far to negative the merits of the whole plan, and especially to interfere with its usefulness amongst the classes which the measure was really intended to benefit. For a few months this scheme, like those preceding it, exhibited signs of suspended animation, when it was referred to the practical officers of the revenue department of the Post-Office, and by them resolved into the simple and comprehensive measure which the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed in 1861, and which was the crowning effort of the legislative session of that year.

This Bill, entitled "An Act to grant additional facilities for depositing small savings at interest, with the security of Government for the due repayment thereof," became law on the 17th of May, 1861.

The first savings' banks in connexion with the post-offices of the country were established on the 16th of September, 1861. A limited number was first organized, and in places where no accommodation of the kind had ever been afforded. The extension of the scheme to Ireland and Scotland was effected on the 3d and 17th of February respectively. Nearly all the 2,879 money-order offices of the United Kingdom are now post-office savings' banks. These banks are in regular working order, 2,000, in round numbers, existing in England and Wales, 450 in Ireland, and 400 in Scotland. Many of our largest towns have several banks. Thus, at the present time, January, 1864, we find five banks in Edinburgh, five in Glasgow, twelve in Dublin, ten in Liverpool, sixteen in Manchester, ten in Birmingham, and seven in Bristol. Only seventy of the [Pg 273] entire number of new banks have failed to obtain depositors—a fact which sufficiently proves that the advantages offered by the Post-Office establishment are understood and appreciated throughout the kingdom. Up to the end of 1863, the total number of depositors in new banks had been 367,000, of which number no fewer than 307,000 then held accounts. At present (March, 1864), the weekly deposits amount, in the aggregate, to 40,000*l.*, while the withdrawals are no more than one-third of that sum. The total amount intrusted to the post-office banks since their first opening has been 4,702,000*l.*, of which sum no less than 3,263,000*l.* remain to the credit of depositors. The most gratifying fact in connexion with the new banks is, that they show a much larger proportion of small depositors than the old savings' banks have been able to attract, the average amount of a deposit being 3*l.* 1*s.* 9*d.* in the new, against 4*l.* 6*s.* 5*d.* in the old class of banks.

Between fifty and sixty old savings' banks, including the Birmingham Bank, closed their accounts during the last year (1863), great part of the business of each being transferred to the new banks. A sum amounting to over 500,000*l.* has already been transferred from these banks to the Post-Office by means of transfer certificates; whilst additional sums, the amount of which cannot be correctly ascertained, have been withdrawn from the old and paid into the post-office banks in cash.

With a view to facilitate the proceedings of the trustees of banks which have been or may hereafter be closed, an Act of Parliament was passed in the last session which will doubtless have the effect of winding up the affairs of many of the smaller banks under the old plan, and increasing the work of those on the new.

The *modus operandi* of this scheme is as simple as it is satisfactory. On making the first deposit, under the new arrangements, an account-book is presented to the depositor, in which is entered his name, address, and occupation. All the necessary printed regulations are given in this book. [Pg 274] The amount of each deposit is inserted by the postmaster, and an impression of the dated stamp of the post-office is placed opposite the entry, thus making each transaction strictly official. At the close of each day's business, the postmaster must furnish to the Postmaster-General in London a full account of all the deposits that have been made in his office. By return of post an acknowledgment will be received by each depositor in the shape of a separate letter from the head office, the Postmaster-General thus becoming responsible for the amount. If such a letter does not arrive within ten days from the date of the deposit an inquiry is instituted, and the error rectified. An arrangement like the foregoing shows the boundless resources which the Government possesses in its Post-Office. The acknowledgment of every separate transaction in each of the money-order offices of the three kingdoms, which in any private undertaking would be an herculean labour, involving an enormous outlay in postage alone, is here accomplished with marvellous ease, and the whole mass of extra communications make but an imperceptible ripple on the stream of the nation's letters flowing nightly from St. Martin's-le-Grand.

When a depositor wishes to withdraw any of his money, he has only to apply to the nearest post-

office for the necessary printed form, and to fill it up, stating his name and address, where his money is deposited, the amount he wishes to withdraw, and the place where he wishes it paid, and by return of post he will receive a warrant, in which the postmaster named is authorized to pay the amount applied for. In this respect post-office savings' banks offer peculiar advantages. A depositor, for instance, visiting the metropolis, and having—as he may easily do in London—run short of ready money, may, with a little timely notice to the authorities in London, draw out, in any of the hundred new banks in the metropolis, from his amount at home sufficient for his needs. Another person, leaving one town for another, may, without any expense, and no more [Pg 275] trouble than a simple notice, have his account transferred to his future home, and continue it there under precisely similar circumstances as those to which he has been accustomed. Last year this power was largely used, there being no fewer than 20,872 deposits and 15,842 withdrawals made under these circumstances, *e. g.* at places where the depositor is temporarily residing.[181] The facilities offered by the Post-Office in this way are unique; no other banks can offer them; and such is the admirable system adopted by the Post-Office, that complicated accounts of this nature are reduced to a matter of the simplest routine. At the end of each month the accounts of the two offices concerned in transactions of this kind are reconciled by the addition or deduction of the amounts in question, which arrangement, so far from being an irksome one, enables the Department to obtain a very valuable check upon its gross transactions. Under the old system, a depositor could only effect a transfer of his account from Manchester to Liverpool by withdrawing it from the one, under the usual long notice, and taking it to the other. This course was not only troublesome to the parties concerned, but the depositor ran the risk of losing his money, or, perhaps, of spending the whole or part of it. Under the Post-Office system, however, the transfer may be effected in a day or two, without the depositor even seeing the money, and without the smallest risk of loss. Suppose a depositor wishes to transfer his account from a bank under the old plan to one under the new, or *vice versâ*, the matter is one of equally simple arrangement. He has only to apply to the old savings' bank for a certificate to enable him to transfer his deposits in that bank to that belonging to the Post-Office, and when he obtains such [Pg 276] certificate he may present it to any postmaster who transacts savings'-bank business. The postmaster receives it as if it were so much money, and issues a depositors' book, treating the case as if the amount had been handed over to him. A few days longer are required before an acknowledgment can be sent from London; but this is all the difference between the case and that of an ordinary savings'-bank deposit[182]

In the order of advantages which post-office savings' banks offer the depositor, we would rank next to their unquestionable security their peculiar convenience for deposit and withdrawal. Twelve months ago, a person might be the length of an English county distant from a bank for savings. Under the present arrangement, few persons will be a dozen miles distant from a money-order office, whilst nine-tenths of the entire community will find the necessary accommodation at their very doors. As new centres of population are formed, or as hamlets rise into flourishing [Pg 277] villages, and the want of an office for money-orders becomes felt, the requirement will continue to be met, with the addition in each case of a companion savings' bank. Again, the expenses of management—amounting to a shilling in the old banks for each transaction, against something like half that amount in the new—will not allow of the ordinary banks being opened but at a few stated periods during the week. The post-office savings' bank, attached as it is to the post-office money-order office, is open to the public full eight hours of every working day.

Sums not below one shilling, and amounts not exceeding thirty pounds in any one year, may be deposited in these banks; depositors will not be put to any expense for books, postage, &c. and the rate of interest to be allowed will be 2½ per cent.—a sum which, though not large, is all which it is found the Government can pay without loss. It is not thought that this low rate of interest will deter the classes most sought after from investing in these banks. The poorer classes, as a rule, regard the question of a safe investment as a more important one than that of profits, and wisely think far more of their earnings being safe than of their receiving great returns for them.

This scheme, last and best of all, must help to foster independent habits among the working population. Their dealings with the post-office banks are pure matters of business, and no obligation of any sort is either given or received. The existing banks, on the other hand, partake largely of the nature of a charity. An objection frequently urged against savings' banks with much bitterness is, that many great employers of labour are on the directorate of such institutions, and that, consequently, they are able to exercise an oversight over their characters and savings, not always used for the best of purposes. In the Committee of Inquiry to which we have already alluded, cases—designated "rare," we are glad to add—were adduced, from which it appeared that provident workmen's wages had been reduced by their employers, upon the ground of their being already well enough off. No such considerations, however, can affect the new banks: [Pg 278] postmasters are forbidden to divulge the names of any depositor, or any of the amounts which he or she may have placed in their hands.[183] The advantages of these banks are so obvious, and the arrangements under which they are worked are of such a simple nature, that they cannot help but be increasingly useful and successful. Moreover, they are so accessible, that the working man, especially, requires nothing but the *will* to do that which his everyday experience tells him is so necessary should be done for the comfort of his family and home.

FOOTNOTES:

[180] The case of a fraud of this kind was mentioned by Lord Monteagle when the Post-Office Savings'-Bank Bill was before the Lords. In a Hertfordshire Savings' Bank, a deficiency of 10,000*l.* was discovered, and the entire amount was subscribed by nine of the trustees, who were noblemen and gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

[181] One of the first deposits which was made on the first day of opening in the banks started on the new system was withdrawn the next week in another town at some distance. The depositor was a person travelling with a wild beast menagerie.—*Mr. Gladstone's Speech at Mold*, January 5, 1864.

[182] Of course in this case inquiry would have to be made of the old bank and the National Debt Office. Ordinarily, the receipt of letters on savings'-bank business received in London, involving inquiry, is promptly acknowledged, the writers being told that the delay of a few days may occur before a reply can be sent. At the General Savings'-Bank Office in London, the transactions of each day are disposed of within that day; the monthly adjustment of accounts being also prompt. Warrants for withdrawals are issued in reply to every correct notice received up to eleven o'clock each morning, and these warrants are despatched by the same day's post to the depositors who have applied for them. Every letter received up to eleven o'clock A.M. is answered the same day, or at the latest the next day, if no inquiry involving delay is necessary. The arrangements for the examination of savings'-bank books every year are also very admirable. A few days before the anniversary of the first deposit, an official envelope is sent down from London to every depositor, in which he or she are asked to enclose their book so that it may arrive at the chief office at such a date. It makes its appearance again in the course of two or three days with the entries all checked, and the interest stated and allowed. See Appendix (B). Also an interesting paper by Mr. Frank I. Scudamore, the newly-appointed Assistant Secretary of the Post Office, read before the *Congrès International de Bienfaisance*, June 11, 1862.

[183] We have seen complaints made from the public press that in the Post-Office there is only a pretension to secrecy in this matter, while the arrangements which make the savings-bank operations so closely connected with money-order business, conducted by the same clerk at the same desk, is anything but conducive to desirable privacy. There is much truth in the latter remark; and if, when the system is perfected and its work properly gauged, there be no change, the new banks may very possibly suffer on this account.

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CHAPTER VI.

BEING MISCELLANEOUS AND SUGGESTIVE.

1. Every person or firm engaged in extensive correspondence should purchase the "British Postal Guide," at least once a-year. It is published quarterly, and may be had at any post-office for a shilling.

2. Those engaged in frequent correspondence with our colonies or with foreign countries should, in addition, subscribe for the "Postal Official Circular," published weekly for a penny, which gives the latest information on all points regarding the incoming and outgoing of all foreign and colonial mails.

3. Since the division of the metropolis into postal districts, those requiring frequent communication with different parts of London will find of great service a penny book which contains a list of all the streets, &c. in London and its environs, as divided into the ten districts, and giving the initials in each case. This book may be purchased at any post-office. It is said that delay is sometimes avoided by adding the initials of the London districts to letters forwarded from the provinces.

4. As a rule, with few exceptions indeed, letters are forwarded according to their address. It is of paramount importance, therefore, that the addresses of letters should not only be legible, but the proper and the complete address. Perhaps the following suggestions on this head may be found useful, viz.:—

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(*a*) Never to post a letter without addressing it either a post town or a county. If the information cannot otherwise be obtained, the "British Postal Guide" contains a list of all post-offices in the United Kingdom, and gives post town to which they are subordinate.

(*b*) Letters for small towns or villages ought not to addressed to the nearest large town, merely because it the *nearest*; although, as a rule, the town in question will be the correct post town, there are many exceptions, which can only be known by reference to the "Guide" provided, or by inquiry.

(*c*) If the town be not well known, or if there be two towns of the same name in the country, the *county* ought to be added. (All the cities and county towns are well known.) Thus, letters addressed to Newport should always give the county, inasmuch as there are several towns and villages of that name in England. Again, letters for Newcastle should either have the county added, or the usual designation thus: Newcastle-on-Tyne, Newcastle-under-Lyme, or Newcastle Emlyn.

(*d*) Letters posted in England for Scotland or Ireland, *vice versâ* (except in the case of the great towns of the three countries), should have the name of the country to which they are sent given as part of the address. N. B. (North Britain) for Scotland, and S. B.

(South Britain) for England, would generally be thought sufficient for letters circulating between the two countries.

(*e*) Foreign letters should invariably have the name of the country given (in English if possible). It ought also to be given in full. Letters addressed "London, C. W." and intended for London in Western Canada, have not unfrequently been sent to the West Central District in London, and so delayed. Letters addressed to "Hamilton, C. W." have also been mis-sent to Hamilton in Scotland, the initials having been overlooked.

(*f*) The street, &c. should be given on all addresses. Well known persons and firms get their letters, &c. regularly, although this rule may not be adhered to; but the omission [Pg 281] frequently leads to delays in the *general* distribution, and sometimes to serious mistakes. In large towns where many names of firms approximate in appearance somewhat to each other, the addresses of letters cannot be too fully given. With London letters, this rule should be strictly adhered to.

(*g*) The number of the house, and the correct one, should be carefully added.[184] When information of this sort is kept back, hesitation and delay frequently occur in delivery; though, perhaps, few letters eventually fail to reach their destination on this account.

5. Every letter should be examined with care before it is dropped in a letter-box, in order to see that it has been securely sealed. Thousands of letters are posted yearly without any precaution of the kind having been taken with them, the Post-Office authorities having to secure them as a consequence.[185] Not only so, but twelve thousand letters are yearly posted without any address at all.

6. Good adhesive envelopes, not too highly glazed, of the ordinary size, are sufficient security for letters,[186] if the adhesive matter has been but *slightly* wetted. If, for additional security, it be thought advisable also to seal a letter with wax, it should be placed outside the envelope. Very frequently, the wax is found to have been placed on the adhesive matter inside the envelope, thus rendering both ineffective. [Pg 282]

7. Letters intended for warm climates should not be sealed with wax at all, inasmuch as there is great danger of the wax melting and injuring the letter, as well as the other contents of the mail-bag.

8. Care should be used in securing newspapers and large packets.[187] Newspapers, when not sent at first from the newspaper offices, should be addressed on the paper itself and tied with string, as great risk is run in the matter of covers becoming detached from the newspapers themselves. Book packets, in addition to being enclosed in covers, sealed with wax, gum, or other adhesive matter (but open at the ends or sides), may be tied round the ends with string, as additional security. When the latter precaution is taken, there is less chance of letters getting within the folds of the packet, which may happen when it is not thoroughly secured.

9. Valuable packets or books, if they cannot be well secured, should scarcely be sent through the post. All such packets are liable to be roughly handled, and in the mail-bags exposed to pressure and friction. When safely deposited in the mail-bags, valuable packets are still in danger, inasmuch as the bags in many cases are constantly being transferred from one kind of conveyance to another, and frequently despatched from railway trains by apparatus machinery whilst the train is in motion.

10. Books with valuable bindings, if it is necessary that they should be sent through the post, might be well secured in strong boards; valuable papers or prints should be enclosed in strong paper, linen, parchment, or other material which will not readily tear or break. Fragile articles of value (which should by all means be registered, as special care will then [Pg 283] be taken of them in all respects) might best be enclosed in wooden boxes, and then wrapped in paper.

11. It is hardly necessary now to point out that the postage-stamp should be placed on the upper right-hand corner of the envelope, and the address written as much towards the left hand as possible; the address will then be removed from the stamp and the postmark of the office, which will be impressed upon the letter before it is despatched. Delay is caused to the Post-Office operations when the stamp is otherwise placed; and in cases which occasionally occur, where the stamp is placed at the *back* of the letter, it frequently happens that it is sent away charged with the unpaid postage.

12. The penny receipt-stamp will not, under any circumstances, serve the purpose of the penny postage-stamp, though many people would seem to think differently; all letters bearing a receipt-stamp are, of course, charged as if unpaid. The two kinds of stamp might easily be assimilated, and there are rumours that this may soon be done; but they have their distinct duties at present, and the one cannot take the place of the other.

13. The Post-Office stamped envelopes (which may be obtained singly, in part packets, or entire packets, of two or three sizes, and embossed with either penny or twopenny stamps) are in every way the most secure; and if the paper were of better quality, would be quite as economical, as if the ordinary envelope and the ordinary stamp were used. All risk of the stamps becoming detached is, of course, avoided by the use of stamped envelopes.

14. In place of affixing penny postage-stamps according to the weight of a letter, however heavy it may be, application might be made for twopenny, fourpenny, sixpenny, or shilling labels, as the case may be.

15. In affixing stamps, care should be had lest by excess of moisture all the gum be washed off.[188] The practice of dipping the stamp in water is objectionable, except some absorbent be used immediately to remove any unnecessary moisture. It will be found to be a good plan to wet slightly the gummed side of the stamp, and also the right-hand corner of the envelope, and then to keep the finger gently on the stamp until it is firmly fixed. Highly glazed envelopes should be avoided. [Pg 284]

16. Letters about which any doubt exists should be carefully weighed before posting. If the Post-Office weight be exceeded to the smallest extent, even to the turning of the scale, a letter becomes liable to, and is charged higher postage—viz. the difference in double or unpaid postage. So trained has the post-office clerk become of late years by a recent system of surcharges, that few letters can now pass with an insufficient number of stamps affixed. To provide against errors in scales, &c. it would be well in all cases to allow a little margin, or ask that the letter be weighed in the post-office scales.

In the case of newspapers and book-packets, the same remarks, as well as the same arrangements, apply. It should be particularly remembered that a newspaper when posted, say wet from the printing-office, will often weigh more than it does on delivery; hence surcharges for which the receiver sometimes cannot account.

17. In posting letters, care should be taken to see that they fall into the box, and do not stick in the passage. The pillar-boxes of our towns, whatever may be said to the contrary, are completely safe as a rule, though the same care should be exercised in depositing the letters.[189] [Pg 285]

18. The earlier a letter is posted the better in all cases: towards the time for the closing of the letter-box, great haste is indispensably necessary in the manipulations which a town's correspondence must undergo, whilst earlier on it gets carefully disposed of in proper box and bag. When letters or newspapers are posted in great numbers, as in the case of circulars, they should be posted as early as practicable, and should be tied up in bundles with the addresses all in one direction, or they may be delayed in the press of work.[190]

19. Every letter of consequence put into the post should contain the name of the sender and also his address, in order that, if it cannot be delivered as addressed, it may be promptly returned to the writer.

20. All business letters, at any rate, might have the sender's name and address embossed on the back of the envelope. On failure to deliver such letters, they would then be returned to the writers without being opened. Care should be taken, however, not to use envelopes with another person's name embossed in this way, as the letter will be forwarded back to the address thus given, though it should not happen to be the sender's own.

21. Coin is prohibited to be sent in ordinary letters passing between one part of the United Kingdom and another.[191] If a letter be posted containing coin, it will be registered and charged a double registration fee. Coins or any other articles of value, if properly secured, will be certain of careful treatment under the registration system.[192] [Pg 286]

22. Letters meant to be registered must never be dropped into the letter-box as in the case of ordinary letters, but should be given to the clerk in charge of the post-office counter or window to be dealt with, who will in each case give his receipt for it. The receipt is the sender's evidence that it has been posted in proper course.

23. Letters containing sharp instruments, liquids, &c. or any other articles which would be likely of themselves, or if they should escape, to do injury to the other contents of the mail-bag, should never be posted. Postmasters have instructions not to forward such letters according to their address, but, when observed, to send them to the Dead-Letter Office, from which place they will be returned to the writers. Valuable letters of this forbidden kind, therefore, run great risks of delay, while the articles are liable to be destroyed in their passage through the post.[193] [Pg 287]

24. Though the transmission of coin in letters is now absolutely forbidden, except under the registration scheme, arrangements are made for rendering it easy to send small sums by post in postage-stamps. When presented at any of the numerous money-order offices in the United Kingdom, they may be exchanged for money, at a charge of 2½ per cent. Any person wishful to send through the post a sum of money under five or six shillings will find it cheaper to buy stamps and enclose them, in place of a post-office order. One penny will be charged for buying forty stamps, a halfpenny for twenty stamps. 60,000*l.* worth of postage-stamps were bought from the public during the year 1862.

25. In sending postage-stamps in letters, care should be taken to use *thick* envelopes, so that enclosures of this kind may neither be seen nor felt. It is easy to feel a quantity of postage-stamps in a letter sent in a thin and crisp envelope, and some official becoming aware of this may not be able to resist the temptation to appropriate them.

26. No enclosures whatever should be sent in newspapers impressed with the regular newspaper-stamp. Even an old address of such a newspaper should be carefully cut out. It is not enough that it be obliterated with the pen, as the rules forbid writing of any kind in addition to the mere address.[194]

With newspapers stamped by the ordinary postage-label the arrangements are quite different. Any printed paper or manuscript may be folded up with the newspaper on which an ordinary penny-stamp is placed, provided the total amount of the package does not exceed four ounces. The old address (supposing the newspaper has circulated through the post before) may be left on or not at the discretion of the sender, as this does not interfere with the regulation that nothing in the packet shall be of the nature of a letter. On the other hand, any sentence or message written in ink or pencil on any part of the paper makes the packet liable to the unpaid letter-rate of postage. [Pg 288]

27. When any letter, book-packet, or newspaper is lost, miscarried, or delayed, inquiry should be made as soon as evidence has been obtained that the article in question was really posted. The postmaster of the town should be informed by the complainant of every particular relating to the missing letter, &c. the day and hour of its posting, the office at which and the person by whom this was done. In cases of delay or mis-sending, the covers ought to be produced in order that the office stamps on them may indicate the exact place where the delay has been occasioned. Correspondence on the subject of the complaints will subsequently be carried on between the applicant and the Secretary's department in England, Scotland, or Ireland, as the case may be.

28. When any one has reason to believe that he has paid extra postage on a letter or packet improperly, or has been charged more than the case would warrant, he should apply to his postmaster, who will bring the case before the notice of the Secretary, when, if any mistake has been made, the money will be refunded by order. Postmasters cannot return postage paid improperly until instructed to do so from the chief offices. [Pg 289]

29. When an unpaid letter is presented to a person who has not the means at disposal of paying the demand upon it (some foreign or colonial letter may be taxed heavily), it will be kept at the post-office a month, *if a request be made to that effect*, in order that efforts may be made to obtain the necessary money to release it.

30. Postmasters and their clerks are forbidden to be parties to the deceptions which used to be practised, and which are now sometimes attempted, as to the place of posting of a letter. If any communication should be forwarded, under cover, to the postmaster of a provincial town, with a request that it may be posted at his office, it will be sent to the Returned-Letter Branch in London, and from thence to the writer.

31. Advertisements are occasionally seen, and applications frequently made, for defaced postage-stamps. It is stated, in some cases, that a given number will gain certain individuals admission to different charitable institutions. Whatever may be the purpose for which the old stamps are required, the Post-Office authorities have found, by inquiry, that the ostensible reason here given has uniformly been false. It is sometimes feared that attempts are made to clean and re-issue them, though this can be attended with but partial success. It is much more probable that they are sought to indulge some whim, such as papering boxes or even rooms.

32. With reference to money-orders, the public should be careful—

(*a*) Always to give particulars of any order required *in writing*. When a number of orders are required, to write out a full list of them. Forms for single orders may be had gratuitously at all money-order offices. These forms, or other written papers, are invariably kept on files for a given time, so that reference may easily be made to them in the event of any mistake. Mistakes may, of course, be made either by the applicant or the clerk on duty. If, on production of the paper, the error is seen to have been the sender's, he must pay (generally a second commission) for the necessary alterations: if, however, it be proved to be caused by the clerk issuing the order, the Post-Office calls upon the latter to bear the expense himself. [Pg 290]

(*b*) Never to present an order for payment on the day on which it is issued, nor, on the other hand, to allow two months to elapse before calling for payment.[195]

(*c*) When sending an order, either to send it to its destination singly, or in a letter signed only by initials. Money-orders passing between friends need not be accompanied with information such as is sometimes required in business transactions.

FOOTNOTES:

[184] The irregularities and eccentricities in the numbering of streets and houses is a great difficulty. On one occasion a London inspector of letter-carriers, going round the districts, noticed a brass-plate with the number 95 between two houses numbered respectively 15 and 16. He made inquiry, when the old lady who tenanted the house said that the number had belonged to a former residence, and, thinking it a pity that it should be thrown away, she had transferred it to her new home, supposing that it would do as

well as any other number!

[185] About two hundred letters pass through the General Post-Office every day unsealed.

[186] It is calculated that 91 per cent. of the letters circulating through the United Kingdom are enclosed in envelopes; the number of those sent abroad in envelopes is somewhat smaller, or about 65 per cent.

[187] The number of newspapers delivered in 1862 amounted to nearly 73,000,000, a considerable increase on the previous year. The number of book-packets exceeded 14,000,000, being an increase on the previous year of about 1,700,000, or nearly 14 per cent. Upwards of 400,000 newspapers, or about one in two hundred, were undelivered in the same year, about half of which failures arose from improper or incorrect addresses, while the remainder were owing to the newspapers becoming detached from their covers in transit through the post.

[188] It is calculated that every year nearly fifty thousand postage-stamps rub off letters and newspapers in their passage through the Post-Office. At one time the quality of the adhesive matter was called in question, loud complaint, even ridicule, settling on the theme. Now, however, that the gum is better the number of stamps which "will not stick" is scarcely perceptibly smaller.

[189] Only one instance is on record of any violent and wilful attempt to damage a pillar letter-box. This is the more wonderful as the temptation to lift the lid and contribute articles not contemplated by our postage-system must naturally be strong in the eyes of our City Arabs. A singular accident befell one of these letter-boxes (1862) in Montrose. A quantity of gas from the street pipes seems to have got into the box, and a night-watchman to have ignited it by striking a match on the top in order to light his pipe. The top was blown off and the pillar-box hopelessly damaged, although the watchman and the letters escaped without injury.

[190] The following announcement from the postmaster of Manchester, as given in a bill dated 1721, contrasts strangely with the latitude allowed now. "The post goes out to London," says he, "on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, at nine o'clock in the morning. It will be best to bring the letters the *night before the going out of the post*, because the accounts and baggs are usually made up *over-night*." In these days, when we may post up to within five minutes of the despatch of a mail, and letters for America may be posted within ten minutes of the sailing of the packet, we cannot be too thankful for our privileges.

[191] This arrangement does not apply to foreign letters coming to or going out of this country.

[192] The number of registered letters last year was over two millions, or one registered letter to about three hundred ordinary letters.

[193] Most of our readers will have heard or read stories of curious articles passing through the post, and without doubt the records of the Returned-Letter Branch of the London Office will present strange appearances in this respect. Sir Francis B. Head, who was permitted to peruse an extraordinary ledger in the General Post-Office where several notable letters and packets were registered, has strung together a catalogue of them, which reminds us of the articles passing through the post before the revocation of the franking privilege. He tells us he found amongst the number—two canaries; a pork-pie from Devonport to London; a pair of piebald mice, which were kept at the office a month, and duly fed till they were called for by the owner; two rabbits; plum-pudding; leeches in bladders, "several of which having burst, many of the poor creatures were found crawling over the correspondence of the country." Further, there was a bottle of cream from Devonshire; a pottle of strawberries; a sample bottle of cider; half a pound of soft soap wrapped in thin paper; a roast duck; a pistol, *loaded almost to the mouth with slugs and ball*; a live snake; a paper of fish-hooks; fish innumerable; and last of all, and most extraordinary of all, a human heart and stomach.—*Head's Essays.*

[194] The annual return just published (February, 1864) shows to some extent how far the public prefers the stamped newspaper, which can be sent through the Post-Office, in fact, until it is fifteen days old. The number of stamps issued to the principal London newspapers from June, 1862, to June, 1863, are as follows:—

Times, 2,782,206; *Express*, 261,038; *Morning Post*, 260,000; *Daily News*, 124,888; *Morning Herald*, 103,256; *Globe*, 140,000; *Shipping Gazette*, 261,000; *Evening Standard*, 80,020; *Evening Star*, 75,000; *Evening Mail* (thrice a week), took 345,000; *St. James's Chronicle*, 89,000; *Record*, 423,500; *The Guardian* (weekly), 219,300; *The Illustrated London News*, 1,136,062; *Punch*, 129,500. Eleven English country newspapers took 100,000 each, the principal being the *Sussex Express*, 336,000, and the *Stamford Mercury*, 334,276. Thirty country newspapers bought more than 50,000 stamps.

[195] Many orders are never claimed at all. In Ireland twice as many orders are allowed to "lapse" as in England or Scotland, though there are many more orders granted in the two latter countries than in Ireland. Perhaps the fact may be accounted for by the wretched addresses of most Irish letters, which make it impossible to deliver many of them and equally impossible to return them to the writers. Of ordinary money-orders, one in 837 are unclaimed within two months; whilst as a curious fact, instancing the pertinacity of a careless habit, it may be stated that when these very orders have been renewed on payment of a second commission, one in every thirty-nine are again overlooked, and allowed to lapse, many of them, in fact, becoming entirely cancelled, and the money forfeited.

CHAPTER VII.

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CONCERNING SOME OF THE POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS TO WHICH THE POST-OFFICE IS LIABLE.

The Post-Office, from its peculiar organization and the nature of its business, is liable to many misconceptions from which the other great Government Departments are more or less free. In one of the reports of the Postmaster-General, many of these misunderstandings are recounted and answered with an evident endeavour to bring about a better feeling between the people and the people's Post-Office. We cannot do better than refer here to a few of the instances given, supplementing them by more which have been suggested to us from that consideration of the entire economy of the Post-Office, into which we have been led in dealing with our subject.

1. Unquestionably, the Post-Office is blamed for many errors and shortcomings which ought never to have been charged against it. On this important point, the evidence given by each Post-Office Report is remarkably clear, although, by the way, a writer in a recent number of a highly respectable quarterly review regards the instances given by successive Postmaster-Generals as so many "testimonials to character," reminding him—so he scurvily added—of nothing so much as "the testimonials given by dyspeptic noblemen in favour of the Revalenta Arabica or Holloway's Pills and Ointment."[196] Of course, much trouble and many losses must, from time to time and at [Pg 292] all times, have been caused by the carelessness or dishonesty of some of many thousand officials of the Post-Office, though the cases are far from few, and the authorities, in which it has been shown, to the satisfaction even of the complainant, that the fault at first attributed to the Post-Office rested really in other quarters. Some examples are afforded. The publisher of one of the London papers complained of the repeated loss in the Post-Office of copies of his journal, addressed to persons abroad. An investigation showed that the abstraction was made by the publisher's clerk, his object apparently being to appropriate the stamps required to defray the foreign postage. In another case, a general complaint having arisen as to the loss of newspapers sent to the chief office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, the investigation led to the discovery of a regular mart held near the office, which was supplied with newspapers by the private messengers employed to convey them to the post. Again: A man was detected once in robbing a newsvendor's cart by volunteering, on its arrival at the entrance of the General Post-Office, to assist the driver [Pg 293] in posting the newspapers. Instead of doing so, however, he walked through the hall with those intrusted to him, and, upon his being stopped, three quires of a weekly paper were found in his possession.

To these cases of newspapers let us add a few concerning letters, the substance of which are adduced in subsequent reports. Thus, a letter containing a cheque for 12*l.* and sent to a London firm, was said not to have reached its destination; the Post-Office was blamed for not delivering it; inspectors were set to work, and after a diligent search, it was traced from the premises of the person to whom it was addressed to those of a papier-maché manufacturer, where it doubtless had been pulped into tea-trays or writing-cases. Again: A bank agent sends his son to the post with a letter, which on his journey he opens. Spying a figured cheque, he abstracts it, and posts the letter without it, and it is afterwards found ornamenting his copy-book! Another bank agent sends his youthful son to the post-office to receive for him his letters, one of which, containing some very valuable inclosures, he leaves in his pocket, and immediately afterwards leaves town for school, carrying with him the precious missive—worth some 1,500*l.*—where it consorts with his marbles, Everton toffy, and cold Bologna sausage, till the vacation, the lad all the time being in blissful unconsciousness of the stir paterfamilias was making about it. Another person complained that several of his letters were not forthcoming. This case was a mystery. At length it struck one of the shrewd officials—who grow shrewd through dint of unravelling the most curious cases—that the letter-box at the person's door ought to be carefully examined. This was done, and the box was found exceedingly defective. Fifteen letters were jammed between the box and the door, where some of them had quietly reposed for the space of nine years.[197] The secretary of a charitable institution in London gave directions for posting a large number of "election [Pg 294] papers," and supposed that his directions had been duly acted upon. Shortly, however, he received complaints of the non-receipt of many of the papers, and in other cases of delay. He at once lodged a strong complaint at the Post-Office; but, on examination, circumstances soon came to light which cast suspicion on the person employed to post the notices, although this man had been many years in the service of the society, and was supposed to be of strict integrity. Ultimately, the man confessed that he embezzled the postage (3*l.* 15*s.* 6*d.*), and had endeavoured to deliver the election papers himself. Once more: A short time since a registered letter was said to have been posted at Newcastle, addressed to a banker in Edinburgh, who, not receiving it according to his expectation, sent a telegraphic message to learn why it had not been forwarded. The banker supposed that the letter had been lost or purloined in the Post-Office; but it was at last found to have been duly delivered to the bank porter in order to post it, but he had locked it up in his desk and forgotten it.

2. The knowledge of the following misconception may also help to save the public and the Post-Office a great amount of trouble. "It is often assumed," says the Postmaster-General, "that a mail-conveyance passing by, or through a place, ought, as a matter of course, to deposit," there and then, "the letters directed thereto; the practice being, on the contrary, that until the mail arrives at the head post-office of the district, the letters in question are not separated from the other letters of the district. A slight consideration of the nature and objects of the postal service will show that such separation cannot be effected in any other way, unless, indeed, the mail-

conveyance, even supposing it to be but a *mail-cart*, were converted into a travelling post-office, and furnished with clerks of unlimited local knowledge (which is plainly impossible), or unless every town and village in the kingdom, having any correspondence with the place in question, were to make up a bag for that place; in which case its mail would contain nearly as many bags as letters." [Pg 295]

3. "It happens from time to time that, owing to the stream of postal communications having been diverted from the old mail-road to a line of railway, or from other causes of like nature, it becomes desirable to reduce the post-office of a town from the condition of a *principal* office to that of a *sub*-office. This step not unfrequently gives rise to complaints, the inhabitants being under the impression that they will not in future be so well served. This is a misconception. The change is not made when it will subject the correspondence to delay; nor does it cause any withdrawal of accommodation in respect to money-orders. It is, in fact, only a departmental arrangement, which consists in carrying on the sorting of the letters for the new sub-office at some intermediate office, instead of sending the letters in direct bags."

4. "Another misconception, which occasionally causes trouble and disappointment, consists in assuming that a discretionary power can be intrusted to subordinate officers to remit penalties or overcharges under special circumstances. Cases will occur in which strict observance of a general rule may inflict more or less injustice upon individuals, and where a dispensing power immediately at hand might furnish a remedy. In an establishment as large and as widely spread as the Post-Office, however, there will always be many subordinate officers, some of them carrying on their duties beyond the easy reach of any supervising authority, who are not fit depositaries of such a power, affecting, as it would to a great degree, the public revenue. It therefore becomes necessary to lay down definite and precise rules, from which no departure can be allowed, except under sanction of the Postmaster-General; and in the few instances in which these rules press hardly, appeal must be made to the General Post-Office. It must be added, that in many instances even such appeal is necessarily fruitless, the Postmaster-General being bound to a particular course by positive law." [Pg 296]

5. "In regard to the expense of railway conveyance, the public naturally supposes, that as such conveyance is cheapest for ordinary purposes, and as the charges made for the carriage of mails are subject to arbitration, that it must be cheapest for postal purposes also; and, indeed, so cheap, as to warrant the free use of the railways, either as substitutes for other conveyance, or for the multiplication of mails. The fact, however, is very different. Except in certain instances, where companies have entered into arrangements, securing to the Post-Office the use of their trains on moderate, though still highly remunerative terms, railway conveyance, with all its acknowledged advantages, has proved much more expensive than that which it has superseded." We have already spoken at length of railways in relation to the Post-Office, and will not here add any further remark.

6. The English Postmaster-General is frequently supposed to have some control over colonial post-offices, and even those of foreign countries. Except at Gibraltar and Malta, however, he is quite powerless out of the United Kingdom.

7. Frequent applications are made, it seems, for extra foreign and colonial mails, yet those existing are only kept up at a ruinous loss. Of the eight great lines of packet communication, only one pays its expenses and yields a profit. If the letters sent abroad were charged with the whole cost of the packets, the foreign agencies, and other incidental expenses, not only would all the sea-postage be swallowed up, but the mails would entail a loss of nearly four hundred thousand pounds a year. "We want," said a leading weekly commercial paper lately, "increased facilities for communication with our West Indian Colonies;" yet every letter now forwarded to those colonial possessions of ours costs one shilling over and above the postage charged! On each letter conveyed between this country and the Cape there is a dead loss of sixpence; to the West Coast of Africa, one shilling and sixpence. Everybody has heard of the New Galway line of packets for America, now suspended for the second time: every letter carried by these packets under their first contract was charged *one*, and cost the country *six* shillings; under the second attempt, each letter is said to have cost even more than six shillings! With the change of system and change of management, described briefly in speaking of the packet service, there can be no question that this state of things will not be allowed to continue. The principle of requiring the colonies themselves to pay a moiety of the cost of their service is a step in the right direction, and is, certainly, only just:[198] the colonies will not be taxed for the mother-country, as in one memorable instance in history, nor, as at present, will the mother-country be taxed unfairly for the colonies: there will then be equal interest in keeping down the expenditure, and in establishing rates of postage high enough to be remunerative. [Pg 297]

8. The English Post-Office will compare favourably with that of any nation in the world. In no country are post-office privileges procured cheaper than with us. Like any other institution capable of endless growth, and which must grow and expand with the progressive influences of the times, it clearly is not perfect in every arrangement; but in answer to complaints of the hard, unyielding, and stringent rules which are said to bind the English Post-Office, it may not be out of place to institute a few comparisons, asking that some reference should be made to contemporary history. In England, coin was suffered for many years to pass in ordinary letters, to the temptation and seduction of many of the officers, and the practice grew from a thoughtless economy, in spite of all the appeals that were made to the contrary. At present coin is not allowed to pass through the post-office, except in registered letters: in France it has long been, and is [Pg 298]

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now, a *penal* offence to transmit coin in letters.[199] At the time Sir Rowland Hill was urging his penny-postage scheme on the attention of the British Legislature, another European State (Piedmont, 1837) had the most stringent and severe regulations maintained in its Post-Office. The law punished any one posting a book or a newspaper opposed to the principles of the monarchy with from two to five years' hard labour; any one who might receive of such newspapers or books through the post without having delivered it into the hands of the authorities with two years' imprisonment; a reward of one hundred crowns was offered to any one giving information. These arbitrary and iniquitous laws are equalled and even surpassed, in European codes of still later date—witness Russia and, until quite recently, Austria.

9. The opinion is frequently expressed in conversation, and we have often met with such expressions of opinion in our daily and weekly press, to the effect that the Post-Office ought to give more accommodation to the public in many ways, and so disburse some, if not all, of its enormous profits. These profits are said to be absurdly large; that fifty per cent. is ten times the interest of money lent on decent security, and five times as much as would satisfy sanguine private speculators. This subject of Post-Office profits is made, *de facto*, the principal argument against what is called the Post-Office monopoly.

We have already, in other parts of this book, offered an opinion on steps which might be taken in the way of affording extra facilities to the public. A cheaper sea service and a halfpenny post for our towns are two of the most important and most practicable measures. Granted that our packet service ought to be kept up as at present, we have an invincible argument for universal free [Pg 300] deliveries at home. When asked[200] if he thought it necessary that our Colonies should have greater postal facilities than they could pay for, Mr. Hamilton, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, answered that "a colony might reasonably complain if it was deprived of advantages of postal communication, simply because that postal communication might not be remunerative." Again, on the question of Post-Office revenue,[201] "I think the first charge upon that revenue is to supply reasonably all portions of Her Majesty's dominions with postal communication," which consideration, it seems to us, will apply equally at home and abroad. Still more important seems the plan of a halfpenny post for local letters, that is, for letters posted and delivered in the same town. Before the days of penny postage, we had penny posts in all the principal towns of the country. A halfpenny post, if only applied to our largest towns, where it would be certain to be remunerative,[202] would have the effect of materially lessening the weight of the argument that our present rate of charges is anomalous and unfair. But this would be by no means the most important result. Such posts would necessitate more frequent deliveries in provincial towns—the postmen to be paid accordingly as fully, and not as now, only partially, employed. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the Post-Office net revenue is a fair and honourable item on the credit side of the Government accounts, with which the public, except through their representatives in Parliament, have nothing whatever to do. The penny postage scheme was carried through Parliament in the confident expectation resolutely urged by the intrepid founder of that scheme, that all the benefits promised under it would result to the country, without any great relinquishment of Post-Office revenue, and that only for a term of years. Gradually, year by year, [Pg 301] with enormous gain to the public convenience in innumerable ways, the revenue derivable from this branch of the service has risen beyond the highest standard of the past. Any relinquishment of the profits—which, by the way, staves off other taxes—depends on Parliament, and not on the Post-Office.[203]

10. Perhaps of all the prevalent misconceptions to which the public have been, and still are, liable, none is so unfounded as that the servants of the Post-Office are, as a body, ill-used and ill- [Pg 302] paid. Without question, individual cases of hardship and inequality exist; but that there is anything inherently wrong in the system, or that that system is administered with harshness or partiality, or that there is in this Department more than the usual modicum of cases in which the legislation for the many presses heavily on the few, no one who will make himself acquainted with the subject in all its bearings can believe for a moment. Statements to a contrary effect have often appeared in the public newspapers; instead, however, of representing the feelings of the officers, they have much more frequently goaded them into discontent, no doubt, at times, against their better feeling and judgment. Two or three years ago, the Postmaster-General, in referring to these statements, dwelt upon the weight of responsibility resting with that part of the public press who, unthinkingly, and on an *ex parte* view of their case, indulged the martial sentiments of the men with encouragement to the utter abandonment of discipline and control. We incline to the belief that the time will come when, in the provinces for instance, more liberal allowances will be made to the lower grades of Post-Office officials; when the graphic description already given by the postman poet would, if uttered, be regarded as a libel on his class of officers. On the other hand, with regard to the same class of men in the metropolitan office, the more the question is calmly considered, the less reason is there for sympathy with the popular view. In 1860, the *Times* gave a dismal account of the sufferings of the London letter-carriers, whose cause it espoused more warmly than wisely. "Hard-worked and ill-paid," said the leading journal, "these men are all discontented and sullen; they are indifferent to the proper performance of their duties, and hold the threat of dismissal in utter disdain, feeling sure, as they say, that even stone-breaking on the road-side would not be harder labour and scarcely less remunerative." A short time after, the other side of the picture relating to these would-be stone-breakers was given, not by an anonymous writer in the *Times*, but by a Cabinet Minister. The [Pg 303] report of the late Lord Elgin stated that "there need not be the least difficulty in procuring, at the present wages, honest, intelligent, and industrious young men, perfectly qualified for the office of letter-carrier: and, I may add, that in cases of dismissal—happily a rare occurrence, considering

the number of men employed—the most strenuous efforts are made to obtain readmission to the service." Regarding the question in a practical common-sense light, there could be no manner of doubt as to which statement should carry most weight. Other organs of the press, however, either thought differently, or dispensed with the preliminary investigation which the Post-Office courts rather than discourages, and which inquiry it would only have been fair to make. Only last year an important commercial paper commented sympathisingly on "the loud and deep complainings of the London letter-carrier, of the grinding oppression to which they are subjected, and their ineffectual struggles to obtain redress;" and this opinion was echoed round by many smaller lights.

What, however, are the facts? The rate of wages of the lowest class of letter-carriers in London ranges from 18*s.* to 25*s.* a week. Each man (who must necessarily begin *under 21 years of age*) commences at the former sum, and steadily advances at the rate of a shilling more each year, till he attains the maximum of 25*s.* This is for the lowest class, be it remembered: but besides the chances of rising into a higher class of carrier, he has the prospect, realized by many in the course of two or three years, of being promoted to the higher grade of sorter. If, as some have been, he be appointed to the corps of travelling sorters, he will nearly double his income at a bound. But not to dwell on chances of promotion, the letter-carrier, in addition to his wages, is allowed to receive Christmas-boxes; and many thus receive, as the public must know well, most substantial additions to their income. He is supplied with two suits of clothes, one for summer, [Pg 304] and the other for winter wear. If ill, he has medical attendance and medicine gratis. When unfitted for work, he may retire upon a pension for which he has not now to pay a farthing; and during service, if he insure his life for the benefit of his family, the Post-Office will assist him to pay his premiums, by allowing him 20 per cent. on all his payments. Every year he is allowed a fortnight's holiday, without any deduction from his pay; many spare hours each day he may devote to other pursuits, for if, when at work at the office, his hours of duty exceed eight hours daily, he is at full liberty to ask for investigation and redress. In short, a London letter-carrier is in as good a position, relatively, as many skilled artisans, without, as regards his pay, being subject to any of the contingencies of weather, trade, and misfortune, which make the wages of other workmen occasionally so precarious, and without having had to go through any expensive apprenticeship or preparation for his calling, as in the case of most of the numerous handicrafts of life.[204]

Finally, it cannot truly be said that the Post-Office institution is not moving with the age, but is as it used to be, intrenched in the traditions of the past. Different from other departments, with their undeviatingly narrow routine, the Post-Office is managed with that enlightened policy which openly invites suggestion and criticism; nay, it goes further, and offers rewards to persons, either in its employ or otherwise, who may devise any plan for accelerating its business. Post-Office work is of such a nature that the Post-Office establishment admits of constant improvement as well as constant expansion. The authorities publicly intimate that they will be glad to receive clear and correct information respecting any faulty arrangements, promising that such information shall have the best attention of the practical officers of the department. At the same [Pg 305] time, they take the opportunity to urge upon John Bull the practice of patience, reminding him of what he is often inclined to forget, that changes in machinery so extensive and delicate must be made carefully, and only after the most mature thought and fullest investigation. "The Post-Office," says Mr. Mathew D. Hill, the respected Recorder of Birmingham,[205] "no longer assumes to be perfect, and its conductors have renounced their claims to infallibility. Suggested improvements, if they can sustain the indispensable test of rigid scrutiny, are welcomed, and not, as of old, frowned away. The Department acts under the conviction that to thrive it must keep ahead of all rivals; that it must discard the confidence heretofore placed in legal prohibitions, and seek its continuance of prosperity only by deserving it."

FOOTNOTES:

[196] In this category we suppose the reviewer placed the following letter addressed to the Secretary of the Post-Office, from Lord Cranworth when Lord Chancellor. We adduce it here, on the contrary, as a specimen of a handsome and manly apology: "Sir,—Complaints were made early last month, that a letter posted by Mr. Anderson, of Lincoln's Inn, and addressed to me, had never reached its destination.... You caused inquiry to be made.... I feel it a duty to you, Sir, and the Post-Office authorities, to say that I have just found the missing letter, which has been accidentally buried under a heap of other papers. I have only to regret the trouble which my oversight thus caused, and to take the earliest opportunity of absolving all persons, except myself, of blame in the matter. I have, &c. &c. CRANWORTH." Somewhat similar to the above case, occurring only last year, we may refer to the circumstance, probably in the memory of most of our readers, when, among a batch of complainants whose letters The *Times* admitted to its columns, was one from the late Mr. John Gough Nicholls, the eminent *littérateur*, who grieved bitterly that a letter sent through the post to him had not arrived at his address. From a manly apology which he made to the Post-Office authorities a few days afterwards, also given in The *Times*, it appeared that the reason why he never received the letter was, that *it had not been sent through the Post-Office*, as it ought to have been, but was delivered by a private messenger at another house in the street.

[197] We do not mention this latter circumstance, be it understood, to discourage the use of slits or letter-boxes in private doors. An occurrence of the above kind must be exceedingly rare, whilst nothing so much helps the prompt delivery of letters as such an arrangement.

[198] Perhaps, however, there is room to doubt whether the true reform will consist in anything less than the entire abolition of packet subsidies, and the offering of the contracts in the ordinary way of commercial transactions. An ocean penny-postage, *e. g.* penny sea-postage, would then be almost inevitable. A letter charged a penny the half-ounce would amount to nearly 300*l.* a ton, an enormous freightage it will be admitted, to the United States, being even fifteen times steam freight to India. Nor when the letters get across the sea would they be subject to heavy inland postage either in the one country or the other. In the United States letters are circulated for thousands of miles for three cents, while for half an anna, a sum equivalent to three farthings of English money, a letter may be forwarded through the length and breadth of British India.

[199] As another example, take the United States, with Mr. Anthony Trollope for a judge on postal concerns. In his *North America*, vol. ii. p. 368, we read: "It is, I think, undoubtedly true that the amount of accommodation given by the Post-Office of the States is small, as compared with that afforded in some other countries, and that that accommodation is lessened by delays and uncertainty.... Here in England, it is the object of our Post-Office to carry the bulk of our letters at night, to deliver them as early as possible in the morning, and to collect them and take them away for despatch as late as may be in the day; so that the merchant may receive his letters before the beginning of his day's business, and despatch them after its close. In the States no such practice prevails. Letters arrive at any hour of the day miscellaneously, and were despatched at any hour. I found that the postmaster of one town could never tell me with certainty when letters would arrive at another. I ascertained, moreover, by painful experience that the *whole* of a mail would not always go forward by the first despatch. As regarded myself, this had reference chiefly to English letters and newspapers. 'Only a part of the mail has come,' the clerk would tell me. With us the owners of that part which did not *come* would consider themselves greatly aggrieved and make loud complaint. But, in the States, complaints made against official departments are held to be of little moment." We are further told that the "letters are subject to great delays by irregularities on railways. They have no travelling post-offices in the States, as with us. And, worst of all, there is no official delivery of letters." "The United States' Post-Office," says Mr. Trollope, "does not assume to itself the duty of taking letters to the houses of those for whom they are intended, but holds itself as having completed the work for which the original postage has been paid when it has brought them to the window of the post-office of the town to which they are addressed." The recognised official mode of delivery is from the office window, many inhabitants paying for private boxes at the post-office. If delivered, a further sum must be paid the bearer. Surely English people have reason to be content with their privileges, and in a certain degree to "rest and be thankful."

[200] Report of the Committee of the House of Commons on Packet and Telegraph Contracts, p. 27.

[201] *Ibid.* p. 34.

[202] A halfpenny post is in full operation at the city of Quebec.

[203] The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his place in Parliament, has just adverted (April) to the argument indicated above. "If the Post-Office revenue be abandoned in whole, or in part, a gap will be created which will have to be supplied by direct taxation." That our postage rates may be regarded as a kind of mild taxation, not unfairly levied, and that the work is done by the State with more uniformity of purpose and greater regularity than would be possible under any private company, our senators agree, perhaps with the single exception of Mr. Roebuck. That gentleman, however, it will be remembered, held that Sebastapol might have been reduced more easily had the business been made a subject of contract! With respect to the state monopoly and the advantages derived from it, political economists are also pretty well agreed. Blackstone has been referred to previously. Sergeant Stephens, in his *Commentaries*, endorses Blackstone's views. Mr. M'Cullagh, in his *Principles of Political Economy*, is so clear on this point that we venture to make a quotation: "Perhaps, with the single exception of the carriage of letters, there is no branch of industry which Government had not better leave to be conducted by individuals. It does not, however, appear that the Post-Office could be so well conducted by any other party as by Government; the latter only can enforce perfect regularity in all its subordinate departments, can carry it into the smallest villages and even beyond the frontier, and can combine all its separate parts into one uniform system on which the public may rely for security and despatch. Besides providing for the speedy and safe communication of intelligence, the Post-Office has everywhere almost been rendered subservient to fiscal purposes, and made a source of revenue; and provided the duty on letters be not so heavy as to oppose any very serious obstacle to the frequency and facility of correspondence, it seems to be a most unobjectionable tax; and is paid and collected with little trouble and inconvenience." Fourth Edition, 1849, pp. 296-7. See also M'Cullagh's *Commercial Dictionary*, where he speaks still more decidedly, and Mr. Senior's *Political Economy*. Sydney Smith, who with Mr. M'Cullagh was opposed to the penny-postage movement, was favourable to the Government monopoly of the Post-Office.

[204] These remarks must not be understood to apply to the *clerks* in the different branches of the London establishment. These clerks, &c., who are required to be educated gentlemen, are as a rule, paid on lower scales of salary than obtain, we believe, in the other Government departments.

[205] *Fraser's Magazine*, September, 1862, p. 536.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX (A).

CHIEF OFFICERS OF THE POST-OFFICE

ENGLAND.

Her Majesty's Postmaster-General.
THE RIGHT HON. LORD STANLEY OF ALDERLEY.

Secretary	John Tilley, Esq.
Assistant Secretaries	Frederic Hill, Esq. and Frank Ives Scudamore, Esq.
Chief Clerk of the Secretary's Office	Rodie Parkhurst, Esq.
Chief Clerk of Foreign Business	William Page, Esq.
Solicitor	Wm. Henry Ashurst, Esq.
Assistant Solicitor	R. W. Peacock, Esq.
Inspector-General of Mails	Edward John Page, Esq.
Deputy Inspector-General of Mails	John West, Esq.
Receiver and Accountant-General	Vacant.
Controller of Circulation Department	William Bokenham, Esq.
Deputy Controller "	Thomas Boucher, Esq.
Controller of Money-Order Office	Fred. Rowland Jackson, Esq.
Controller of Post-Office Savings' Banks	George Chetwynd, Esq.
Medical Officer	Waller Lewis, Esq. M.D.

Post-Office District Surveyors.

Northern District	Chris. Hodgson, Esq.	Penrith.
Southern District	J. H. Newman, Esq.	Dorking.
Eastern District	Anthony Trollope, Esq.	Waltham Cross.
Western District	G. H. Cresswell, Esq.	Devonport.
Derby District	Ernest Milliken, Esq.	Derby.
Manchester District	William Gay, Esq.	Altrincham.
Shrewsbury District	W. J. Godby, Esq.	Shrewsbury.
Gloucester District	John Patten Good, Esq.	London.
Birmingham District	A. M. Cunynghame, Esq.	London.

IRELAND.

Secretary	Gustavus Charles Cornwall, Esq.
Accountant	Joseph Long, Esq.
Controller of Sorting Office	R. O. Anderson, Esq.
Solicitor	R. Thompson, Esq.
Surveyors	H. James, Esq. Limerick, and W. Barnard, Esq. Dublin.

SCOTLAND.

Secretary	Francis Abbott, Esq.
Accountant	John Marrable, Esq.
Controller of Sorting Office	T. B. Lang, Esq.
Solicitor	J. Cay, Jun. Esq.
Surveyors	John Warren, Esq. Aberdeen, and E. C. Burckardt, Esq. Edinburgh.

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APPENDIX (B).

ABSTRACT OF THE PRINCIPAL REGULATIONS.

"It may not be too much to say that half the people in this country who use the Post-Office do not know clearly all the benefit they may derive from it."—*Household Words*, 1856.

We have already directed the attention of those engaged in frequent correspondence, especially with our colonies and foreign countries, to the necessity of consulting the official books published for their guidance. The following digest of Post Office regulations may, perhaps, answer the ordinary requirements of the general reader.

THE LETTER-POST.

As at present constituted, the British Post-Office has, with the few exceptions noticed in our historical survey, an exclusive authority to convey *letters* within the United Kingdom. It is also required by law to convey newspapers when the public choose to use the post for that purpose. The Post-Office further undertakes the conveyance of books and book-packets, and the remittance of small sums of money. Still more recently, it has entered into competition with the banking interest of the country: it now threatens a scheme which will compete with benefit societies and insurance offices. It is only with regard to the carriage of letters, however, that the Post-Office possesses any special privileges, the other branches of its business being open to any person or persons who may choose to undertake them.

(*a*) The rates of postage on all letters passing through the Post-Office are now regulated by weight,[206] irrespective of distance, and (with some exceptions, which we will mention presently) altogether irrespective of their contents. Letters weighing *less than four ounces* may be sent unpaid, but they will be charged double postage on delivery. Letters may be sent insufficiently stamped, but that deficiency, whatever it may be, will also be charged double postage on delivery. The rate for letters is familiar to every reader. [Pg 310]

(*b*) All re-directed letters are liable to additional postage, but at the *prepaid*, and not the unpaid rate. Thus, for a letter under half an ounce, re-addressed from one post-town to another, additional postage, to the amount of one penny, is levied. Re-directed letters, not addressed to a fresh post-town, but to a place within the district belonging to the same post-town to which they were originally sent, are not charged with any additional postage, the first payment franking them until they are delivered. Letters for officers in the army and navy, and private soldiers and seamen employed on actual service, have their letters re-addressed to them from place to place without any charge for re-direction.

(*c*) No letter, &c. can be forwarded through the post which is more than two feet in length, breadth, or depth, nor any unpaid letter or packet which weighs more than four ounces, unless three-quarters of the postage due on it have been paid. The exceptions to this rule are—

1st. Packets sent to or received from places abroad.

2d. Packets to or from any of the Government departments or public officers.

3d. Petitions or addresses to the Queen, whether directed to Her Majesty or forwarded to any member of either House of Parliament.

4th. Petitions to either House of Parliament.

5th. Printed parliamentary proceedings.

(*d*) Late letters, &c. are received till within five minutes of the despatch of the mails, except where the Post-Office surveyor may deem a longer interval necessary, and providing that this arrangement does not necessitate any office being open after ten o'clock at night. In each post-office window placards are exhibited showing the time up to which such letters may be posted. [Pg 311]

No late letters can be forwarded by the mail preparing for despatch unless prepaid in stamps, including the ordinary postage and the late-letter fee. Government letters are an exception to this rule; they may be posted, without extra fee, up to the latest moment.

(*e*) Letters containing sharp instruments, knives, scissors, glass, &c. are not allowed to circulate through the post, to the risk of damaging the general correspondence. Such communications, when posted, are detained and forwarded to the Metropolitan Office, where correspondence is at once opened with the senders.

Letters for the United Kingdom found to contain coin are only forwarded to their destination under certain restrictions. Such letters, if not registered, are at once treated as if they were, and charged on delivery with a double registration-fee, or eightpence in addition to the postage.

REGISTERED LETTERS.

The registration-fee of fourpence, prepaid in stamps, will secure careful treatment to any letter, newspaper, or book-packet addressed to any part of the United Kingdom. Record is kept of all such letters throughout their entire course. The registration of a packet makes its transmission more secure, by rendering it practicable to trace it from its receipt to its delivery. For a fee of sixpence letters may be registered to any British colony, except Ascension, Vancouver's Island, British Columbia, and Labuan, for which places they can only be registered part of the way. Letters may be registered to several foreign countries at varying rates. (*See British Postal*

Guide.)

Every letter meant for registration should be presented at the post-office window, or counter (as the case may be) and a receipt obtained for it, and must on no account be dropped into the letterbox among the ordinary letters. If, contrary to this rule, a letter marked "registered" be found in the letter-box, addressed to the United Kingdom, it will be charged an extra registration-fee of double the ordinary fee, or one of eightpence instead of fourpence.

The latest time for posting a registered letter on payment of the ordinary fee is generally up to within half an hour of the closing of the letter-box for that particular mail with which it will require to be forwarded. A registered letter will be received at all head offices up to the closing of the general letter-box, or until the office is closed for the night, on payment of a late fee of fourpence in addition to the ordinary registration fee. All fees, as well as postage, of registered letters must be prepaid in stamps. A registered letter, when re-directed, is liable to the same additional charge as if it were an ordinary letter, the original register fee, however, sufficing until it is delivered. [Pg 312]

By Act of Parliament, the Post-Office is not responsible for the absolute security of registered letters, though every care and attention are given to them. Each registered letter may be traced from hand to hand, from posting to delivery, with unfailing accuracy, and there can be no question as to the great security which is thus afforded. Any officer who may neglect his duty with registered letters is called to strict account, and, if the Postmaster-General should see fit, will be required to make good any loss that may be sustained. In cases where registered letters have been lost (in the proportion, it is said, of about one in ninety thousand), or some abstraction of their contents, the Department makes good the loss, if the fault is shown to rest with the Post-Office, and if the sum lost be of moderate amount and the sufferer a person not in affluent circumstances.

FOREIGN AND COLONIAL LETTER-POSTS.

For information of the despatch of foreign and colonial mails; rates of postage; and as to whether prepayment be optional or compulsory; see the "British Postal Guide," published quarterly.

Letters addressed to places abroad may be prepaid in this country either in money or stamps, but such payment must be made either wholly in stamps or wholly in money. The only exception to this rule is when the rate of postage includes a fractional part of a penny, for which, of course, there are no existing English stamps.

With certain exceptions, the only admitted evidence of the prepayment of a foreign letter is the mark agreed upon with the particular foreign country or colony.

When prepayment is *optional*, any outward letter (*e. g.* going abroad) posted with an insufficient number of stamps is charged with the deficient postage in addition, unless the letter has to go to Holland, or to the United States, or to a country through France, in which case it is treated as wholly unpaid, the postal conventions with these countries not allowing the recognition of partial prepayment. When, however, prepayment of the whole postage is *compulsory*, a letter, or aught else posted with an insufficient number of stamps, is sent (by the first post) to the Returned Letter Office. [Pg 313]

Letters for Russia and Poland are also treated as wholly unpaid, if the full postage has not been paid in the first instance.

Letters to or from Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, British West Indies (except Turk's Island), Honduras, and St. Helena, posted wholly unpaid, or paid less than one rate, are detained and returned to the writers for postage. If the letters should be paid with one rate (paid for half an ounce, for instance, when the letter weighs more than half an ounce), they are forwarded (except in the case of New Zealand), charged with the deficient postage and sixpence as a fine. Letters for New Zealand must be fully prepaid.

Letters for nearly all our remaining British colonies, if posted unpaid, either wholly or in part, are, on delivery, charged sixpence each in addition to the ordinary postage.

Letters intended to be sent by private ship should, in all cases, have the words "By private ship," or "By ship," distinctly written above the address. The postage of letters forwarded by private ship is sixpence—if the weight does not exceed half an ounce—and the postage must generally be prepaid. Exception is made to most of our North American and African colonies, to which places prepayment by private ship is not compulsory. (See table in the *British Postal Guide*.)

When the route by which a foreign or colonial letter is to go is not marked on the letter, it will be sent by the principal or earliest route. In some cases, the postage paid (provided it be by stamps) is regarded as an indication of the wish of the sender, and the letters are forwarded by the route for which the prepayment is sufficient. Thus, letters for Holland, Denmark, Norway, &c. which, as a rule, are sent *viâ* Belgium, are sent *viâ* France, if the prepayment be insufficient for the former, but sufficient for the latter route. [Pg 314]

North American and Indian Mails.—Letters for passengers on board the Cunard mail packets for America touching at Queenstown, provided they be addressed to the care of the officers in charge of the mails on board such packets, *and be registered*, may be posted in any part of the United Kingdom up to the time at which registered letters intended for transmission to America

by the same packets are received, and they will be delivered on board the packets at Queenstown.

Letters for passengers on board the Mediterranean packets about to sail from Southampton for India, China, Australia, &c. and the Canadian mail packets touching at Londonderry, may, under similar conditions, be posted up to the same time as registered letters for India and Canada.

The letters should be addressed thus: "Mr. ——, on board the mail packet at Queenstown, Londonderry, or Southampton (as the case may be), care of the officer in charge of the mails."

Letters directed to the care of the packet agent at Suez, and despatched by the Indian mails *viâ Marseilles*, which always leaves after the mails *viâ Southampton*, will most probably there reach passengers for India, &c. who may have previously sailed in the Southampton packets.

NEWSPAPER POSTS.

(*a*) It is not compulsory to send newspapers through the post.

(*b*) The rate for newspapers stamped with the *impressed* stamp is one penny for two sheets, three-halfpence for three sheets, and twopence for four sheets, of printed matter.

(*c*) No newspaper, or other publication, can pass through the post, unless the impressed stamp be of the value of at least one penny.

(*d*) The title and date of every publication so passing must be printed at the top of every page.

(*e*) The impressed stamp (or stamps, if more than one publication be sent under one cover) must be distinctly visible on the outside. When a newspaper is folded so as not to expose the stamp, a [Pg 315] fine of one penny is made in addition to the proper postage of the paper.

(*f*) The publication must not be printed on pasteboard or cardboard, but on ordinary paper, nor must it be enclosed in a cover of either material.

(*g*) Newspapers bearing the impressed stamp cannot circulate through the post after they are *fifteen days old*.

(*h*) They must not contain any enclosure, and must either have no cover at all, or one which shall be open at both ends. They must have no writing either inside or outside, except the name of the persons to whom they are sent, the printed title of the publications, and the printed names of the publishers or agents sending them. If one of these newspapers be addressed to a second person, the address in the first instance still remaining, it is regarded as an infringement of the above rule, and renders the paper liable to be charged as an unpaid letter.

(*i*) In order that newspapers may be sent abroad, the publishers must first have had them registered at the General Post-Office.

(*j*) Newspapers intended for transmission to our colonies or foreign countries must, in all cases, be prepaid *with postage-stamps*, the impressed stamp here, in all respects, standing for nothing. Though this is the case, all newspapers sent abroad are liable to the same regulations as English newspapers bearing impressed stamps.

(*k*) It must be borne in mind, that the arrangements for inland newspapers forwarded under the book-post regulations, and paid with the ordinary postage-stamp, are entirely distinct from the above.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS.

(*a*) Printed proceedings of the British Parliament are forwarded through the Post-Office at a special rate, and possess privileges in their transmission not belonging to either the newspaper- or book-postage. Parliamentary proceedings, however, may pass through the post at either the special rate, the newspaper rate, or book-post rate, always provided that the conditions of the particular rate chosen be complied with.

(*b*) "Parliamentary proceedings," if these words are written or printed on the cover (otherwise [Pg 316] they are liable to be charged letter rate), may circulate through the United Kingdom at the following rates of postage:—

Weighing not more than	4 oz.			1*d.*
Weighing more than	4 oz.	and not exceeding	8 oz.	2*d.*
"	8 oz.	"	12 oz.	3*d.*
"	12 oz.	"	16 oz.	4*d.*

and so on; one penny being charged for every additional *quarter* of a pound or fraction of a quarter of a pound.

(*c*) Prepayment of parliamentary proceedings is *optional* throughout the United Kingdom. Prepayment may also be made in part, when the *simple difference only* will be charged on delivery.

Parliamentary proceedings can only be sent to the colonies or foreign countries by means of the

book-post system, and, of course, only where book-posts are established.

THE BOOK-POST.

(*a*) Written or printed matter of any kind—including matter which may be sent by the ordinary newspaper-post, or under the special privileges of parliamentary proceedings—may be sent through the book-post under the following rates and conditions:—

(*b*)

A packet weighing	not more than	4 oz.			1*d.*
"	more than	4 oz.	but not exceeding	8 oz.	2*d.*
"	more than	8 oz.	"	1 lb.	4*d.*
"	more than	1 lb.	"	1½ lb.	6*d.*
"	more than	1½ lb.	"	2 lb.	8*d.*

and so on; twopence being charged for every additional *half-pound* or fraction of a half-pound.

(*c*) The postage on book-packets must be prepaid, and that by postage-stamps affixed outside the packets or their covers. If a book-packet should be posted insufficiently prepaid, it is forwarded, charged with the deficient book postage together with an additional rate; thus, one weighing over four ounces and only bearing one penny stamp, would be charged twopence additional postage on delivery. If a book-packet is posted bearing no stamps at all, it is charged as an *unpaid letter*.

(*d*) In cases where a book-packet is re-directed from one to another postal district in the United Kingdom, the same charge is made on delivery as was originally made for the postage, one penny for four ounces, twopence for a packet under eight ounces, and so on. [Pg 317]

(*e*) Every book-packet must be sent either without a cover, or with one open at the ends or sides, in order that the contents may be examined if it be thought necessary. For greater security, it may be tied round the ends with string, though each postmaster is empowered to remove it for the purpose of examining the packet. He will re-secure it, however, after examination. As a security against fraud, it has been found necessary to adopt precautionary measures with book-packets and newspapers: it has been demonstrated over and over again that many people will evade the Post-Office charges, cheap as they now are, if it be possible to do so.[207] When any head postmaster has grounds for suspecting an infringement of the rules of the book-post, and occasionally when he has no suspicion, he is required to open and examine packets passing through his office, in order to assure himself that the privileges of the book-post are being legitimately used.

(*f*) A book-packet may contain any number of separate books or other publications (including printed or lithographed letters), photographs (when not on glass or in cases containing glass), prints, maps, or any quantity or quality of paper, parchment, or vellum. The whole of this description of paper, books, and other publications, may either be printed, written, engraved, lithographed, or plain, or the packet may consist of a mixture of any or all these varieties. The binding, mounting, or covering of books and rollers, &c. in the case of prints or maps, are allowed. In short, whatever usually appertains to the sort of articles described, or whatever is necessary for their safe transmission, may be forwarded through the post at the same rate charged for the articles themselves. [Pg 318]

(*g*) Among the general restrictions, we find the following:—

> No book-packet must exceed two feet in length, width, or depth.
>
> No book-packet must contain anything inclosed which is sealed against inspection, nor must there be any letter inclosed, or anything in the way of writing in the packet of the nature of a communication, either separate or otherwise. Entries on the first page of a book, merely stating who sends it, are allowable (and even desirable in case of failure of delivery) inasmuch as they are not regarded as of the nature of a letter.
>
> Any packets found with a communication written in it (if the communication in question cannot be taken out, but forms a component part of the packet) will be charged with the *unpaid letter postage*, and then sent forward.
>
> If a packet be found containing an enclosure, whether sealed or otherwise, or anything of the shape of a letter, such enclosure or letter will be taken out and forwarded separately to the address given on the packet. It is sent forward, of course, as an unpaid letter, but, in addition, another single rate is charged. Thus, if the article taken out of the packet does not exceed half an ounce in weight, the charge of threepence will be levied on delivery, while the remainder of the packet, if prepaid, will be delivered free at the same time.

(*h*) And lastly. The conveyance of letters being the main business of the Post-Office, the authorities make distinct stipulations that book-packets and newspapers must not interfere with the quick and regular conveyance and delivery of letters. Though it is believed to be of very rare occurrence, head postmasters are authorized to delay forwarding any book-packet or newspaper for a period not exceeding twenty-four hours beyond the ordinary time, if the other interests of their office demands it.

THE PATTERN-POST.

Arrangements for an inland pattern-post, such as has been in existence for a short time between this country and France, for the conveyance of *patterns*, have just been made. The pattern-post is now in operation, and must prove beneficial to those engaged in mercantile pursuits. [Pg 319]

(*a*) At present, parcels of patterns may be forwarded through the post, subject to the undermentioned regulations, at the following fixed rates, prepaid with stamps, viz.:—

For a packet weighing	under	4 oz.			3*d.*
"	above	4 oz.	and not exceeding	8 oz.	6*d.*
"	above	8 oz.	"	1 lb.	1*s.* 0*d.*
"	above	1 lb.	"	1½ lb.	1*s.* 6*d.*

and so on; threepence being charged for every additional four ounces.

(*b*) The pattern must not be of intrinsic value. All articles of a saleable nature, wearing apparel, medicine, &c. or anything which may have a value of its own and not necessarily a money value, are excluded by this rule.

(*c*) The patterns-packet must not contain any writing inside, except the address of the manufacturer or trademark, the numbers, or the prices of the articles sent.

(*d*) The patterns must be sent in covers open at the ends or sides, in the same way as book-packets, so as to admit of easy and thorough examination. Samples of seeds, drugs, and other things of that character, which cannot be sent in open covers, may be inclosed in bags of linen, paper, or other material, tied at the neck with string. If transparent bags are used, as in France, the articles may easily be seen; but even then the bags must not be tied so that they cannot easily be opened in their passage through the post.

(*e*) Articles such as the following are prohibited by this new post, and few of them can be sent even at the letter-rate of postage, viz. metal boxes, porcelain or china, fruit, vegetables, bunches of flowers, cuttings of plants, knives, scissors, needles, pins, pieces of watch or other machinery, sharp-pointed instruments, samples of metals or ores, samples in glass bottles, pieces of glass, acids, &c., copper or steel-engraving plates, or confectionary of all kinds. In almost all these cases, the contents of a letter-bag would be in danger of being damaged or spoiled.

MONEY-ORDERS. [Pg 320]

(*a*) Inland money-orders are obtainable at any of the offices of the United Kingdom on payment of the following commission:—

On sums not exceeding 2*l.*			for	3*d.*
Above 2*l.*	and not exceeding	5*l.*	"	6*d.*
Above 5*l.*	"	7*l.*	"	9*d.*
Above 7*l.*	"	10*l.*	"	1*s.* 0*d.*

The commission on money-orders made payable in any of the British Colonies where money-order business is transacted is *four times* the sum charged for inland orders, except at Gibraltar and Malta, where the commission is only three times the British rate.

(*b*) The amount of any one money-order cannot exceed 10*l.*, nor less than 1*d.* No order is allowed to contain a fractional part of a penny.

(*c*) Applications for a money-order should always be made in writing. "Application Forms" are supplied gratuitously at all money-order offices. The surname, and, at least, the initial of one Christian name of both the person who sends the order, and the person to whom the money is to be paid, must always be given. The address of the remitter of the money should also be given. The following exceptions are allowed to the above rule:—

(1) If the remitter or payee be a peer or bishop, his ordinary title is sufficient.

(2) If a firm, the usual designation will suffice—if that designation consist of names of persons, and not of a company trading under a title.

(3) Money-orders sent to the Privy Council may be issued payable to "The Privy Council Office."

(4) When the remitter notifies that the order is to be paid through a bank, he may withhold the name of the person for whom it is intended if he chooses; or he may, if he wishes, substitute a designation instead of a person's name; as, for example, he may make an order payable, through a bank, to "The Cashier of the Bank of England," or "The Publisher of *The Times*."

(*d*) A money-order is always issued on the *head* office of any town where there are several money-order offices, except the persons sending it request that it should be made out for some other subordinate office. [Pg 321]

(*e*) The sender of any money-order may make his order payable ten days after date, by simply signing a requisition at the foot of the order to that effect, and affixing a penny receipt-stamp to his signature.

(*f*) An order once made out cannot be cancelled by the officer issuing it under any circumstances. If the sender should require to transmit it to a different town than the one he first mentioned, or to a different name, he must apply to the issuing postmaster, and make the necessary application on the proper form which will be furnished to him. Directions on all these subjects are printed on the back of money-orders.

(*g*) When an order is presented for payment (not through a bank), the postmaster is required to see that the signature on the order is identical with the name to which he is advised to pay the money, and that the name be given as full in the one case as it is in the other. If this is so, the person presenting the order is required to state the name of the party sending it, and should the reply be correct, the order is paid, unless the postmaster shall have good reason for believing that the applicant is neither the rightful claimant, nor deputed by him. If presented through a bank, however, it is sufficient that the order be receipted by some name, and that (crossed with the name of the receiving bank) it be presented by some person known to be in the employment of the bank. The owner of a money-order is always at liberty to direct, by crossing it, that an order be paid through a bank, though the sender should not make it so payable. The ordinary questions are then dispensed with.

(*h*) Money-orders, when paid, do not require a receipt-stamp.

(*i*) Under no circumstance can payment of an order be made on the day on which it has been issued.

(*j*) After once paying a money-order, by whomsoever presented, the Post-Office is not liable to any further claim. Every endeavour, it is stated, will be made to pay the money to the proper party, or to some one believed to be delegated by the proper party.

(*k*) A money-order in the United Kingdom becomes *lapsed*, if it be not presented for payment before the end of the second calendar month after that in which it was issued (thus, if issued in January, it must be paid before the end of March). A second commission for a new order will then, after that time, be necessary. *Six* months are allowed in the colonies. [Pg 322]

If the order be not paid before the end of the twelfth calendar month after that in which it was issued, all claim to the money is lost.[208]

(*l*) In case of the miscarriage or loss of an inland money-order, a duplicate is granted on a written application (enclosing the amount of a second commission and the requisite particulars) to the Controller of the Money-Order Office of England, Scotland, or Ireland (as the case may be), where the original order was *issued*. If it be desired to stop payment of an inland order, a similar application, with postage-stamps to the amount of a second commission, must be made to the controller of the money-order office in that part of the United Kingdom in which the order is *payable*. All mistakes made in money-orders can only be rectified in this manner by correspondence with the chief metropolitan office and by payment of a second commission. Whenever the mistake is attributable to the Post-Office, however, and a second commission is rendered necessary, the officer in fault is called upon to pay it.

Proper printed forms, moreover, are supplied for every case likely to arise, and full instructions are given on money-orders. In addition, however, to supplying the proper forms, the postmasters are required to give every necessary information on the subject of second or duplicate orders.

(*m*) No money-order business is transacted at any post-office on Sundays. On every lawful day, the time for issuing and paying money-orders is from ten till four at the chief offices in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, and from nine till six at provincial offices. On Saturday nights it is usual to allow two extra hours for this business.

POST-OFFICE SAVINGS BANKS. [Pg 323]

We have already explained at some length the origin and ordinary working of these banks; the following *résumé* of the distinctive features of the new plan may therefore suffice:—

(*a*) Nearly all the money-order offices in the United Kingdom are now open each working-day for the receipt and payment of savings-bank accounts.

(*b*) Deposits of one shilling, or any number of shillings, will be received, provided the total amount of deposits in any one year does not exceed 30*l.*, or the total amount standing in one name does not exceed, exclusive of interest, 150*l.*

(*c*) Each depositor, on making the first payment, must give every necessary particular regarding himself, and sign a declaration. He will then receive a book (gratis) in which all entries of payments and withdrawals will be regularly made by an officer of the Post-Office.

(*d*) Interest at the rate of 2*l.* 10*s.* per cent. is given on all money deposited.

(*e*) Secrecy is observed with respect to the names of depositors in post-office banks, and the amounts of their deposits.

(*f*) Depositors have direct Government security for the prompt repayment, with interest, of all their money.

(*g*) Married women may deposit money in these banks, and money so deposited will be paid to the *depositor*, unless her husband give notice of marriage, in writing, and claim payment of the deposits.

(*h*) Money may also be deposited by, or in behalf of, minors. Unlike some ordinary savings-bank, depositors over seven years of age are treated here as persons of full age, though minors under seven cannot withdraw, or have drawn, their deposits until they attain that age.

(*i*) Charitable societies and penny-banks may deposit their funds in the Post-Office banks, but a copy of their rules must, in the first instance, be sent to the Postmaster-General. Special aid is given to penny-banks established in connexion with those of the Post-Office.

(*j*) Friendly societies, duly certified by the Registrar of these societies, may also deposit their funds, without limitation or amount, under the same condition. [Pg 324]

(*k*) A depositor in an old savings-bank may have his money transferred to the Post-Office banks with the greatest ease. He has only to apply to the trustees of the old savings-bank for a certificate of transfer (in the form prescribed by the Act of Parliament regulating the transactions of these banks, viz. 24 Vict. cap. 14), and he can then offer the certificate to the Post-Office bank, and it will be received as if it were a cheque. Of course he can draw out from one bank and pay into the other in the usual way, but the transfer certificate will save him both trouble and risk.

(*l*) A depositor in any one of the Post-Office savings-banks may continue his payments in any other bank at pleasure without notice or change of book. The same facilities of withdrawal, as we have previously shown, are also extended to him.

(*m*) Additional information may be obtained at any post-office, or by application to the Controller, Savings-Bank Department, General Post-Office, London. All applications of this kind, or any letters on the business of the savings-banks, as well as the replies thereto, pass and repass free of postage.

MISCELLANEOUS REGULATIONS.

1. Petitions and addresses to Her Majesty, or to members of either House of Parliament, forwarded for presentation to either House, may be sent *free*, provided that they do not weigh more than two pounds, and are either without covers, or enclosed in covers open at the ends or sides. They must not contain any writing of the nature of a letter, and if, upon examination, anything of the kind be found, the packet is liable to be charged under the book-post arrangement.

2. Letters on the business of the Post-Office, relating to any of its numerous branches, may be forwarded to the head offices of London, Edinburgh, or Dublin, by the public, free of all postage. Letters for the different departments of the Government in London may be prepaid, or otherwise, at the option of the sender. [Pg 325]

3. Letters addressed by the public to the district surveyors of the Post-Office, on postal business, may also be sent without postage, though all letters addressed to local postmasters should be prepaid by stamps.

4. It is absolutely forbidden that information respecting letters passing through the Post-Office should be given to any persons except those to whom such letters are addressed. Post-Office officials are strictly prohibited from making known official information of a private character, or, in fact, any information on the private affairs of any person which may be gathered from their correspondence.

5. Letters once posted cannot be returned to the writers under any pretence whatever—not even to alter the address, or even the name, on a letter. Further, postmasters have not the power to *delay forwarding*, according to the address, any letter, even though a request to that effect be made on the envelope, or to them personally, either orally or in writing. Each letter, put into the Post-Office, is forwarded, according to its address, by the *first mail* leaving the place, unless, indeed, it be posted "too late," when it is not forwarded till the next succeeding mail.

6. Each postmaster is required to display a notice in the most conspicuous position in his office, giving every necessary information respecting the time of despatch and receipt of mails, delivery of letters, hours of attendance, &c. &c.

7. On Sundays there is usually but one delivery of letters, viz. in the morning, and two hours are allowed during which the public may purchase postage-stamps, have letters registered, or pay foreign and colonial letters, &c.; but for the rest of the day all other duties, so far as the public are concerned, are wholly suspended. In the General Post-Office in London no attendance is given to the public. In all the towns of Scotland, and also in one or two towns in England, no delivery of letters takes place from door to door, but the public may have them by applying during the time fixed for attendance at the post-office.

8. In England and Ireland, where, as a rule, letters are delivered on Sunday mornings, arrangements are made under which any person may have his letters kept at the post-office till Monday morning by simply addressing a written request to the postmaster to that effect. Of course, all the correspondence for such applicant is kept, even supposing some of it should be marked "immediate;" and no distinction is allowed. Letters directed to be kept at the post-office in this way cannot be delivered from the post-office window, except in the case of holders of private boxes, who may either call for their letters or not, as they may think proper. Instructions sent to the postmasters of towns under this arrangement are binding for three months, nor can a request for a change be granted without a week's notice. [Pg 326]

9. Any resident, in town or country, can have a private box at the post-office on payment of an appointed fee. That fee is generally fixed at a guinea per annum, payable in advance, and for a period of not less than a year. Private bags in addition are charged an extra sum.

10. "No postmaster is bound to give *change*, or is authorized to demand change; and when money is paid at a post-office, whether in change or otherwise, no question as to its right amount, goodness, or weight, can be entertained after it has left the counter."

11. Except in the case of foreign or colonial letters about to be prepaid in money, a postmaster or his clerks are not bound to weigh letters for the public, though they may do so provided their other duties will allow of it.

12. Postage-stamps or stamped envelopes (the latter to be had in packets or parts of packets, and charged at an uniform rate, viz. 2*s.* and 3*d.* for a packet of twenty-four envelopes) may be obtained at any post-office in the United Kingdom at any time during which the office is open—in most cases, from 7 or 7.30 A.M. till 10 P.M.

13. A licence to sell postage-stamps can be obtained, free of expense, by any respectable person, on application to the office of Inland Revenue, Somerset House, London, or (in the provinces) by application to the district stamp distributor.

14. Every rural messenger is authorized to sell stamps and embossed envelopes at the same price at which postmasters sell them; and when, in the country, the rural postman is applied to for these articles, he must either supply them, or (if he has none in his possession) must take letters with the postage in money, and carefully affix stamps to them when he arrives at the end of his journey.

15. Each postmaster is authorized to purchase postage-stamps from the public, if not soiled or otherwise damaged, at a fixed charge of 2½ per cent. Single stamps will not be received, but those offered must be presented in strips containing at least two stamps adhering to each other. This arrangement was fixed upon primarily in order to discourage the transmission of coin by post. [Pg 327]

16. Letter-carriers and rural messengers are prohibited at any time from distributing letters, newspapers, &c., except such as have passed through the Post-Office. They are not allowed to receive any payment beyond the unpaid postage on letters or newspapers delivered.[209] Further, in delivering letters, they are not allowed to deviate from the route laid down for them by the proper authorities.

17. Persons living within the free delivery of any town cannot obtain their letters at the post-office window, unless they rent a private box, in which case they may apply for them as often as a mail arrives. In some cases where there are not frequent deliveries of letters, persons may apply at the post-office for their letters arriving by a particular mail after which there is not an immediate delivery from door to door.

18. Persons having a distinct residence in any town cannot have their letters addressed to the post-office (except a private box be taken), and a postmaster is warranted, when such letters arrive so addressed, to send them out by the first delivery. The "Poste Restante" is meant for commercial travellers, tourists, and persons without any settled residence. Letters so addressed are kept in the office for one month, after which, if they are not called for, they are returned to the writers through the Dead-Letter Office. "Ship-letters" in sea-port towns, or letters addressed to seamen on board ship expected to arrive at these towns, are kept *three* months before they are thus dealt with.

19. When any letters, &c. remain undelivered, owing to the residences of the persons to whom they are addressed not being known, a list of such addresses is shown in the window of the post-office to which they may have been sent, during the time (only *one week* in these cases) they are allowed to remain there.

20. Greenwich time is kept at the Post-Office.

LONDON DISTRICT POSTS. [Pg 328]

1. The London district comprises all places within a circle of twelve miles from St. Martin's-le-Grand, including Cheshunt, Hampton, Hampton Court, Sunbury, and the post towns of Barnet, Waltham Cross, Romford, Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, and Hounslow.

2. There are ten postal districts, each of which is treated in many respects as a separate post

town. The names of the districts are as follows, the initial letter or letters of the name forming the necessary abbreviation to each, viz.:—East Central, West Central, Western, South-Western, North-Western, Northern, North-Eastern, Eastern, South-Eastern, and Southern.

3. The portion of each district within three miles of the General Post-Office is designated the Town Delivery. Within the town limits there are eleven deliveries of letters daily, the first or principal commencing at 7.30 and generally concluded by 9 A.M.; the last delivery commences at 7.45 P.M.; there being something like hourly deliveries within the interval. Each town delivery occupies on an average forty-five minutes. There are seven despatches daily to the suburban districts.

4. As a general rule, the number of despatches from the suburban districts is the same as the number of deliveries.

5. Information relative to the time of delivery and the time for each despatch to the head office, and also from thence to the provinces, is afforded at each town and suburban receiving-house. At each of these houses, several hundreds in number, stamps are sold, letters are registered, and separate boxes are provided for "London District" and "General Post" letters.

THE "POSTE RESTANTE" AT THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

6. The "Poste Restante" arrangements for London are somewhat different to those in the provinces; but like the latter they are meant to provide for strangers and travellers who have no permanent abode in London,—residents in London not being allowed the privilege. [Pg 329]

7. Letters addressed to "initials" cannot be received; if so addressed they are returned to their writers through the Returned Letter-Office.

8. Letters addressed "Post-Office, London," or "Poste Restante," are delivered only at the Poste Restante Office, on the south side of the hall of the General Post-Office, between the hours of 9 A.M. and 5 P.M.

9. All persons applying for letters at the Poste Restante must be prepared to give the necessary particulars to the clerk on duty, in order to prevent mistakes, and to insure the delivery of the letters to the persons to whom they properly belong. If the applicant be a subject of the United Kingdom (and subjects of states not issuing passports are regarded as British subjects), he must be able to state from what place or district he expects letters, and produce some proof of identification; and if he sends for his letters the messenger must be supplied with this information, as well as show a written authority to receive them. If the applicant be a foreigner, he must produce his passport; or should he send for his letters, the messenger must take it with him.

FOOTNOTES:

[206] The average weight of inland letters is now about a quarter of an ounce; that of colonial letters about a third of an ounce; of a foreign letter also about a quarter of an ounce. The average weight of newspapers is about three ounces, and of book-packets ten ounces.

[207] With charges extremely low, the Post-Office is victimized by all kinds of craftiness. The dodging of the proper payment is sometimes quite ludicrous. Hundreds of newspapers, for instance, are annually caught (and we may reasonably assume that thousands more escape) with short loving messages deftly inscribed between their paragraphs of type, or letters, different descriptions of light articles, and even money curiously imbedded in their folds. Almost everybody might tell of some adventure of this kind in his experience not only before penny-postage, but even after it.

[208] Moneys accruing to the revenue from lapsed orders are allowed to go into a fund for assisting officers of the Post-Office to pay their premiums on life assurance policies. No officer, however, can be assisted to pay for a policy exceeding 300*l.*

[209] This prohibition does not extend to Christmas gratuities.

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APPENDIX (C).

INFORMATION RELATIVE TO THE APPOINTMENTS IN THE POST-OFFICE SERVICE.

All candidates for appointment in the Post-Office, whether to places in the gift of the Postmaster-General, or to those in provincial towns in the gift of the respective postmasters, must pass the stipulated examination prescribed by Government, and which is conducted under the auspices of the Civil Service Commissioners in London.

I. Candidates for clerkships in the Secretary's Office, London, must pass an examination on the following subjects, viz.[210]:—

1. Exercise designed to test handwriting and composition.

2. Arithmetic (higher branches, including vulgar and decimal fractions).

3. Precis.

4. A Continental language, French or German, &c.[211]

II. Candidates for general clerkships in the Metropolitan Offices are examined in[210]—

1. Writing from dictation.

2. Exercise to test orthography and composition.

3. Arithmetic (higher rules).

III. Candidates for the place of letter-carrier, &c.

1. Writing from dictation.

2. Reading manuscript.

3. Arithmetic (elementary).

All officers nominated to places in provincial offices must be examined by the postmaster, under the auspices of the Civil Service Commissioners, the examination-papers to be in all cases submitted to the Commissioners for inspection and judgment. [Pg 331]

IV. For clerks, the examination consists in

1. Exercises designed to test handwriting and orthography.

2. Arithmetic.

V. For sorters, letter-carriers, and stampers:—

1. Writing from dictation.

2. Reading manuscript.

3. Arithmetic (of an easy kind).

VI. For messengers:—

1. Writing their names and addresses.

2. Reading the addresses of letters.

3. Adding a few figures together.

No person under sixteen years of age is eligible for any situation in the Post-Office.

Candidates for clerkships in London must be under twenty-four years of age but not under seventeen. The stipulated age in the country is from seventeen to twenty-eight.

No one is eligible for an appointment who has been dismissed the Civil Service.

No one is eligible who is connected, directly or indirectly, with the management of an inn or public-house.

Sorters, stampers, or railway messengers must not be under 5ft. 3in. high in their stockings.

All officers appointed to the London Office must pass a medical examination before the medical officer of the Department. A special examination after probation is required from those appointed to the travelling post-offices. In the country, candidates must provide a medical certificate to the effect that they enjoy good health.

Sorters and letter-carriers may be promoted to clerkships.

Persons of either sex are eligible for appointment in provincial offices.

Letter-carriers are provided with uniforms.

Post-office officials are assisted, at the rate of about 20 per cent. in payment of premiums for life assurance. They are also entitled to superannuation allowance, according to their length of service. Clerks in the General Post-Office are allowed a month's, and sorters, letter-carriers, &c., a fortnight's, leave of absence each year.

Clerks, sorters, &c. in the provinces are allowed leave of absence for a fortnight in each year. [Pg 332]

Postmasters in the country and officers in the General Post-Offices must give security to the Postmaster-General for the faithful discharge of their duties, in amounts calculated according to the responsible nature of the appointment. A guarantee office[212] or two sureties are taken.

The clerks, &c. in the country offices are required to give security in the same manner to the postmasters who may have appointed them.

After the preliminary examinations have been passed successfully, each new officer, before commencing duty, is required to make a declaration before a magistrate, to the effect that he will

not open, or delay, or cause or suffer to be delayed, any letter or packet to which he may have access. He is then put on *probation* for a term of six months, after which period, if able to perform all the duties required of him, he receives a permanent appointment.

Promotion from class to class in the Post-Office is now, as a rule, regulated by seniority of service —a much more satisfactory arrangement to the whole body of officers than the system of promotion by merit which it has just superseded.

Heads of departments, postmasters, and all other officers employed in the Post-Office, are prohibited by law, under heavy penalties, from voting or interfering in elections for members of parliament.

No officer of the Post-Office can be *compelled* to serve as mayor, sheriff, common councilman, or in any public office, either corporate or parochial; nor can he be compelled to serve as a juror or in the militia.

FOOTNOTES:

[210] This examination is for third-class clerks only. Vacancies are filled up in the first and second classes from the third without any further examination.

[211] Clerks in the Solicitor's Office are examined also in conveyancing, and in the general principles of equity and common law.

[212] A Post-Office Mutual Guarantee Fund, suggested by Mr. Banning, the postmaster of Liverpool, is in active operation in London, and deserves mention. By means of this fund many officers of the Post-Office have been relieved from the necessity of providing personal securities, or of paying yearly sums to some guarantee office. Any clerk in London who may wish to join *deposits* the sum of 10*s.*, and letter-carriers 5*s.* These deposits are invested in the name of trustees in Government securities. There are at present nearly 3,000 subscribers, with an invested capital of 900*l.* Last year there were no demands at all on the fund except payments to members leaving the service, who not only draw out their original deposits, but are entitled to receive back a proportionate amount of interest after defaults have been paid.

APPENDIX (D).

APPOINTMENTS IN THE CHIEF OFFICE IN LONDON. (*Extracted from the Estimates of 1864-5.*)

In all cases marked thus * the present holders of office, or some of them, receive additional allowances, either on account of length of service, compensation, as paid on some previous *scale* of salary, or for extra work.

Number of Persons.	***Designation.***	***Salary of Office.***		
		Minimum per Annum.	***Annual Increment.***	***Maximum per Annum.***
		£	£ *s.*	£
1	Postmaster-General	—	—	2,500
1	Secretary	1,500	after 5 years	2,000
2	Assistant Secretaries*	700	50 0	1,000
	Secretary's Office.			
1	Chief Clerk	600	25 0	800
1	Principal Clerk for Foreign and Colonial Business*	600	25 0	800
11	First-class Clerks:—			
	4 First Section	500	25 0	600
	7 Second Section*	400	20 0	500
4	Senior Clerks	—	—	440
19	Second-class Clerks*	260	15 0	380

16	Third-class Clerks	120	10	0	240
11	Supplementary Clerks	80	5	0	150
10	Probationary Clerks at 5*s.* a day				
	Solicitor's Office.				
1	Solicitor	—	—		1,500
1	Assistant Solicitor	—	—		800
1	Second-class Clerk	260	15	0	380
2	Third-class Clerks	120	10	0	240
1	Fourth-class Clerk	80	5	0	150
	Mail Office.				
1	Inspector-General*	600	25	0	800
1	Deputy Inspector-General	500	20	0	600
1	Principal Clerk of Stationary Branch	400	20	0	500
1	Principal Clerk of Travelling Branch	350	20	0	450
3	First-class Clerks	260	10	0	350
6	Second-class Clerks*	180	7	10	240
12	Third-class Clerks	80	5	0	150
5	Inspectors of Mails Allowance of 15*s.* a day when travelling.	300	20	0	500
	Travelling Post-Office.				
8	First-class Clerks	260	10	0	350
15	Second-class Clerks	180	7	10	240
30	Third-class Clerks	80	5	0	150
141	Sorters:—				
	10 First-class	40*s.* a wk.	2	12	50*s.* a wk.
	19 Second-class	32*s.* a wk.	2	12	38*s.* a wk.
	38 Third-class	25*s.* a wk.	2	12	30*s.* a wk.
	74 Fourth-class	18*s.* a wk.	2	12	25*s.* a wk.
	Clerks in this office are also allowed travelling allowances at the rate of 5*s.* a trip; sorters, 3*s.* a trip				
1	Supervisor of Mails' Bag Apparatus	—	—		290
	Receiver and Accountant-General's Office.				
1	Receiver and Accountant-General*	600	25	0	800
1	Chief Examiner*	475	20	0	575
1	Cashier*	475	20	0	575
1	Principal Book-keeper*	425	20	0	525
11	First Class Clerks:—				
	5 First Section	310	15	0	400

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	6 Second Section*	260	10 0	350	
17	Second-class Clerks*	180	7 10	240	
22	Third-class Clerks	80	5 0	150	[Pg 335]
	Money-Order Office.				
1	Controller*	500	25 0	750	
1	Chief Clerk*	400	20 0	550	
1	Examiner*	375	15 0	450	
1	Book-keeper*	375	15 0	450	
13	First-class Clerks:—				
	4 First Section	365	15 0	400	
	9 Second Section	260	10 0	350	
52	Second-class Clerks	180	7 10	240	
55	Third-class Clerks	80	5 0	150	
6	Probationary Clerks 5*s.* per day				
	Circulation Department.				
1	Controller*	600	25 0	800	
1	Vice-Controller*	500	20 0	600	
3	Sub-Controllers	450	20 0	600	
16	Deputy Controllers	350	15 0	500	
40	First-class Clerks*	260	10 0	350	
80	Second-class Clerks*	180	7 10	240	
118	Third-class Clerks*	80	5 0	150	
7	First-class Inspectors of Letter-carriers	210	10 0	300	
15	Second-class ditto	150	7 10	200	
20	Third-class ditto	110	5 10	145	
2,356	Sorters, Messengers, &c. viz.—				
	Sorters 100 1st Class	40*s.* a wk.	2 12	50*s.* a wk.	
	Sorters 450 2d Class	24*s.* a wk.	2 12	38*s.* a wk.	
	Messengers 20 2d Class	21*s.* a wk.	2 12	40*s.* a wk.	
	Stampers 60 1st Class	28*s.* a wk.	2 12	35*s.* a wk.	
	Stampers 199 2d Class	21*s.* a wk.	2 12	27*s.* a wk.	
	Letter-carriers 330 1st Class*	26*s.* a wk.	2 12	30*s.* a wk.	
	Letter-carriers 962 2d Class*	20*s.* a wk.	2 12	25*s.* a wk.	
	Surveyors' Department.				
13	Surveyors*	500	25 0	700	
32	Surveyors' Clerks:—				
	13 First Class*	300	20 0	400	
	19 Second Class*	200	10 0	300	

13	Stationary Clerks	80	5 0	150

The surveyors have travelling allowances at the rate of 20*s.* per diem; surveyors' clerks, 15*s.* per diem; clerks in charge, 10*s.* and 7*s.* per diem. The whole are also allowed actual expenses of locomotion.

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PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENTS IN THE CHIEF OFFICES OF DUBLIN AND EDINBURGH.

(*Extracted from the Estimates of 1864-5.*)

Number of Persons.	***Designation.***	***Salary of Office.***		
		Minimum per Annum.	***Annual Increment.***	***Maximum per Annum.***
	DUBLIN	£	£ *s.*	£
1	Secretary	700	50 0	1,000
1	Chief Clerk	500	20 0	600
2	First-class Clerks	300	15 0	400
4	Second-class Clerks	140	10 0	300
1	Solicitor	—	—	1,000
1	Accountant*	500	20 0	600
1	Examiner*	325	20 0	425
1	Controller of Sorting Office	400	20 0	500
4	Deputy Controllers	280	10 0	350
	General Body of Clerks.			
13	First-class Clerks*	200	10 0	300
39	Second-class Clerks	125	7 10	180
14	Supplementary Clerks	70	5 0	120
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	125	7 10	200
1	Medical Officer	—	—	200
	EDINBURGH.			
1	Secretary	700	50 0	1,000
1	Chief Clerk	500	20 0	600
2	First-class Clerks	300	15 0	400
3	Second-class Clerks	140	10 0	300
1	Solicitor	—	—	400
1	Accountant*	500	20 0	600
1	Examiner*	325	20 0	425
1	Controller of Sorting Office	450	20 0	550
3	Deputy Controllers	280	10 0	350
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	125	7 10	200
1	Medical Officer	—	—	150
	General Body of Clerks.			

12	First-class Clerks	200	10 0	300
30	Second-class Clerks	125	7 10	180
9	Probationary Clerks, 5*s.* a day			

APPOINTMENTS, WITH SALARIES, OF THE FIVE PRINCIPAL PROVINCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND.

[Pg 337]

(*Extracted from the Estimates of 1864-5.*)

Number of Persons.	***Designations.***	***Poundage allowed.*** [213]	***Salary of Office.***		
			Minimum per Annum.	***Annual Increment.***	***Maximum per Annum.***
	Liverpool Office.	£	£	£ *s.*	£
1	Postmaster	730	—	—	1,000
1	Chief Clerk	—	400	20 0	500
2	Principal Clerks	—	200	10 0	300
1	Controller of Sorting Office	—	300	10 0	400
5	Assistant Controllers	—	200	5 0	250
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	—	125	7 10	200
2	Assistant Inspectors	—	80	5 0	120
8	First-class Clerks	—	150	5 0	200
16	Second-class Clerks	—	100	4 0	140
15	Third-class Clerks	—	60	3 0	100
23	First-class Sorters	—	31*s.* a wk.	2 12	35*s.* a wk.
23	Second-class Sorters	—	26*s.* a wk.	2 12	30*s.* a wk.
46	Third-class Sorters	—	22*s.* a wk.	1 6	25*s.* a wk.
93	Fourth-class Sorters	—	18*s.* a wk.	1 6	21*s.* a wk.
	Allowance to a Medical Officer	—	—	—	90*l.* a-year.
	Manchester Office.				
1	Postmaster	790	—	—	700
1	Chief Clerk	—	—	—	450
5	Principal Clerks	—	200	7 10	250
5	First-class Clerks	—	150	5 0	200
10	Second-class Clerks	—	100	5 0	150
	Medical Officer	—	—	—	80
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	—	150	7 10	200
2	Assistant ditto	—	80	5 0	120
	Sorting Clerks:—				
20	First-class	—	31*s.* a wk.	3 18	38*s.* a wk.
37	Second-class	—	21*s.* a wk.	2 12	30*s.* a wk.
116	Letter Carriers	—	18*s.* a wk.	1 6	23*s.* a wk.

[Pg 338]

	Glasgow Office.				
1	Postmaster	673	—	—	700
1	Controller of Sorting Office	—	200	10 0	300
5	First-class Clerks	—	150	5 0	200
5	Second-class Clerks	—	100	4 0	140
10	Supplementary Clerks		60	3 0	100
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	—	125	7 0	200
	Assistant Inspectorsof Letter-carriers	—	80	5 0	120
10	First-class Sorters	—	31*s.* a wk.	2 12	35*s.* a wk.
24	Second-class Sorters	—	26*s.* a wk.	2 12	30*s.* a wk.
29	Third-class Sorters	—	22*s.* a wk.	1 6	25*s.* a wk.
66	Fourth-class Sorters	—	18*s.* a wk.	1 6	21*s.* a wk.
97	Auxiliary Letter-carriers	—	—	—	6*s.* a wk.
	Allowance to Medical Officer	—	—	—	90
	Birmingham Office.				
1	Postmaster	500	—	—	700
3	Chief Clerks	—	150	5 0	230
2	Clerks	—	150	5 0	200
12	Ditto	—	60	5 0	140
1	Inspector of Letter-carriers	—	125	7 10	180
1	Assistant Inspector of Letter-carriers	—	80	5 0	120
25	Sorters	—	21*s.* a wk.	2 10	35*s.* a wk.
20	Third-class Letter-carriers	—	22*s.* a wk.	1 6	25*s.* a wk.
48	Fourth-class Letter-carriers	—	18*s.* a wk.	1 6	21*s.* a wk.
6	Temporary Letter-carriers	—	—	—	18*s.* a wk.
5	Auxiliaries	—	—	—	10*s.* 6*d.* a wk.
1	Medical Officer	—	—	—	60*l.* a year.
	Bristol Office.				
1	Postmaster	325	—	—	600
1	Chief Clerk	—	200	10 0	300
2	First-class Clerks	—	150	5 0	200
7	Second-class Clerks	—	100	4 0	140
8	Supplementary Clerks	—	60	3 0	100
1	Inspector of Letter-Carriers	—	110	5 0	140
9	First-class Sorters	—	27*s.* a wk.	2 12	33*s.* a wk.
12	Second-class Sorters	—	23*s.* a wk.	1 6	26*s.* a wk.
10	Third-class Sorters	—	19*s.* a wk.	1 6	22*s.* a wk.

24	Fourth-class Sorters	—	16*s.* a wk.	1 6	18*s.* a wk.
28	Auxiliaries	—	—	—	10*s.* 6*d.* a wk.
1	Medical Officer	—	—	—	50*l.* a year.

INFORMATION RESPECTING OTHER PRINCIPAL PROVINCIAL POST OFFICES.

[Pg 340]

Name of Town.	*Salary of Postmaster.*	*Poundage allowed.*	*Staff of Clerks.*	*Other Subordinate Officers.*	*Total Expenses of Establishment for 1864-5.*
	£	£			£
Bath	450	155	7	80	4,997
Brighton	500	210	8	36	3,357
Birkenhead	350	74	6	30	2,652
Carlisle	300	68	6	45	3,138
Derby	300	110	5	42	3,449
Exeter	500	145	13	104	6,185
Gloucester	300	72	6	29	2,404
Hull	450	200	15	63	4,887
Leeds	450	280	12	86	7,265
Newcastle-on-Tyne	450	240	9	54	4,318
Norwich	380	118	6	68	4,453
Oxford	331	72	8	23	2,362
Plymouth	332	105	6	37	2,648
Portsmouth	360	118	5	23	2,104
Preston	300	105	6	43	2,995
Sheffield	400	215	17	57	4,708
Shrewsbury	400	95	8	68	4,830
Southampton	450	160	8	52	4,415
Worcester	320	70	7	40	2,514
York	400	125	11	70	5,059
Belfast	340	116	6	47	3,407
Cork	340	105	6	39	2,719
Aberdeen	400	146	10	55	3,545
Dundee	230	109	5	30	2,038
Greenock	300	100	7	40	2,692

FOOTNOTES:

[213] On the sale of postage-stamps.

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APPENDIX (E).

AMOUNT OF POSTAGE (including Postage-Stamps sold by the Post-Office and by the Office of Inland Revenue) during the years 1861 and 1862 at those Towns in the United Kingdom where the amount was largest.

	1861	**1862**
ENGLAND.	£	£
Bath	17,795	18,433
Birmingham	48,818	50,272
Bradford, Yorkshire	17,098	19,640
Brighton	21,945	22,579
Bristol	33,865	35,720
Cheltenham	11,834	12,315
Exeter	16,334	16,739
Hull	20,561	20,819
Leeds	30,641	32,736
Leicester	10,420	11,238
Liverpool	115,268	117,676
London	979,662[214]	1,033,268[215]
Manchester	102,263	98,650
Newcastle-on-Tyne	24,844	25,998
Norwich	12,740	12,997
Nottingham	12,237	13,376
Plymouth	11,520	11,493
Sheffield	20,364	21,188
Southampton	15,182	15,852
York	13,368	13,850
IRELAND.		
Belfast	18,431	19,189
Cork	13,418	13,568
Dublin	67,458	65,199
SCOTLAND.		
Aberdeen	15,283	16,326
Edinburgh	73,863	74,569
Glasgow	70,476	73,809

FOOTNOTES:

[214] Including £163,837 for postage charged on Public Departments.

[215] Including £149,202 for postage charged on Public Departments.

APPENDIX (F).

CONVEYANCE OF MAILS BY RAILWAY.

Conveyance of Mails by Railway in England and Wales, viz.:—		***Amount required for 1864-5.***
		£
By the	Birkenhead Railway	2,500
"	Bristol and Exeter	9,875
"	Chester and Holyhead	30,200
"	Cockermouth and Workington	104
"	Colne Valley	15
"	Cowes and Newport	23
"	Cornwall	5,500
"	Great Northern	9,877
"	Great Western	49,829
"	Great Eastern	21,367
"	Knighton	120
"	Lancaster and Carlisle	18,206
"	Lancashire and Yorkshire	6,900
"	Leominster and Kington	300
"	Llanelly	40
"	London, Brighton, and South Coast	1,890
"	London, Chatham, and Dover	94
"	London and North Western	82,416
"	London and South Western	21,620
"	Manchester and Altrincham	60
"	Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire	2,600
"	Maryport and Carlisle	841
"	Midland	35,190
"	Monmouthshire	91
"	London, Tilbury, and Southend	25
"	North Eastern	39,177
"	North Staffordshire	712
"	North Union	4,878
"	Oystermouth	40
"	Oldham and Guide Bridge	20
"	Seaham and Sunderland	70
"	Shrewsbury and Hereford	2,031
"	Shrewsbury, Borth, &c.	2,180
"	Shropshire Union Railway	2,085
"	South Devon	7,479
"	South Eastern	23,635
"	South Staffordshire	45
"	South Yorkshire	18
"	Stockton and Darlington	1,311
"	Taff Vale	1,000
"	Tenbury	8
"	West Cornwall	1,500
"	West Hartlepool	17
"	Whitehaven Junction	364
"	Allowance for probable variation of Awards or Agreements	19,313
		405,566
	The Irish Railway Service (the principal recipients being the Great Southern and Western £30,982, Midland and Great Western £15,208, Belfast and Dublin Junction £5,917, Dublin and Drogheda, £4,485) requires	86,833
	The Scotch Railway Service (the principal items being the Caledonian £28,497, the Scottish Central £13,068, the Scottish North Eastern £12,000, and the Great North of Scotland £7,584) requires	79,754
	Total for conveyance of Mails by Railway	£564,102

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[Pg 344]

APPENDIX (G).

MANUFACTURE OF POSTAGE-LABELS AND ENVELOPES.

(*From the Estimates of 1864-5.*)

Number of Persons.		***Amount required for* 1864-5.**
		£
1	Controller	500
1	Assistant-Controller	300
1	Assistant-Superintendent of Postage Stamping	200
1	Clerk	120
1	Superintendent of Printing Label-stamps	175
1	Superintendent of Perforating Label-stamps	100
1	Foreman of Embossing Machines, 42*s.* per week	109
1	Packer, at 25*s.* per week	65
3	Tellers, from 18*s.* to 30*s.* per week	211
6	Assistant-Telling Boys, from 7*s.* to 12*s.* per week	127
24	Boys for working Machines, from 4*s.* to 12*s.* per week	433
	Allowance to the Accountant's Department for keeping the Accounts, to the Receiver-General's and to the Warehouse-keeper's Departments	1,050
	Total Salaries, &c.	3,390
	Poundage to Distributors and Sub-Distributors	4,600
	Paper for Labels and Envelopes, Printing and Gumming Labels, and Folding and Gumming Envelopes	18,500
	Postage and Carriage of Parcels	450
	Tradesmen's Bills	400
	Miscellaneous Expenses	500
	Estimate of additional expenditure for increase of business	nil.
41	Total amount required for the Manufacture of Postage-Labels and Envelopes	27,840

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APPENDIX (H).

The following important document, published by Sir Rowland Hill on his resignation of the Secretaryship of the Post-Office, and circulated privately, is deserving of careful study, as giving the results of the penny-postage reform up to the latest date:—

RESULTS OF POSTAL REFORM.

Before stating the results of postal reform, it may be convenient that I should briefly enumerate the more important organic improvements effected. They are as follows:—

1. A very large reduction in the rates of postage on all correspondence, whether inland, foreign, or colonial. As instances in point, it may be stated that letters are now conveyed from any part of the United Kingdom to any other part—even from the Channel Islands to the Shetland Isles—at one-fourth of the charge previously levied on letters passing between post towns only a few miles apart;[216] and that the rate formerly charged for this slight distance, viz. fourpence—now suffices to

carry a letter from any part of the United Kingdom to any part of France, Algeria included.

2. The adoption of charge by weight, which, by abolishing the charge for mere enclosures, in effect largely extended the reduction of rates.

3. Arrangements which have led to the almost universal resort to prepayment of correspondence, and that by means of stamps.

4. The simplification of the mechanism and accounts of the Department generally by the above and other means.

5. The establishment of the book-post (including in its operation all printed and much MS. matter) at very low rates, and its modified extension to our colonies and to many foreign countries.

6. Increased security in the transmission of valuable letters afforded, and temptation to the letter-carriers and others greatly diminished, by reducing the registration fee from 1*s.* to 4*d.*, by making registration of letters containing coin compulsory, and by other means. [Pg 346]

7. A reduction to about one-third in the cost—including postage—of money-orders, combined with a great extension and improvement of the system.

8. More frequent and more rapid communication between the metropolis and the larger provincial towns, as also between one provincial town and another.

9. A vast extension of the rural distribution—many thousands of places, and probably some millions of inhabitants, having, for the first time, been included within the postal system.

10. A great extension of free deliveries. Before the adoption of penny postage many considerable towns, and portions of nearly all the larger towns, had either no delivery at all, or deliveries on condition of an extra charge.

11. Greatly increased facilities afforded for the transmission of foreign and colonial correspondence, by improved treaties with foreign countries, by a better arrangement of the packet service, by sorting on board, and other means.

12. A more prompt despatch of letters when posted, and a more prompt delivery on arrival.

13. The division of London and its suburbs into ten postal districts, by which, and other measures, communication within the twelve-miles circle has been greatly facilitated, and the most important delivery of the day has, generally speaking, been accelerated as much as two hours.

14. Concurrently with these improvements, the condition of the *employés* has been materially improved; their labours, especially on the Sunday, having been very generally reduced, their salaries increased, their chances of promotion augmented, and other important advantages afforded them.

RESULTS.

My pamphlet on "Post-Office Reform" was written in the year 1836. During the preceding twenty years, viz. from 1815 to 1835 inclusive, *there was no increase whatever in the Post-Office revenue, whether gross or net*, and therefore, in all probability, none in the number of letters; and though there was a slight increase in the revenue, and doubtless in the number of letters, between 1835 and the establishment of penny postage early in 1840—an increase chiefly due, in my opinion, to the adoption of part of my plan, viz. the establishment of day mails to and from London—yet, during the whole period of twenty-four years immediately preceding the adoption of penny postage, the revenue, whether gross or net, and the number of letters, were, in effect, stationary. [Pg 347]

Contrast with this the rate of increase under the new system, which has been in operation during a period of about equal length. In the first year of penny postage the letters more than doubled; and though since then the increase has, of course, been less rapid, yet it has been so steady that, notwithstanding the vicissitudes of trade, every year, without exception, has shown a considerable advance on the preceding year, and the first year's number is now nearly quadrupled. As regards revenue, there was, of course, at first a large falling off—about a million in gross, and still more in net revenue. Since then, however, the revenue, whether gross or net, has rapidly advanced, till now it even exceeds its former amount, the rate of increase, both of letters and revenue, still remaining undiminished.

In short, a comparison of the year 1863 with 1838 (the last complete year under the old system) shows that the number of chargeable letters has risen from 76,000,000 to 642,000,000; and that the revenue, at first so much impaired, has not only recovered its original amount, but risen, the gross from 2,346,000*l.* to about 3,870,000*l.* and the net

from 1,660,000*l.* to about 1,790,000*l.*[217]

The expectations I held out before the change were, that eventually, under the operation of my plans, the number of letters would increase fivefold, the gross revenue would be the same as before, while the net revenue would sustain a loss of about 300,000*l.* The preceding statement shows that the letters have increased, not fivefold, but nearly eight and a half fold; that the gross revenue, instead of remaining the same, has increased by about 1,500,000*l.*; while the net revenue, instead of falling 300,000*l.*, has risen more than 100,000*l.*

While the revenue of the Post-Office has thus more than recovered its former amount, the indirect benefit to the general revenue of the country, arising from the greatly increased facilities afforded to commercial transactions, though incapable of exact estimate, must be very large. Perhaps it is not too much to assume that, all things considered, the vast benefit of cheap, rapid, and extended postal communication has been obtained, even as regards the past, without fiscal loss. For the future, there must be a large and ever-increasing gain. [Pg 348]

The indirect benefit referred to above is partly manifested in the development of the money-order system, under which, since the year 1839, the annual amount transmitted has risen from 313,000*l.* to 16,494,000*l.*—that is, fifty-two fold.

An important collateral benefit of the new system is to be found in the cessation of that contraband conveyance which once prevailed so far that habitual breach of the postal law had become a thing of course.

It may be added, that the organization thus so greatly improved and extended for postal purposes stands available for other objects, and passing over minor matters, has already been applied with great advantage to the new system of savings' banks.

Lastly, the improvements briefly referred to above, with all their commercial, educational, and social benefits, have now been adopted, in greater or less degree—and that through the mere force of example—by the whole civilized world.

I cannot conclude this summary without gratefully acknowledging the cordial co-operation and zealous aid afforded me in the discharge of my arduous duties. I must especially refer to many among the superior officers of the Department—men whose ability would do credit to any service, and whose zeal could not be greater if their object were private instead of public benefit.

ROWLAND HILL.

HAMPSTEAD,
Feb. 23rd, 1864.

R. CLAY, SON, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS, LONDON.

FOOTNOTES:

[216] When my plan was published, the lowest General Post rate was fourpence; but while the plan was under the consideration of Government the rate between post towns not more than eight miles asunder was reduced from fourpence to twopence.

[217] In this comparison of revenue, the mode of calculation in use before the adoption of penny-postage has of course been retained—that is to say, the cost of the packets on the one hand, and the produce of the impressed newspaper stamps on the other, have been excluded. The amounts for 1863 are, to some extent, estimated, the accounts not having as yet been fully made up.

Transcriber's note:

A missing reference to footnote [83] was inserted.

The following is a list of changes made to the original. The first line is the original line, the second the corrected one.

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been the permanent arrangements for the transmission of the

Nothwithstanding the losses he must have suffered
Notwithstanding the losses he must have suffered

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surely no argument against a State monopoly of letter-carrying.

Rev. Sydn Smith, Mr. McCullagh.

Rev. Sydney Smith, Mr. McCullagh.

it might be desirable, but impracticable" (10,939). "Most
it might be "desirable, but impracticable" (10,939). "Most

offices; (3) a hourly delivery of letters instead of one every
offices; (3) an hourly delivery of letters instead of one every

vender, and how trade--retail at any rate--is fostered by it.
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Thus, letters addressed to Newport should alway give the
Thus, letters addressed to Newport should always give the

A singular accident befel one of these letter-boxes (1862) in Montrose.
A singular accident befell one of these letter-boxes (1862) in Montrose.

every town and village in the kingdom, having any correpondence
every town and village in the kingdom, having any correspondence

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