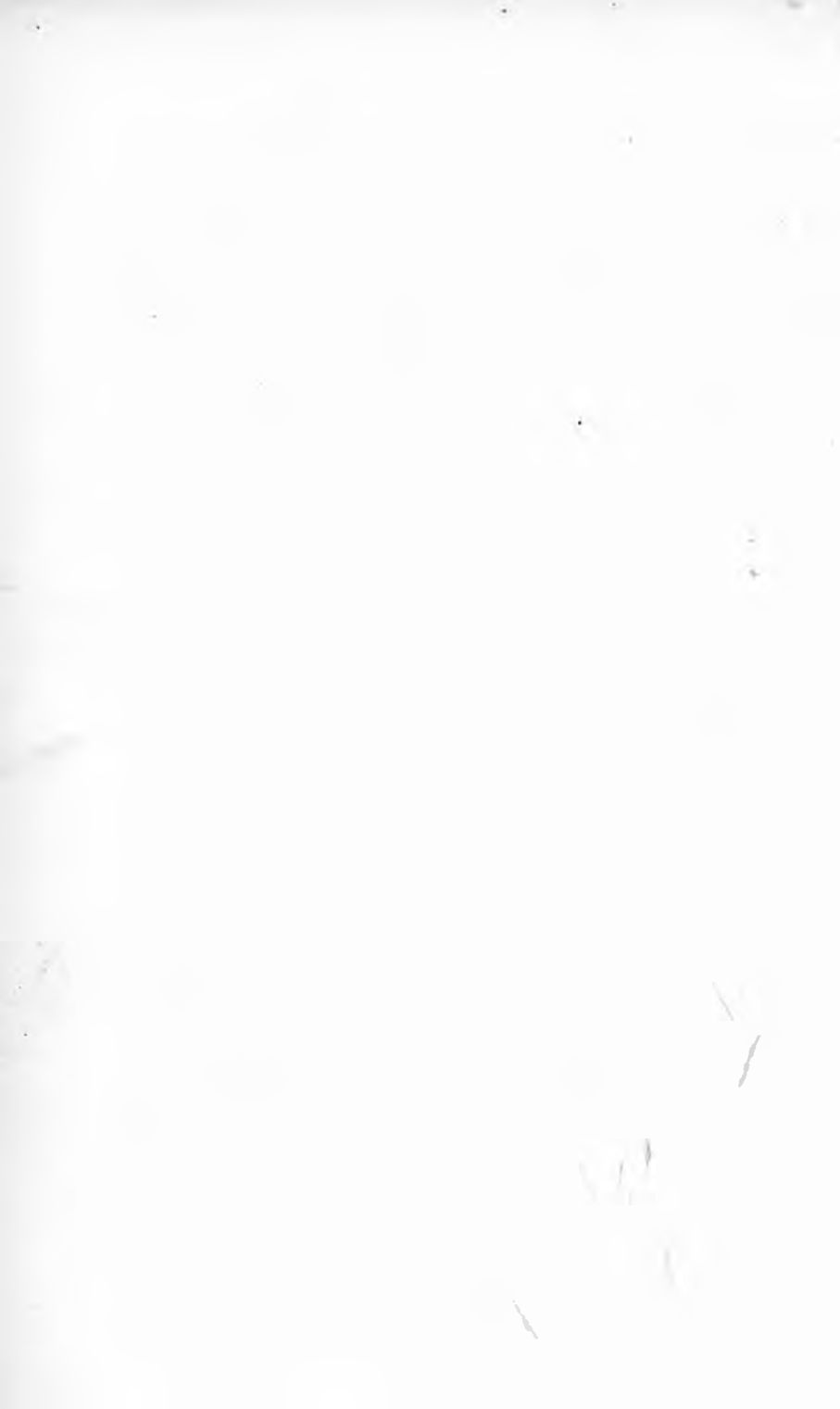




Ε. Δ. Β. Δ. Ο. Ν.



Gravford 1235

THE
POST IN GRANT AND FARM

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THE POST
IN
GRANT AND FARM

BY

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LONDON
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK

1894

P R E F A C E



THERE has not hitherto been published any detailed account of the first establishment, in this country, of the Post Office as a public institution ; nor does it appear that anything has been made known of the men who were instrumental in building up this useful fabric, in the years of its infancy, beyond the barren mention of their names. In some cases, moreover, in such bald notices as have been given of the early posts, important names are wholly omitted, and in others the names of men are associated with events in which they had little concern. What is disclosed in the following pages is an attempt not only to give a fairly full and true

account of the first forty years' existence of the Inland Posts in Britain, but to tell something of the men to whom the credit is due of contriving and bringing into working shape this great machine of public convenience and utility. The facts here narrated are collected from the Public Records, original documents, and other authentic sources. In the extracts which have been made from original papers, modern orthography, as being more convenient for the reader, has been generally employed; but in a few cases the tone and flavour of the antique have been retained in the original spelling.

I have to acknowledge with gratitude the very kindly assistance given me by librarians, not only in Edinburgh but elsewhere, and by other gentlemen in public positions, who have assisted me in clearing up points of difficulty.

EDINBURGH, 1894.

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THE POST IN GRANT AND FARM



CHAPTER I

IN order to understand the circumstances under which the public postal service in England was first established, it is necessary to go back to an earlier period, and look at the patents granted to the Chief Postmasters, whose duties did not then go beyond the forwarding of despatches for the monarch or his government. A patent granted by Queen Elizabeth in 1590 to John Stanhope, as Master of the Posts, was surrendered to James I. in 1607, and (with the view, no doubt, of securing the succession to Stan-

hope's son) a new patent was granted to Stanhope, now Lord Stanhope of Harrington, and to Charles, his son and heir-apparent. The appointment was as "Master of the Messengers and Runners, commonly called the king's posts, as well within the kingdom as in parts beyond the seas, within the king's dominions." The nominal wages or fee attaching to this office amounted to £66, 13s. 4d. per annum, being the same as was granted to the Postmasters Sir William Paget and John Mason in the year 1545. But there were casualties attaching to the office, yielding a more certain income, which were doubtless the sums paid by the deputies for admittance to their employments. This will be referred to hereafter.

In studying the post-office history of this early period, the inquirer is apt to be misled by some of the terms used; for the words "post," "postmaster," "pacquett," and the like, were not always applied in the modern

sense, the word "post" sometimes serving to designate common carriers, and "postmaster" being used indifferently to indicate the Master of the Posts and the postmasters on the roads. The word *pacquett* was also applied to common carriers. An instance of the last mentioned is given in M'Dowall's *Chronicles of Lincluden*. A letter was written from the abbey on the 24th August 1625, to the "richte noble and verrie guid Lord the Earl of Nithisdail," in which the following words appear:—They "intreat the richt guid lord to help them suddenly—at once; and more especially that he would procure an order from the King's Treasurer to stay the legal proceedings directed against them, until His Majesty's pleasure in the matter shall have been made known. Because of the urgency of their case, the noble lord is requested to favour them with an answer by a bearer of his own in the event of the ordinary 'pakett' being unavailable." Now

the word "pakett" here does not refer to the post, but to the packman—the carrier—with his pack of goods. In what follows we shall endeavour, as far as possible, to use terms that will prevent any confusion of the kind indicated.

The reign of Charles I. was one full of abuses. The king required money to maintain the excesses of his Court; his ministers were called upon to find the money; they themselves had to wring it out of the pockets of the people; and its passage through their hands produced such attenuation that but a small portion reached the royal coffers. Clarendon says that of £200,000 drawn from the subject in a year by various oppressions, scarcely £1500 came to the king's use or account. Monopolies in trade were granted for lump sums paid down, offices were bought and sold, no man seemed secure without support of a patron, and patronage was a marketable commodity.

It will be remembered that Lord Stanhope's patent covered not only the control of the inland posts, but the posts in foreign parts, *within the king's dominions*. Although Stanhope was not by patent specifically empowered to send or work posts in foreign parts, *out of the king's dominions*, it appears to have been his practice to do so, undertaking, as may be supposed, all the various duties of conveying the king's letters and packets to whatever parts they might be directed.

A somewhat similar condition of want of funds as that existing in the reign of Charles distinguished the reign of his father, James I.

Now it is quite probable that, for the sole purpose of raising money by the sale of a new office, advantage was taken by James of an opening in Stanhope's patent, to make a new appointment of Master of the Posts in Foreign Parts, *out of the king's dominions*.

By the recital of a patent bearing date the 30th April of the seventeenth year of James I., we learn that the king "appointed that there should be an office or place called Postmaster of England for Foreign Parts, being out of the king's dominions; that the office should be a sole office by itself, and not member or part of any other office or place of Postmaster whatsoever; and that there should be one sufficient person or persons, to be by the king from time to time nominated and appointed, who should be called the Postmaster or Postmasters of England for Foreign Parts, etc.; and, for the considerations therein mentioned, the king appointed Mathew de Quester, and Mathew de Quester, his son, to the said office; to hold to them the said Mathew de Quester, the father, and Mathew de Quester, the son, as well by themselves, or either of them, as by their or either of their sufficient deputy or deputies, during the natural lives of

Mathew de Quester, the father, and Mathew de Quester, the son, the said office of Postmaster of England for Foreign Parts, for their natural lives and the life of the survivor," etc.

On the setting up of the De Questers, Stanhope was naturally unwilling to surrender part of the service which he had hitherto undertaken, and a long contest took place between Stanhope and these men, resulting, as it would appear, in confirming the latter in their new office, and in the discomfiture of Stanhope.

Thus from the seventeenth year of the reign of James I. down to the period upon which we are about to enter, commencing in 1632, and for some years thereafter, there were in England two distinct Masters of the Posts—one for places within the kingdom itself and in foreign parts, within the king's dominions; the other for foreign parts, out of the king's dominions. Stanhope filled the one office, the De Questers the other.

It is interesting to know who the people were that are now passing in review before us at this distant date. A return made to the Council by the Lord Mayor in 1635, of strangers inhabiting London, tells us something of the de Questers. It is this:—"In ward of Billingsgate, St. Andrew's parish. Mathew de Quester, late Postmaster, born in Bruges, of 64 years' continuance in London; naturalised by Act of Parliament. All his family English born." He was probably one of the many foreign merchants who at that period were gathered together in the neighbourhood of Lower Thames Street.

By letters patent, dated 15th March 1632, the office of Master of the Posts for Foreign Parts, out of the king's dominions, was made to devolve upon William Frizell and Thomas Witherings. Mathew de Quester the younger had died, and the elder de Quester being stricken in age, "the king . . . declares his will and pleasure, that the office shall

have perpetual continuance, and grants unto William Frizell and Thomas Witherings, gentlemen, the office of place of Postmaster of England for Foreign Parts, out of the king's dominions; to do all things to the said office belonging and appertaining; to hold, exercise, and enjoy the said office of Postmaster of England for Foreign Parts, out of the king's dominions, together with all powers, etc., by themselves or either of them, or their or either of their sufficient deputies, during their natural lives and the life of the survivor, from and after and so soon as the said office shall become void by the death, surrender, forfeiture, or other determination of the estate of Mathew de Quester, the father. The king prohibits all persons other than the said William Frizell and Thomas Witherings from intruding themselves in the said office after the determination of the estate of Mathew de Quester; and the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Warden of the

Cinque Ports, the Secretaries of State, etc., in their several jurisdictions and places, are not only to be aiding and assisting the said Frizell and Witherings, but to the utmost of their power to repress all intruders."

The patent, it will be observed, only vested the patentees in the office as from the death of de Quester; and de Quester the elder was still living. Accordingly, with a view to Frizell and Witherings being at once admitted to the active management of the place, a proclamation was issued, on the 19th July 1632, to the following effect:—

"The late king appointed Mathew de Quester, the father, and Mathew de Quester, the son, Postmaster for Foreign Parts for their lives. Mathew de Quester, the son, being dead, and the father aged and infirm, he (that is, de Quester) has appointed William Frizell and Thomas Witherings his deputies. The king approves this substitution, and

charges all his subjects that none of them, other than the said Frizell and Witherings, presume to take up or transmit foreign packets or letters."

Thus Frizell and Witherings entered upon their office as Foreign Postmasters on the 19th of July 1632.

It must be understood that, though there was no authority for carrying letters of the public at this time by the inland posts, it was the practice of the foreign posts to carry the letters of merchants and others to and from the Continent, — and the posts who actually conveyed the packets would seem to have been men engaged in mercantile traffic. The following letter, dated Westminster, 16th October 1632, from Humphrey Fulwood to Sir John Coke, Principal Secretary to His Majesty at Court, throws a good deal of light upon the subject:—

"Upon inquiry of Mr. Burlamachi, what should be the cause why letters have not of

late come from Germany, the Hague, and Brussels, as usually, he entered into a large relation of the present disorder of the posts. He imputed the fault merely to the posts who have heretofore bought their places. They more minding their own peddling traffic than the service of the State or merchants, omitting many passages, sometimes staying for the vending of their own commodities, many times through neglect by lying in tippling-houses. The opinions of Mr. Burlamachi and Mr. Peter Rycaut favourable to Mr. Witherings and Frizell in their places of Postmasters. For reformation they both agree in one, and that with the proposition wherewith Mr. Witherings hath formerly acquainted your honour. The displacing of these posts, and laying of certain and sure stages whereby His Majesty will save, as Mr. Burlamachi will make appear, above £1000 or £1500 yearly, now expended for expresses," etc.

Mr. Burlamachi, whose Christian name was Philip, and Peter Rycaut were merchants in London, and would no doubt be well informed as to the way in which the mail service was conducted. In the Lord Mayor's return of foreigners residing in London in 1635, Burlamachi is described as follows:—
“In the ward of Langbourne, in St. Gabriel, Fenchurch. Mr. Philip Burlamachi, merchant, naturalised by Act of Parliament. He was born in Sedan in France, and has been in England this thirty years and more. He hath certain rooms at Mr. Gould's house in Fenchurch Street, for his necessary occasions of writing there some two or three days in the week; but his dwelling-house, with his wife and children and family, is at Putney.”
Burlamachi, besides being a merchant, was a great financier, and, as will be seen hereafter, he had intimate relations in money matters with the Court.

Not very long after the date of the letter

above quoted, namely, on the 28th January 1633, the following orders for the Foreign Postmasters and packet posts were drawn up by Secretary Coke :—

“In consequence of complaints, both of Ministers of State and merchants, it is thought fit to send no more letters by carriers who come and go at pleasure, but, in conformity with other nations, to erect ‘staffetti’ or packet posts at fit stages, to run day and night without ceasing, and to be governed by the orders in this paper. Among these it is provided that the Foreign Postmasters shall take the oaths of supremacy and allegiance, shall have an office in London, and shall give notice at what time the public are to bring their letters. A register is to be kept of the writers or bringers of all letters, and of the parties to whom they are sent. The letters are to be put into a packet or budget, which is to be locked up and sealed with the Postmasters’

known seal, and to be sent off so that it may reach Dover while there is sufficient daylight for passage over sea the same day. Various other minute regulations are laid down, both for the carriage of the packet to Dover, the sending of the passage-barks to Calais, and the transmission from stage to stage. The course to be adopted with letters received from beyond seas is laid down with equal minuteness. Letters for the Government and foreign ministers residing here were to be immediately delivered to them, after which a roll or table of all other letters was to be set up in the office for every man to view and demand his letters."

In pursuance of the scheme here sketched out, Witherings appears to have been sent to the Continent shortly thereafter; for on the 8th April 1633, he writes from Calais (to Sir John Coke probably) describing the steps then taken in the business:—

"Right honourable and my good patron,

I found here the Countess Taxis' secretary with the postmaster of Ghent, they having settled stages betwixt Antwerp and Calais for the speedy conveyance of letters ; they have placed a postmaster at Dunkirk, having dismissed all their couriers, and seven days hence they intend to begin by the way of 'staphetto' (*estafette*) from Antwerp to London ; their request is we shall do the like, which accordingly I have ordered my man to do, having taken order at Dover for the passage. The governor of this place promiseth me all favour.

“The boatmen of this place who take their turns for Dover I find unwilling to be obliged to depart upon the coming of the portmantell. But upon the advice of Mr. Skinner and other merchants of our nation in this place, I have found out a very sufficient man, who will oblige himself, with security, that for forty shillings he will wait upon the coming of the packet, upon sight

whereof he will depart, engaging himself to carry nothing but the said packet. Asks directions, and will stay till the first packet shall come by 'staphetto' from Antwerp."

This then was the commencement of the forwarding of the continental mails by fixed and regular stages, instead of by carriers proceeding through the whole way, and engaged in other kinds of business.

Witherings had not long entered upon his office, jointly with Frizell, when troubles began. In the year 1633, a curious complication came to light, in which not only Witherings and Frizell, but two or three other persons were involved, and which resulted in the temporary suspension of the Foreign Postmasters from their functions. The matter is referred to in a memorandum from the king to Secretary Windebank, dated August 1633. It runs thus: "The king having granted the place of Foreign Postmaster to his servant William Frizell,

he has given the king to understand that, whilst he was beyond seas, Thomas Witherings endeavoured to defraud him of that place, the examination whereof the king has referred to Secretary Windebank. The king understands, moreover, that the place has been mortgaged for money, both by Frizell and Witherings, which he condemns in them both; and has therefore thought good, for the present, that the place shall be sequestered into the hands of Mathew de Quester, the king's ancient servant in that place. Windebank is therefore to send for John Hatt, an attorney, in whom the legal interest of that place, for the present, is vested, and to will him to make an assignment thereof to de Quester."

Although the question of this sequestration was not finally disposed of till the year 1634, the period during which Witherings was removed from the active management and possession of the place was from the 4th

September to the 28th December 1633. The details of the arrangement of this business are not easily understood, but it would seem that the first step was to get rid of the attorney; and with this in view the Earl of Arundel (the Earl Marshal) advanced about £1000 to pay off Hatt, the earl retaining possession of Witherings' patent. Another claim was put forward by one Robert Kirkham for £200, due 25th May 1633, for a reversion of the Postmaster's office surrendered to Witherings and Frizell. This indebtedness was not denied by Witherings; but how there came to be a reversion in favour of Kirkham does not appear.

Prior to the difficulties in connection with the suspension of Witherings and Frizell from office, these two men were not getting along smoothly. On 5th June 1633, Witherings writes to (Secretary Coke probably) . . . "I hear Mr. Frizell declares that the Lord Marshal will, by His Majesty's

he has given the king to understand that, whilst he was beyond seas, Thomas Witherings endeavoured to defraud him of that place, the examination whereof the king has referred to Secretary Windebank. The king understands, moreover, that the place has been mortgaged for money, both by Frizell and Witherings, which he condemns in them both; and has therefore thought good, for the present, that the place shall be sequestered into the hands of Mathew de Quester, the king's ancient servant in that place. Windebank is therefore to send for John Hatt, an attorney, in whom the legal interest of that place, for the present, is vested, and to will him to make an assignment thereof to de Quester."

Although the question of this sequestration was not finally disposed of till the year 1634, the period during which Witherings was removed from the active management and possession of the place was from the 4th

September to the 28th December 1633. The details of the arrangement of this business are not easily understood, but it would seem that the first step was to get rid of the attorney; and with this in view the Earl of Arundel (the Earl Marshal) advanced about £1000 to pay off Hatt, the earl retaining possession of Witherings' patent. Another claim was put forward by one Robert Kirkham for £200, due 25th May 1633, for a reversion of the Postmaster's office surrendered to Witherings and Frizell. This indebtedness was not denied by Witherings; but how there came to be a reversion in favour of Kirkham does not appear.

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means, compel me to deliver the place back again, and pretends he will have a bout with me for my own moiety. I beseech you move His Majesty as occasion shall offer, for I am confident the king will be much moved for (in favour of) Mr. Frizell." On 19th June of the same year, Witherings writes to Humphrey Fulwood: "Mr. Frizell is at the Court, pretending that Witherings owes him a great sum, and intending to move His Majesty for a proclamation for possession of the whole place (of Deputy Foreign Postmaster), offering security to be accountable if it be recovered from him again. Witherings owes him nothing. He has sent the affidavit of Frizell's own servant to Secretary Coke. Prays Fulwood to speak to Mr. Secretary that Witherings suffer not in his absence." On the 3rd July, Witherings again writes to Fulwood: "To answer all Frizell's allegations would be troublesome. Upon their meeting, Frizell spoke of paying Witherings

back his money; but he is not able. Assures Fulwood that he can clear himself—with the help of his noble friends he doubts nothing. Desires Fulwood to sift him (Frizell presumably), for the knowledge of his intents doth much advance Witherings." Then on the same day, as it happens, the Earl of Arundel, who was at Stirling with the king, writes to Secretary Windebank: "Mr. Frizell's business is referred to Windebank to examine and report to the king. Needs not entreat him to do Frizell favour, since his case is so well understood, and the foulness of Witherings' abuse, which the writer is confident Windebank will represent as it deserves."

Sir John Coke seems to have been the patron and protector of Witherings, who, in a letter to Coke about this time, concludes his communication with the words: "I rest, though never rest, to pray for your honour as my only patron." In a letter sent by

Coke to Windebank on the 25th May 1633, Witherings is introduced to the latter thus: "The bearer is the Postmaster who went over to Antwerp and Calais and settled the business of the foreign letters. He has settled with Frizell's assignee, so as the charge of the office is again reduced to one hand. Frizell never did any service in the place, but the king never till now heard of Witherings' name. How he satisfied the merchants, their testimony witnesses; how he acquitted himself at the Council Board, their Order declares. He complains that he is now called again upon some reference which His Majesty remembers not. Secretary Coke must avow that hitherto he has carried himself honestly and with general approbation." The settling with Frizell's assignee may possibly refer to the paying-off of Attorney Hatt by means of money found by the Earl Marshal already referred to.

The criticisms made upon Witherings at

this time are somewhat conflicting, and on that account it is not by any means easy to determine what sort of a man he was. On the 31st May 1633, Secretary Windebank writes: "Mr. Witherings the Postmaster's industry and dexterity for that place appeared at the Council-table by many testimonies, in the midst of much powerful opposition. Mr. Witherings misbehaved himself toward my Lord Marshal and his son, the Lord Maltravers, and how he will be able to give them satisfaction I know not." On 9th June, Lord Goring, Master of the Horse to the Queen, writes: "I must highly commend the extraordinary care of the posts; and especially Mr. Witherings, the Master, of whose care Her Majesty hath taken most especial notice, for he is indeed the most diligent in his services that ever I saw."

In commendation of Witherings' plans and work, a petition was presented to the Council

in April 1633, signed by fifty-four merchants in London, to the following effect:—"By their Order (the Council's Order) of the 6th February 1633, it was determined that letters should be sent by *staffeto* or packet posts; according to which Order Thomas Witherings, one of the Postmasters for Foreign Parts, has, by consent of foreign states, settled the conveyance of letters from stage to stage, to go night and day, as has been continued in Germany and Italy; by which agreements letters are to be conveyed between London and Antwerp in three days, whilst the carriers have for many years taken from eight to fourteen days, having played the merchants, and answered complaints by saying that they had bought their places and could come no sooner."

Early in 1633, an attempt was made to set up another foreign-post service, as appears by a petition from eighty-nine London merchants, addressed to the king, as follows:—"They

are informed that some strangers living here have made choice of a postmaster by whom they have sent their letters, whilst His Majesty has chosen William Frizell and Thomas Witherings for his Postmaster for Foreign Services, who have hitherto carried themselves carefully. Pray the king to protect them (Frizell and Witherings), and not to suffer strangers to make their own choice." While on this subject of unauthorised posts, it may be noted that in December 1633, Burlamachi writes to Secretary Coke respecting a post set up in Paris, to work thence to London. He says: "I must not fail to tell you that yesterday a courier from France called upon me, who appears, from what he says, to have agreed with the postmaster of Paris, to take up the letters for conveyance to and from that city and London. I told him that this was a proceeding that could not be allowed, and counselled him to return to Paris, which I believe he has done. It is to

be considered that, if the mails for France and Flanders are not soon put into good order, all will go into confusion. We might have letters to or from Paris in five days and less, while at present they take fourteen days to come."

This statement does not reflect creditably upon Witherings' system of posts established early in the year ; but at this time Witherings was under sequestration of his office, and it may be that de Quester, who was temporarily in charge of the situation, had allowed matters to go back into their old groove.

CHAPTER II

THE sequestration of Witherings' office of Foreign Postmaster ceased on the 28th December 1633, but it was not till the 20th August 1634 that he was made legally secure in his place. On this latter date he writes to Sir John Coke as follows:—"Four days past he procured his Order to be drawn up by Sir William Becher (clerk of the Council in Ordinary), which he shewed Mr. March, the Earl Marshal's steward, who went with Mr. Witherings to Mr. Recorder, whose opinion was, that the Order not only cleared Frizell in law and equity, but all others." Witherings had, however, to sign a covenant holding the Earl Marshal harmless, and thereupon the patents were signed over to Witherings.

It is tolerably clear that de Quester and Witherings were not on particularly good terms. At anyrate the former wrote to Secretary Coke in March 1633, complaining against Witherings "for breaking open a packet directed to de Quester, and using disdainful speeches of him." He also reminds the Secretary of a promise "that he should receive no damage or detriment."

The occurrence of the sequestration has been the means of leaving on record details of these early posts which would not otherwise have survived. A statement of the accounts of Mathew de Quester during the sequestration of the post office in London for foreign parts (*i.e.* 4th September to 28th December 1633), made up in the year 1634, gives much curious information, as also Witherings' comments on various alleged inaccuracies therein. "Witherings desires that de Quester may bring in all the rolls and books of accounts, from which Witherings

may draw out a just account. Among the items in this account, covering a period of seventeen weeks, are the following:— For three portmantles, £1, 12s.; for cord and cloth to cover the mails, 2s. 6d.; for pack-thread to bind up the letters, 9s. 5d.; for pens, ink, and paper to write and to pack, £1, 1s.; to George Martin for carrying letters abroad, seventeen weeks, £2, 11s.; to John Ridge for the like service, £2, 11s.; to clerks' allowance for seventeen weeks, at the rate of £60 per annum a piece, £39, 4s. 8d.; for candles, wax, and sealing-thread, 5s. 4d.; one quarter's rent for the office and other rooms, £10." In another paper, making further remarks in objection to de Quester's accounts, Witherings suggests "that if he and Lynde, who is paid £60 per annum for nothing else but to keep the accounts, were jointly to inspect the rolls and accounts, they would be able to 'just' them in one day."

There is reason to conclude that at this

time some of the stages in France were under English control ; for on the 20th August 1634, Witherings writes to Secretary Coke that he "had procured the French ambassador's letters for settling the stages in France, and to-morrow he begins his journey. At his coming to Paris he will write Coke of all that passeth."

We may assume from the foregoing particulars that the posts with the Continent were now laid in stages, and in a way to expedite the mail service not previously existing.

The channel was, however, about this time infested with foreigners who plundered the mail packets and robbed the passengers. A few instances may be interesting.

On the 24th June 1635, the deputy post-master of Dover writes to Secretary Coke :— "On Tuesday, 16th, he received advertisement by certain seamen whom the writer employs for carriage of the merchants' letters

to Dunkirk, and to bring the same from thence, that, coming by Calais, their shallop and such passengers as were in it were rifled of all the money they had and some trifles, and the mail (wherein His Majesty's and the merchants' letters were put) was taken away by men of Calais, who laid them suddenly aboard with a small shallop full of musketeers. This advice coming to the writer in the night very late, he wrote to Mr. Witherings, and did not then give the Lord Warden's deputy notice, by which means the news came to His Majesty's knowledge before it was written of to the Lord Warden."

Again, in the month of August, Henry Hendy, the post of Dover, had an unpleasant experience. In an examination which he underwent touching the facts, he states that, "going to and returning from Dunkirk, he has been robbed five times within these seven weeks—four times by the

French, and once by a Flushingier. They shot at him, and commanded him to strike, calling him and the rest 'English dogs'; and coming aboard, they used violence, beating them, stripping them of all their money, apparel, and goods, and took from the post all his bundle of letters, among which was a packet from the king. The post showing them his pass from Secretary Coke, they bid him keep it to wipe his breech." The ill words of calling the men dogs seem to have been in common use in the channel at that time; for Sobrière, a Frenchman who visited England at the period in question, makes mention of the incivility which his countrymen received on landing at Dover, the children running after them and calling with all their might, "A *Mounser!* a *Mounser!*" and, as they warmed up, they became more offensive. When told to be off, they would cry out, "French dogs, French dogs."

But the English were not content to undergo all this offence and ill-usage without showing that they could fight, and were prepared to maintain their position on the high seas. The measures taken in this sense are described in the following despatch, dated 14th August 1635, from Admiral Lord Lindsey to Secretary Coke :—“ On Saturday last, speaking with the post of Dover that plys to Dunkirk, the writer found him unwilling to undergo the service any longer, unless he were better provided to resist the violences offered him. The earl encouraged him, and lent him fifteen men, well fitted with muskets and half-pikes and swords, and sent them aboard his ketch. On Sunday morning they went off from Dover, and in the afternoon were chased awhile by a shallop, and then by a Holland man-of-war that made six great shots at them. The *Sampson*, which the writer had the day before employed to sea, was in their sight, but they durst not bear up

to him, for then they had been overtaken ; but keeping upon a tack, they were too swift for the man-of-war, who, after five hours' chase, left them in open sea. The next morning, between Gravelines and Calais, the same shallop that used to rob the post came to the ketch, as near as a man might throw a biscuit into her. The master of the ketch had stowed all the men within, there to remain until he should give the watchword, when they were to appear and give fire. The shallop shot four or five times at the ketch, and hailed the master and the rest in such English as one of them could speak, crying out, 'English dogs! strike, you English rogues! we will be with you presently,' the chief of them, in a red coat, flourishing his falchion over his head. Hereupon the master gave the word ; and the men came out, pouring shot so fast into the shallop that the French had not power to return one shot, but rowed away with a

matter of four using oars that were left of about sixteen men. It was a dead calm, and the ketch had neither oars nor boat to help her, otherwise she had brought away the shallop and the remainder of the men. The post has desired the same supply again for his defence on Sunday next; the writer has taken order accordingly, and furnished him also with letters of safe-conduct."

In the following month, September, another outrage upon the mail boat was committed. Waad, the deputy postmaster of Dover, gives an account of the transaction, and a capture made thereafter, in a letter to his chief, Witherings, on the 26th September. He writes: "The manner of taking the boats by those that were laid in Dover Castle was: that the Zealanders shot at them divers times, when one of the packet boatmen struck sail and showed the Lord General's warrant, which they slighted, and

were like to stab the old man whom Waad trusts with the mail, with base words to His Majesty. The place was off the Splinter, betwixt Gravelines and Dunkirk. The day was the 2nd instant ; and on the 3rd, setting out another boat with the mail, one of the ketch told Waad that he saw the captain that took them and some of his men ; whereupon, about twelve in the night, he called the watch and carried the captain and other two to the town jail, having paid Sir William Monson's gentlemen's dinners and horse-hires to acquaint the Lord General in the forenoon before that the vessel was in Dover road. Whereupon Sir William Monson came into the road and took the ship out, and sent his boat after ashore. The prisoners being claimed by Sir William Monson, and also by Mr. Moore, Secretary to the Lord Warden, the Mayor adjudged to Sir William, who carried them to the Lord General. After examination, he returned

them to Dover Castle ; but their ship was cleared in the Downs, and on the Sunday morning took a bylander of Bruges ; also that night the prisoners made escape out of the castle by a mat twisted very laboriously." The meaning of this last sentence probably is, that these sailors untwisted the strands of a mat, then spun the material into a kind of rope, and let themselves down from their cell in the castle.

Again, in February 1636, another outrage was perpetrated on the packet boat. The particulars are furnished by the examination of William Dadds, master ; Harry Hendy, passenger ; and Richard Swan, servant to William Dadds. They swore as follows :—
“The Earl of Lindsey authorised His Majesty's passage boat at Dover to wear a flag of His Majesty's colours upon the rudder-head. It hath secured the said boat from the Dutch, the French, and Spaniards ever since till Tuesday last ; at which time

the said boat, riding at anchor by Dunkirk harbour, near the Splinter fort, with the said flag, there came down from the said fort three musketeers, and shot three or four volleys of shot at the said packet boat, and in the hull of the said boat some of the shot are still to be seen. They retired to the said fort, and shot one piece of great ordnance at the said boat. The three musketeers began to beat the said R. Swan with a crabtree cudgel of two inches about ; they came aboard, searched the packet boat, and fetched W. Dadds ashore, and made him pay 20s. in money, which H. Hendy laid down to prevent imprisonment. The master and his company, in the dark of the night, set sail and came away. The serjeant-major and the soldiers gave no other reason, than because they came not on shore to fetch the searcher on board ; and if they did not the next time come to fetch the searcher aboard, they would hang the master upon the

gallows. And this is the first time that ever the searcher did question His Majesty's packet boat."

Several other violations of the packet boat occurred about this time, and a good deal of friction arose between the peoples on the two sides of the channel ; but probably the robberies were partly the result of conditions arising from the unsettled relations existing between England and the countries on the Continent at the period. The English took extreme measures with these pirates, as will be seen by the two following despatches from the Earl of Suffolk to Secretary Coke :—

" July 30, 1636, Dover Castle.—Since the writing of his last letter, and the condemnation of the French prisoners, two of them, who were quitted and returned to Calais, reported there that, after the condemnation of the prisoners, three of them were presently hanged ; whereupon the people of Calais were much influenced, and have committed

many insolencies, as will appear by the enclosed examination.

“ Declaration of John Adams of Gillingham, Kent, master of the *John* of that place :—Arriving with the packet ordinary from Thomas Witherings, His Majesty’s Postmaster for Foreign Parts, he received from the master of a ship of Lynn this intelligence: That the people of Calais came aboard, to the number of 300 or 400, presently after the arrival of the two sailors cleared at Dover, in the Court of Admiralty, and assaulted the master and company of the said ship, beating all the company, wounding the master, and doing many outrageous acts—which are stated here with a good deal of confusion, and probably exaggeration. The informant concludes, that carrying the mail to the postmaster of Calais, and having His Majesty’s colours at the stern of his ketch, the people came down upon them, throwing stones to the endangering of

their lives, and rending the said 'unite' colours.

"August 3, 1636.—By all men that come from Calais, he perceives that there is in that town a froward inclination against His Majesty's subjects, and therefore sends him (Sir John Coke) this present information from the master of His Majesty's packet boat, that the Secretary may thereupon use means to the French ambassador, or otherwise, to prevent greater mischiefs that may happen.

"Enclosure.—Information of John Keres of Leith, mariner, that about the 4th July, carrying over to Calais Mr. Witherings, His Majesty's Postmaster, as soon as he came on shore they threw stones at informant that he could not walk in the streets without great danger; and being forced by stress of weather out of that road for Dunkirk, a little off Gravelines he met with three French shallops of Calais, who commanded him to

strike, and then boarded him, spoiled his bark, beat him with their swords, and would have taken the clothes off his back. Having nothing in his bark worth pillaging, they went their way."

Shortly after this period, it was thought fit to provide an armed vessel for the channel service. It was named the *Speedy Post*; and we find that in February and March 1637 there was some correspondence between the Council and the officers of ordnance as to the supply of six brass guns for the Postmaster's frigate, the *Speedy Post* of London. It is probably to this vessel that Evelyn refers in his diary, under date of the 10th October 1642 :—"From hence (Dunkirk), the next day, I marched three English miles towards the packet boat, being a pretty fregat of six guns, which embarked us for England about three in the afternoone. At our going off, the fort against which our pinnace ankered saluted my Lord Marshall with twelve greate

guns, which we answered with three. Not having the wind favorable, we ankered that night before Calais. About midnight we weighed; and at four in the morning, though not far from Dover, we could not make the peere till four in the afternoon, the wind proving contrary and driving us westward; but at last we got on ashore, Oct. the 12th."

Leaving these squabbles of the channel for a time, it will perhaps be convenient to consider for a moment who Witherings was.

By the "Visitation of London, 1633-4," we find it stated that Thomas Withering, "Postmaster of England for Forrayne Parts," was a second son; that he was of a Staffordshire family who had property in that county for many generations; that an uncle named Anthony Withering was a yeoman usher, and his elder brother a gentleman sewer—both places, we apprehend, attaching to the Court. In proceedings held before the

Council in June 1633, of which Secretary Windebanke made notes, and wherein Thomas Witherings was interested, mention is made that Witherings was stated to be a papist, and "to have been at one time gentleman harbinger to the queen." The office of harbinger was that of "agent in advance," the harbinger proceeding one day ahead of the queen, to secure for her suitable lodging and entertainment on occasions when she was upon progress. If Witherings really held this office of harbinger, it is possible that he may have shown a leaning towards papacy (though in later life he was a declared Protestant), for King Charles' wife Henrietta Maria was a Roman Catholic herself, and many of her followers were of that religion. There is nothing improbable in the suggestion that Witherings held the office of harbinger, seeing that his brother and uncle were servants at the Court; but whether he was or was not, he would have,

by his friends, interest with the royal family. In a remonstrance of the grievances of His Majesty's posts in England, carriers, waggons, and others (1642), "miserably sustained by the unlawful projects of Thomas Witherings," Witherings is referred to as "sometime mercer of London." Of this mention will be made hereafter.

Witherings was married to Dorothy, daughter of John Oliver of Wilbrougham; and she brought him a fair fortune. In a petition or representation made by her after Witherings' death, she mentions that £105 a year of her land was sold to assist him in procuring his place as Postmaster.

It is well here to remark, in relation to this sum, and the matter should be borne in mind in perusing what follows, that £105 in 1632 would be equivalent to about £420 in the present day. Professor Masson, when speaking of the relative equivalents of English money now and in the first half

of the seventeenth century, gives his impression "that any specified salary in English money (of that time) would have purchased at least four times as much, whether in commodities or in respectability, as the same English money would purchase now." As only a portion of Mrs. Witherings' land was sold, she must have had a very respectable fortune of her own.

Witherings lived in an age characterised by corruption, by Court intrigue and Court favouritism, when envy and uncharitableness struggled for place and power, and when those who failed to secure the royal smile were in imminent danger of going to the wall. He did not achieve his official career without attempts being made to oust him from his place. Many general allegations were made against him of irregularities committed in his office, but for the most part with an irritating absence of any definite charges; and in the opposite scale

we have the fact that he was still Postmaster for Foreign Parts at the time of his death, in the year 1651.

We have hitherto been dealing with the Postmastership for Foreign Parts; and having accompanied Witherings over a portion of his service, it will be convenient now to see what was going on in the inland posts. It will be remembered that Charles Lord Stanhope was the king's Postmaster at Home and in Foreign Parts, within the king's dominions. The duties of Stanhope were to appoint and supervise the deputy postmasters on the roads, to provide for the conveyance of letters to or from the king or the Court, and, generally, letters on State business; but there was no arrangement, recognised as a State service, for the conveyance of letters of the merchants or the public generally by the deputy postmasters under Stanhope. Although this was so, there is apt to be some misapprehension

as to the means available at this time for the forwarding of letters of the public throughout the country. It might be supposed that no machinery to this end existed. There is, however, we think, every probability that while the postmasters were not officially authorised to convey letters from place to place, they did so, and reaped some benefit from the work. The postmasters throughout the country were constantly sending guides and horses between their several stages; the horses had to be brought back by the guides to their headquarters; and it would be surprising if the postmasters, when opportunity offered, did not undertake the carriage of letters for a fee. Further, in a State-paper office document, dated 1635, it is mentioned that the king's postmasters carried the subjects' letters, but up to that time had never reaped any benefit from it. The meaning of this must be, that the Chief Postmaster

and his predecessors had never reaped any benefit; but it is not likely that the deputy postmasters, who did the work, would perform the service for nothing. When the carriage of letters was afterwards taken up as a State affair, we shall hear an outcry for arrears of wages due to the postmasters, who previously were apparently content to let that matter lie over, deriving their profits from the letting out of horses, and the fees from the carriage of private letters. But the carriers with their carts and pack horses also conveyed letters for the public, and though the travelling was slow, it extended to all parts. By consulting old calendars and like books of reference, the reader will see how extensive was this carrying business, down to the time when it was superseded by the railways. But we are not left in any doubt as to the part the country postmasters took in the carriage of letters for the public, at anyrate on the Western road

from London to Plymouth, antecedent to this period, for by a petition which will be quoted hereafter from the postmaster of Crewkerne, it will be seen that, under an Order of the Council of State, dated the 24th February 1630, a weekly carriage of letters had been set up by the several postmasters on that road for their own profit.

Confirmation is given to this statement by papers belonging to the borough of Barnstaple, under date the 17th September 1633. It is there recorded that the Mayor and Aldermen of Barnstaple established communication between their borough and Exeter by means of "a foote post to goe weekly every Tuesday morning about seaven of the clock in the morning from the said towne of Barnstaple unto Exceter, and to be there at the postmaster's howse in Exceter the Wednesday morning, and there to deliver unto the post whiche is to goe that morneing toward London all such letters

as shalbe sent him to be conveyed unto London, . . . which foote post is to stay in Exceter untill the London post for that weeke shall come from London, and shall take upp all such letters as the said post shall bringe from London," etc. It is then explained that, "by means of which so speedie conveyance, men may in eleaven days write unto London and receive answers thereof backe again, and their friends and factours may have three dayes' respitt to give answeere unto such letters as shalbe sent; as also any man receiving letters from London may have like time to answer the same," etc. Now, if we deduct from the eleven days here mentioned the two days coming and going of the foot post between Barnstaple and Exeter, and the three days' "respitt" in London, it leaves only six days for the double journey between Exeter and London, or three days for a single journey of over 170 miles.

There is no doubt whatever from these statements that there existed, prior to Witherings' posts, a regular weekly horse post from London to the West of England for the general service of the public.

A project for a new and extended arrangement of the business of the post office was drafted in 1633—probably by Witherings. According to this paper, "it was calculated that in the 32 counties of England there were at least 512 market towns, which, one with another, sent 50 letters per week to London, which, in respect of their answers, are to be reckoned at 4d. each, making in all 25,600 letters, or £426 per week. The estimated charge for conveyance of these letters would be only £37 per week, leaving £388, 10s. weekly profit by this office, out of which was to be deducted £1500 per annum paid to the postmasters for the charge of conveying his Majesty's packets. All letters on the road to Scotland were to be

charged 2d. for every single, and 4d. for every double letter, to be paid at the receiving and delivery in London; for Yorkshire and Northumberland, 3d. a letter; and for Scotland, 8d. The postmasters in the country were not to take any money for letters, save 1d. for carriage to the next market town." Thus, in 1633, it would appear that nearly 26,000 letters a week reached London from the country, and, as replies, a similar number would be sent thence to the country. The project sketched out above was not, however, then carried out.

Some curious questions as to the post service arose at this period. On the 13th May 1633, the Mayor and Jurats of Dover made a representation to the Lieutenant of Dover Castle and of the Cinque Ports, to the effect that the deputy postmasters and the hackneymen of Dover and Canterbury had admeasured the highway between these places, and set up posts at every mile's end,

making the distance fifteen miles and a quarter. For this "distance they charged 3s. 9d. for horse hire, being 9d. more than the ordinary rate." The Mayor and Jurats "called before them the postmaster's deputy and some of the hackneymen, and found them resolute therein. They have done the same without commission from His Majesty or the Lords." It appears that the Kentish miles were longer than the miles elsewhere, and that 3d. per mile was allowed here, while in some other places only 2½d. was paid. The men of Kent wanted to be paid the higher rate for the shorter miles, which they had measured for themselves.

The postmaster of St. Albans, by the methods which he employed in carrying on the business of his office, got himself into deep water with the people of that town. On the 20th January 1632, informations were made by Edward Seabrooke, John Tuttle, and Fromabove Done, setting forth com-

plaints against John Wells, postmaster of St Albans, in pressing their horses for the service of the post maliciously or corruptly, in order to procure a bribe for their release." On the next day informations were made by John Mitchell of Sandridge, Ralph Heyward of Bushey, Henry Pedder of Luton, and John Bolton of Harding, all containing charges of corruption or misconduct against John Wells, postmaster of St Albans. Again, on the 3d August 1633, the inhabitants of the parish of St. Stephens, in St. Albans, forward depositions, taken before Sir John Garrard and others, Justices of the Peace, seeking to establish that "under colour of a commission granted by Lord Stanhope, Wells sent to the several parishes in and about St. Albans to furnish horses for His Majesty's service, there being not any such horses needed; but warrants being issued merely to compel the owners of the horses to compound." Whether Mr. Wells was as bad

as painted we cannot say, but he no doubt had at times to call in extra horses ; for, on the 13th May 1633, Lord Stanhope issued the following warrant to all Deputy Lieutenants, Justices of the Peace, and other officers :—“ Special occasions are offered, for the affairs of the State and service of His Majesty, to send in post both packets and otherwise oftener than ordinary ; the persons addressed are therefore to assist John Wells, post of St. Albans, and on his application to take up ten or twelve sufficient horses, as the service shall import.” This was within a few days of the king's setting out upon a progress into Scotland

On the 19th June 1633, a petition to the Council is forwarded by Edward Hutchins and Joseph Hutchins, sons of Thomas Hutchins, post of Crewkerne, lately deceased, and by all the posts between London and Plymouth, as follows :¹—

¹ This petition has already been referred to as establishing

“ Having obtained an Order, dated 24th February 1630, from this Board for the weekly carriage of letters between London and Plymouth, the settling whereof had cost them £400, besides their great and daily charge in keeping men and horses. Neither Lord Stanhope, nor Mr. Dolliver, the Paymaster of the Posts, had given any encouragement to this business, but rather opposed it ; Lord Stanhope going about to assume the benefit of the merchants' letters, and raising the valuation of the post places of the Western road from £20 to £100. Pray their lordships to require Lord Stanhope and the Paymaster of the Posts to answer wherefor they should raise the post places from £20 anciently given, and for what cause they (Stanhope and the Paymaster) should have the benefit of the merchants' letters. Pray also that Edward and Joseph Hutchins may, the fact that before Witherings' inland posts, the postmasters on the Western road had already established a weekly post for the public.

for £20, have the place filled by their father and grandfather for seventy years, or else the benefit of the merchants' letters, which their father had." Lord Stanhope's answer was to the effect that he doubted the statement as to the "great sums alleged to have been given for obtaining the merchants' letters," that he did not "take notice of disposing any place in that road, nor aim at any profit by reason of those letters; he only takes upon him the appointment of the posts." The meaning of this answer is not very clear; but the two papers taken together show that the postmasters were in the habit of buying their offices, paying £20 for them, and that it was now attempted to raise the charge to £100. Stanhope's salary was only £66, 13s. 4d. per annum, and, in consonance with the shameful traffic of the age, he made his profit in his own position by requiring his subordinates to purchase their places.

When Witherings set up the new plan of "estafette" posts in 1633, the men who had up to that time performed the post service between England and the Continent were all dismissed. They, like the deputy post-masters, had purchased their places, and upon being turned off received no compensation. Aggrieved as they felt themselves to be, they had recourse to a petition to Lord Cottington. They were Sampson Bates, Enoch Lynde, Jarman Marsham, Job Allibon, Abraham van Solte, and Samuel Allibon "heretofore ordinary posts for the Low Countries." "At their first entrance into their places," says the petition, "they paid great sums of money for the same, and they were granted for term of life, some of petitioners having served twenty-six years, and others various other long periods. About April 1633 petitioners were all dismissed without restoring any of their moneys, or giving them any allowance towards their

maintenance, so that they have been driven to pawn their household stuff, and, if not relieved, are like to perish. The ordinary posts beyond the seas likewise dismissed have been allowed £80 yearly, although their places were not so good as petitioners'. Pray that, upon a new election of a Postmaster, petitioners may be admitted to their several places again, or each of them receive a pension from the office of the Postmaster."

Besides the constant stream of horse posts passing from London to Dover in connection with the continental mail service, there was a service by foot messenger between these two towns. At this period there was a prohibition against the carrying of gold out of the country. In *Moryson's Itinerary*, 1617, the following limitation is stated to have been in force:—"In England the law forbids any traveller, upon paine of confiscation, to carry more money about him out of the kingdom than will serve for the expenses of his

journey, namely, about twenty pounds sterling." In 1635, the prohibition was still in force. On the 29th June of that year, the foot post between London and Dover, Edward Ranger, was examined as to the exporting of gold before Sir John Bankes, the Attorney General. Ranger deposed "that within two years last past he had carried from London to Dover gold and silver, to the value of several thousand pounds in the whole, for Cæsar Dehaze, Edward Buxton of Lime Street, Jacob Deleap, Roger Fletcher, Walter Eade, and John Terry of Canning Street, Charles French of Wallbrook, Peter Herne of Love Lane, Lucas Jacob of Botolph's Lane, and John Fowler of Bucklersbury, and Isaac Bedloe, and had delivered the same, in various sums, severally to John Parrott, Nathaniel Pringall, Mark Willes, John Demarke, David Hempson, David Neppen, John Wallop, and Henry Booth, at Dover ; that he had after the rate of five

shillings for every hundred pounds he carried ; and that he believes that the greatest part of the gold was sent beyond the seas by such persons as he delivered the same unto at Dover." This man Ranger was still foot post for Dover down to 1649 ; but in that year he was superseded in his place in consequence of certain irregularities. In the Council of State's proceedings of the 17th December of that year, the Mayor and Jurats of Dover were to be advised that the Council approved of another appointment being made, "as it would not have been safe for the State to suffer him (Ranger) to continue in that employment."

The king's posts at this period (1633) were not remarkable for their great speed. On the 27th June, Secretary Coke and the king received letters at Edinburgh which had taken five days in coming from Greenwich. On 9th July, Sir Francis Windebank writes to Secretary Coke, that "your several letters

of the 2nd and 3rd of this present, written from Lithco (Linlithgow) and Stirling, and sent by Davis, came to my hands upon Sunday the 7th, late in the evening. I send these by Davis again because of the slowness of the posts, some of your letters being ten days upon the way, and never any packet yet dated at the stages as they ought to be." A Captain Plumleigh, writing from Kinsale, apparently to the Lord Deputy, complains that "your lordship's letters unto me seldom come to my hands under fourteen days' time. I beg that the despatch of this of mine may come on towards Kinsale day and night, for otherwise we shall haply lose the opportunity of a fair wind," etc.

The condition of the roads in these times was an important factor in causing the posts to travel slowly; and the through couriers, after riding during the day, would necessarily rest during the night. The following letter, dated 20th December 1633, from Sir Gervase

Clifton to Sir John Coke the younger, at Selston, Nottinghamshire, describes a journey by road:—"I will be bold to trouble you with a discourse of my perambulation. I came on Tuesday to Dunstable, somewhat, albeit not much, within night. On Wednesday to Northampton, almost three hours after daylight, yet with perpetual fear of overturning or losing our way, which without guides hired, and lights holding in, I had undoubtedly done. On Thursday to Leicester, a great deal later, and so much more dangerously, as the way (you know) was worse at the end of the journey. On Friday we were the most of all troubled with waters, which so much covered the causeways, and almost bridges, over which we were to pass, as made me nearer retiring than coming forward; which, nevertheless, at length I ventured to do, and am (God be thanked), with my wife, safely got to Clifton (near Loughborough), where I remain yet, the

worse of the two, by reason of a great cold I have taken." Even a good many years later the roads were in a bad way. In 1678, Lady Russell writes to her husband from Tunbridge Wells: "I do really think, if I could have imagined the illness of the journey, it would have discouraged me: it is not to be expressed how bad the way is from Seven Oaks; but our horses did exceeding well; and Spence very diligent, often off his horse to lay hold of the coach." Smiles, in his *Lives of the Engineers*, gives an account of the great North road, the principal thoroughfare into Scotland, from a tract published in 1675 by Thomas Mace, one of the clerks of Trinity College, Cambridge:—

"The writer there addressed himself to the king, partly in prose and partly in verse, complaining greatly of the 'wayes, which are so grossly foul and bad,' and suggesting various remedies. He pointed out that much ground 'is now spoiled and trampled down

in all wide roads, where coaches and carts take liberty to pick and chuse for their best advantages ; besides, such sprawling and straggling of coaches and carts utterly confound the road in all wide places, so that it is not only unpleasurable, but extreme perplexin and cumbersome both to themselves and all horse travellers.'

“ But Mace's principal complaint was of the innumerable controversies, quarrellings, and disturbances, caused by the pack-horse men in their struggles as to which convoy should pass along the cleaner parts of the road. From what he states, it would seem that these disturbances, daily committed by uncivil, refractory, and rude Russian-like rake-shames, in contesting for the way, too often proved mortal, and certainly were of very bad consequences to many. He recommended a quick and prompt punishment in all such cases. 'No man,' said he, 'should be pestered by giving the way (sometimes)

to hundreds of pack-horses, panniers, whiff-
lers (*i.e.* paltry fellows), coaches, waggons,
wains, carts, or whatsoever others; which
continually are very grievous to weary and
loaden travellers; but more especially near
the city and upon a market-day, when, a man
having travelled a long and tedious journey,
his horse well-nigh spent, shall sometimes be
compelled to cross out of his way twenty
times in one mile's riding, by the irregularity
and peevish crossness of such-like whiff-
lers and market-women; yea, although their
panniers be clearly empty, they will stoutly
contend for the way with weary travellers,
be they never so many, or almost of what
quality soever.' 'Nay,' said he further,
'I have often known travellers, and myself
very often, to have been necessitated to
stand stock-still behind a standing cart or
waggon, on most beastly and insufferable
deep wet ways, to the great endangering of
our horses, and neglect of important busi-

ness; nor durst we adventure to stir (for most imminent danger of those deep rutts and unreasonable ridges) till it has pleased mister carter to jog on, which we have taken very kindly.' ”

These were the sort of roads the posts had to travel in the seventeenth century; but fortunately the horses were suited to the conditions. With respect to these, Moryson says, in his *Itinerary* (1617), that: “The horses are strong, and for journies indefatigable; for the English, especially northern men, ride from daybreak to the evening without drawing bit, neither sparing their horses nor themselves.” In considering the speed of the posts and the endeavours made to accelerate them, it is well to bear in mind the condition of the highways.

CHAPTER III

WE now come to an important period of Witherings' connection with the Post Office. In June 1635, the following scheme of public posts for inland letters was propounded; it is attributed to Witherings:—

“ Proposition for settling a ‘staffeto’ or packet post betwixt London and all parts of His Majesty’s dominions for carrying and re-carrying his subjects’ letters. The clear profits to go towards the payment of the postmasters of the roads of England, for which His Majesty is now charged with £3400 per annum.” The chief points of the proposal are: “That an office or counting-house should be established in London for receiving letters; that letters to Edinburgh and other places along that

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road should be put into a 'portmantle,' with particular bags directed to postmasters on the road; for instance, a bag should be directed to Cambridge, where letters were to be delivered, taking the same port (postage) as was then paid to the carriers, which was 2d. for a single letter, and so according to bigness. At Cambridge a foot-post was to be provided with a known badge of His Majesty's Arms, who on market-days was to go to all towns within 6, 8, or 10 miles to receive and deliver letters, and to bring back those he received to Cambridge, before the return of the 'portmantle' out of Scotland, when the letters being put into a little bag, the said bag was to be put into the 'portmantle'; that the 'portmantle' should go forward night and day without stay; that the port should be advanced in proportion to the distance the letter is carried; that a horse should be provided for carrying letters to towns which lie far off the main roads, as, for

example, Hull. Similar arrangements were to be made on the road to Westchester, and thence to Ireland; to Shrewsbury and the marches of Wales; to Exeter and Plymouth; to Canterbury and Dover; to Colchester and Harwich; to Norwich and Yarmouth. By these means, letters which were then carried by carriers or foot-posts 16 or 18 miles a day (so that it was full two months before any answer could be received from Scotland or Ireland) would go 120 miles in one day and night. At this rate of travelling, it was declared that news would come from the coast towns to London 'sooner than thought.'

"In the first place, it will be a great furtherance to the correspondency betwixt London and Scotland, and London and Ireland, and great help to trades and true affection of His Majesty's subjects betwixt these kingdoms, which, for want of true correspondency of letters, is now destroyed; and a thing

above all things observed by all other nations.

“As for example :—

“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. The letters being now carried by carriers or foot-posts 16 or 18 miles a day, it is full two months before any answer can be received from Scotland or Ireland to London, while by this conveyance all letters shall go 120 miles at the least in one day and night.

“It will, secondly, be alleged, that it is a wrong to the carriers that bring the said letters. To which is answered, a carrier sets out from Westchester to London on the Monday, which is 120 miles. The said carrier is eight days upon the road, and upon his coming to London, delivers his letters of advice for his reloading to Westchester again, and is forced to stay in London

two days, at extraordinary charges, before he can get his reloading ready. By this conveyance letters will be from Westchester to London in one day and night, so that the said carriers' loading will be ready a week before the said carriers shall come to London; and they no sooner come to London, but may be ready to depart again. The like will fall out in all other parts.

“ Besides, if at any time there should be occasion to write from any of the coast towns in England or Scotland to London, by this conveyance letters will be brought immediately; and from all such places there will be weekly advice to and from London.

“ As for example :—

“ Any fight at sea; any distress of His Majesty's ships (which God forbid); any wrong offered by any other nation to any of the coasts of England, or any of His Majesty's forts, the posts being punctually

paid, the news will come 'sooner than thought.'

"It will be, thirdly, alleged that this service may be pretended by the Lord Stanhope to be in his grant of Postmaster of England. To which is answered, neither Lord Stanhope nor any other that ever enjoyed the Postmaster's place of England had any benefit of the carrying and recarrying of the subjects' letters; besides, the profit is to pay the posts of the road, which, next unto His Majesty, belong to the office of the said Lord Stanhope; and by determination of any of the said posts' places, by death or otherwise, the Lord Stanhope will make as much of them as hath heretofore been made by this said advancement of all their places,—the Lord Stanhope now enjoying what either he or any of his predecessors hath ever heretofore done to this day."

The foregoing scheme of public posts is doubtless an amplification of that drafted by

Witherings in 1633, already quoted. Witherings refers, in the closing paragraph of his scheme, to possible difficulties with Lord Stanhope; but he meets this by saying that "Lord Stanhope will make as much of them" — that is, the deputy postmasters' places—"as hath heretofore been made by this said advancement of all their places." The meaning of this appears to be, that Stanhope would still receive his fee of £66, 13s. 4d. as Chief Postmaster of England, would appoint the deputies of the roads, and continue to receive payment for the sale to them of their places.

The plan being now ripe to be put into operation, the king issued a proclamation, dated at Bagshot the 31st July 1635, "for the settling of the Letter Office of England and Scotland." The general features of the scheme are described to be: the laying of regular posts between London and Edinburgh to perform the double journey every

week,—the travelling to be done in six days, —the laying of weekly posts on the other principal roads out of London, the providing of by-posts to serve the towns lying beyond the main roads. The postage rates prescribed were :—

| | | |
|--|----------------|-----|
| For a single letter under . . . | 80 miles . . . | 2d. |
| ” ” ” between 80 and 140 ” . . . | ” . . . | 4d. |
| ” ” ” above . . . | 140 ” . . . | 6d. |
| ” ” ” to Scotland or its borders . . . | ” . . . | 8d. |

When several letters were made up in one packet, the charge was to be according to the “bigness” of the packet. The postage both for outward and inward letters was to be payable in London. On the Western road to Plymouth the charge was to be as near as possible the same as that heretofore charged. This must refer to the system of posts already established by the deputy postmasters on that road before alluded to. The several postmasters of the roads were required to keep one or two horses in their

stables ready for the service as Witherings might direct them ; and it was commanded that on the day on which the mail would be due, these horses were not to be let or sent forth "upon any other occasion whatsoever." For the hire of the horses, the post-messenger was to pay $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per horse per mile. All other messengers or foot-posts on the roads covered by Witherings were to be put down, so far as the carriage of letters was concerned, exception being made only in respect of "common known carriers, or particular messenger to be sent on purpose with a letter by any man for his own occasions, or a letter by a friend."

These, then, are the lines upon which the first general system of inland posts in Great Britain, for the use and convenience of the public, was launched by the State.

There was this curious complication about the business. Thomas Witherings was already Postmaster for Foreign Parts, out of

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| | | |
|--|--------------------|-----|
| For a single letter under | 80 miles | 2d. |
| „ „ „ between 80 and 140 „ | | 4d. |
| „ „ „ above | 140 „ | 6d. |
| „ „ „ to Scotland or its borders | | 8d. |

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There was this curious complication about the business. Thomas Witherings was already Postmaster for Foreign Parts, out of

the king's dominions; Charles Lord Stanhope was Master of the Posts in England and for Foreign Parts, within the king's dominions, Stanhope's sphere being restricted to the appointing of deputy postmasters on the roads and managing the conveyance of letters for the king and State officials; and now a third control is introduced by the appointment of Witherings to manage a system of public posts, to be grafted upon the chain of deputy postmasters already existing upon the roads and under the direction of Stanhope. Such complex arrangements were not likely to work smoothly, nor did they.

The postmasters of Stanhope were not all in a good position to perform their part in the new system of posts, as will be seen by the following representation made by the Mayor and others of Coventry to Secretary Coke on the 10th April 1635:—"By his letter of the 27th March, they perceive that many complaints are made of the backward-

ness of their city to furnish post-horses for persons employed in His Majesty's service between that and Ireland. They find that John Fletcher is postmaster within their city, authorised by Lord Stanhope. Fletcher, by reason of poverty and lameness, keeps his house, but employs John Scott, another poor aged man, as his deputy. Scott acknowledged that Fletcher had not had for a month past above three horses, and that all of them are lame. They sent the Sheriff of the city to see how the postmaster was provided for the said service, by whom answer was returned that neither Fletcher nor Scott have so much as one horse, mare, or nag. By an Order of the Council, it was ordered that the postmaster, not being able to find sufficient numbers of horses for packets and persons employed in His Majesty's service, should have a supply of horses out of the country within twelve miles' distance from Coventry. They also find that the postmaster, by

himself and agents, makes composition with the towns about the city, and has taken yearly of them several sums of money to spare them from the service, by which means the burden of the whole service falls upon the city, which hath occasioned many late complaints. The writers are in great hope that some speedy reformation may be had therein. They recommend to that place Edward Mosse, an innholder in their city."

In order the better to understand the position in which the country postmasters found themselves about this period, 1635 and later, it will be well to quote some of the petitions sent forward by the postmasters, most of which relate to arrears of pay. And it is not unlikely that the demands for arrears were due to the new scheme of Witherings, under which the postmasters would no longer be allowed to carry letters for the public on their own account:—

1635. "Petition of William Parbo, post of Sandwich, to the Lords of the Treasury :— About 13 years since petitioner bought the said post's place in the name of a poor kinsman, Arthur Ruck, then a child, intending the profits to be applied towards his education. Being much impoverished by the forbearance of his post wages for ten years and a half, petitioner is unable longer to maintain his kinsman at the University of Oxford. If his arrearage of 16d. per diem were paid, he should be a loser above £100, he being at charges of boat-hire to carry His Majesty's letters aboard His Majesty's ships, and of warning-fires on shore, besides of horse and man by land. Prays payment of his arrears, amounting to £255, 10s."

1635. "Petition of Alexander Nubie to the Council :—Petitioner being post of Dartford, is forced to keep sixteen horses for the performance of the service, which is an

extraordinary great charge, and for which he has received no pay these two years and a half, so that there is due to him about £100. Is poor and in debt, and dare not go abroad for fear of arrest by creditors by whom he has been furnished with hay and other provisions. Prays for protection until he may receive his money."

1636. "Petition of Thomas Hookes, servant to the prince, to Secretary Coke:—Petitioner's father, Nicholas Hookes, lately deceased, executed the post of Conway, Co. Carnarvon, for 26 years. About six years since petitioner was appointed to the said place by Lord Stanhope. Understanding that all posts are in person to supply their places, petitioner, being tied to attendance on the prince, prays the Secretary to grant the place to petitioner's brother, Henry Hookes, who was living in the said town, and also to give order for £300, arrears due for the same place."

1636. "William Hugessen, postmaster of Dover, to Secretary Windebank :—Has served as postmaster in the Port of Dover many years, and keeps the most convenient and fairest house betwixt London and Dover, and where ambassadors generally lodge. Is behindhand of his pay about £400. If there be an order that no man may enjoy the place except he serve by himself, he desires that Edward Whetstone, who is his tenant in the house called the Greyhound of Dover, may have the place upon such conditions as others, but if possible in Hugessen's name as formerly.

1637. "March 26th.—Petition of Edmund Bawne, postmaster of Ferrybridge, Co. York, to the Council :—After the death of petitioner's grandfather, who served as postmaster in the place abovesaid thirty years, petitioner, for £200, by his grandfather three years since paid Lord Stanhope, was admitted into the same place. Upon

questioning Lord Stanhope's patent, petitioner gave Mr. Witherings £35 more for his settlement, and was, by the signatures of Secretaries Coke and Windebank, and Witherings, admitted into the same. Petitioner's grandfather is owing for wages at least £500 from His Majesty. Without any misdemeanour, being now sought to be ousted, he prays relief."

These various petitions set forth not only that the country postmasters were being badly treated in regard to their pay,—this pay being what may conveniently be described as their retaining-fee,—but that there was some stirring-up by Witherings of derelictions of duty on the part of the postmasters.

Allusion has already been made to the fact that matters could not go along smoothly with the whole system of posts, seeing that the control was in two sets of hands, and that the spheres of action were not properly divided. So a blow shortly fell upon Lord

Stanhope. This must, apparently, have been unlooked for by Stanhope, for, shortly before his fall, a proclamation was issued by the king bearing Stanhope's signature. It had regard to the duties of the postmasters, and is supposed to have been issued early in the year 1637. Its chief provisions were: that (1) in all places where posts were laid for the packet, the postmasters were to have the benefit and pre-eminence of letting, furnishing, and appointing of horses to all riding in post; that (1) none were to be regarded as riding on public affairs unless with special commission signed by one of our Principal Secretaries of State, or six at least of the Privy Council, etc.; that the postmasters or owners of the horses were to be allowed to claim $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per mile (besides the guide's groats); but that private persons riding post were to pay such rate as might be agreed upon between the parties; that (3) no horse was to be ridden away until the

fare was first paid, nor taken beyond the next stage without the owner's consent; baggage was not to exceed 30 lbs., and no horse was to be ridden above seven miles an hour in summer, or six in winter; and that (4) the constables and magistrates were to take up horses for the postmaster's service in the posts when the postmaster was himself short of horses. Not long after the issue of the proclamation above referred to, Lord Stanhope was driven from office. The immediate cause is not apparent; but the fact is dealt with in the following petition, dated March 1637 :—

“Petition of Charles Lord Stanhope, late Postmaster of England and Wales, to the king :—

“There is due to the petitioner for his fee of 100 marks per annum (£66, 13s. 4d.), as Master and Comptroller of the Posts, being in arrear for 19 years and more, £1266, 13s. 4d., which petitioner, when he

enjoyed the said place, was in some sort better able to forbear, and therefore did not importune for the same; but now, having resigned the said office, full sore against his will, but in obedience to His Majesty's pleasure, signified to him by the Commissioners for the Posts,—the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Keeper, the Lord Treasurer, Lord Cottington, and the Secretaries Coke and Windebank,—he has lost divers profits incident thereunto, which were a great help to his support (his other means left by his father being small as yet, and most of it in his mother's hands), whereby, since the loss of his office, he is disabled to maintain himself in the degree of an English baron. In consideration of his free yielding of his place, prays order for payment of the arrear, and some satisfaction for his office. A man of quality, and honourable knight, would willingly have given petitioner £5000 for his office."

Lord Stanhope states that he resigned his office "sore against his will," and "in obedience to His Majesty's pleasure"; but no hint is given of the immediate cause for this pressure being applied. An event happened in 1629, however, which may have had some bearing upon the present matter. On the 2nd of March in that year, the king desired, by means of the Speaker, Sir John Finch, to dissolve Parliament before the Commons could proceed with certain business which they had in hand. In order, however, to carry their protest, certain patriots in the House, Denzil Hollis among the rest, laid hands upon the Speaker and held him in the chair while the House voted its protest. In consequence of the violence thus shown to the Speaker, the chief actors in the scene were thrown a few days thereafter into the Tower. While these men lay in confinement, they were visited by certain of their friends. In a paper dated 1629, found among

the Coke Manuscripts, and headed "The Lieutenant of the Tower's information of such as had visited the prisoners in the Tower, from their first imprisonment to the 19th March 1629," it is recorded that "the Lord Hollis (brother of Denzil) brought the Lord Stanhope, Postmaster, and other persons to visit Denzil Hollis. It is quite possible from this, and other circumstances which have not come down to us, that Stanhope may have been suspected of sympathy with the Parliamentary party, and that, on that account, he was no longer to be relied upon as a faithful adherent of the king. Although the removal of Stanhope was not effected till 1637, at which period the tension between the royalists and the popular party was becoming more severe, it is possible that the event of the Tower may have had its share in bringing about his loss of office.

In a petition of Lord Stanhope's in the year of the Restoration, 1660, on the subject

of the loss of his office, some further information of the way in which he was "removed" is given by Stanhope. He says, that "when by the contrivance of one Witherings, and some great persons, he was summoned to bring his patent before the Council, and, after writing his name upon the back, to leave it there, words purporting to be a surrender of the patent were afterwards written above his name, and copied on to the enrolment; the late king offered him a new patent if he would agree that Sir Henry Vane, senior, should be joined with him; but this petitioner declined, being advised to appeal to the Parliament then about to meet," etc. If this be a correct statement of what happened, there is little doubt that Stanhope was deprived of his place by the operation of a gross job. In connection with his petition of 1660, Stanhope produced a copy of a letter from Mr. Prideaux, dated 5th September 1644 (of whom we shall hear later on as

Attorney General to Cromwell, and more intimately connected with the posts), about erecting stages in all the roads for the service of the State; and this letter was held to show that Prideaux recognised Stanhope's right to the office. The committee who examined Stanhope's claims in 1660 were of opinion that "he should be put into a position to recover the profits of the office since the 25th April 1637"; but it does not appear that he succeeded eventually in his suit.

According to Rymer's *Fœdera*, the king granted to Thomas Witherings, by Letters Patent, on the 22nd day of June 1637, the office of Postmaster of Foreign Parts during life, which office, in 1632, had been granted in the joint names of William Frizell and Thomas Witherings. The details of this grant, if such were made, are not given; and it is a curious fact that, before and after Witherings' death, the grant put forward as the ground for Witherings' interest in the

Foreign Post Office was not that mentioned by Rymer, but the joint grant made in favour of Frizell and Witherings of an earlier date.

In the same month (June 1637), a grant was made to Secretaries Coke and Windebank "of the office of Postmaster within His Majesty's dominions for their lives, if they so long continue Secretaries, with the like fee of £66, 13s. 4d. (per annum), to be paid quarterly out of the Exchequer, as was formerly granted to Lord Stanhope, who has surrendered that grant. His Majesty thereby annexes the office of Postmaster to the Principal Secretaries for the time being, and declares that the surviving Secretary is to surrender this grant to His Majesty, who thereupon will grant the said office to the Secretaries who for the time shall be, to hold the same while they continue Secretaries."

Following this change, we find, from a letter written by Sir John Coke to his son, dated the 5th August 1637, that the Secre-

taries had then appointed Witherings their deputy for executing this office. It states that : "Your letters come sometimes late. I hope that will, by Mr. Witherings' posts, be amended. For we, the Postmasters General, have made him our deputy, that he may the better accommodate his letter office." So now we have got to this stage, that Witherings, being Postmaster for Foreign Parts, was also appointed Deputy Postmaster General for the Inland Posts, and there was more likelihood of his plans being successfully carried out.

The reader will remember that, in 1633, Witherings was for some months suspended from office, and that several claims were made against him, in respect of which he made terms of settlement. One of these claims, not already mentioned, was put forward by Endymion Porter, Groom of the Bedchamber ; but this claim was met by Witherings with a flat denial of any indebted-

ness. What the grounds were does not appear. But by an opinion given by Attorney General Bankes in 1637, it seems that on the 24th September 1635 an indenture of deputation of Stanhope's place was made in favour of Endymion Porter and his son George; which deputation of place, in the Attorney General's opinion, only referred to the post-work incidental to the forwarding of State despatches, and not "the ordering of the carriage of letters by post to be settled within the kingdom, at the charge of particular persons and not of His Majesty." It is to be remarked that the date of Porter's indenture almost coincides with the date upon which Witherings' inland posts were started; and the idea occurs to us, that possibly the Groom of the Bedchamber was brought into the business with the view of providing a channel of access to His Majesty for the furtherance of Stanhope's interests. Be this as it may, Porter, having had a taste of the Post Office,

seemed desirous of obtaining Stanhope's place wholly to himself. On the 5th April 1636 he writes a letter to Secretary Windbank, of which the following is the import :—

“The Secretary is best acquainted how long Porter followed the business of the Postmaster's place, being one to whom it was referred; and Porter has intimated to His Majesty his former intentions towards Porter in that business, to which he has received so gracious an answer from his *sacred mouth* as has much lessened Porter's sickness; yet he fears, by something His Majesty said, that he imagines Porter is not willing to have Lord Stanhope's patent made void. Begg the Secretary to let His Majesty know that Porter has no disposition nor thought to be averse to any intention of His Majesty. He hopes His Majesty does it for the good of Porter (*his poor servant and creature*); and if he be thought worthy of the office, he will make it such for His Majesty's honour and

profit as he shall have no cause to think it ill bestowed." "Sacred mouth," and "his poor servant and creature"! Such expressions may have been common at the period under review; but they would be sadly out of place in the present day. The English language is rich enough in figure to convey sentiments of submission, and even veneration, without involving the writer in such wretched abjection. May it not be that the doctrine of divine right is responsible for this tone of servility in a large degree? A better specimen of self-effacement in a petition could not be quoted than that of Denzil Hollis to the king about 1630, found among Secretary Coke's manuscripts. It will be remembered that Hollis was one of the Parliament men who gave serious offence to the king by holding Speaker Finch in the chair. As a punishment for the rash act, he was cast out of the sunshine of royal favour and thrown into prison. From this changed position,

Hollis, patriot and Parliament man, penned the following petition :— “Most gracious Sovereign, your Majesty be pleased to vouchsafe leave to your most afflicted suppliant again to cast himself at your royal feet, there still to implore your Majesty’s grace and favour, for he is no longer able to bear the weight either of your Majesty’s displeasure or of his own grief ; and he languisheth under it so much the more by how much he hath been heretofore comforted with the sweet influence of your Majesty’s goodness to him, and gracious acceptance of him. His younger years were blessed with his attendances upon your princely person, and it was the height of his ambition to end his days in your service ; nor did he ever willingly entertain the least thought which might move your Majesty to cast him down from that pitch into this precipice of your indignation ; but in anything he may have failed, it hath been through misfortune, and the error of his

judgment. Imitate the Dread Sovereign the God of Heaven, whose image you bear here upon earth, both in yourself in regard to your royal excellencies and in relation to us your loyal and obedient subjects. He is best pleased with the sacrifice of a sorrowful heart, and accepts only that person who mourns because he hath offended Him; and such a sacrifice do I here offer myself unto your Majesty, a heart burdened with the sense of your Majesty's displeasure, prostrate at your royal feet with all humble submission waiting till your Majesty will reach out the golden sceptre of princely compassion to raise me out of this lowest dust, and so, by breathing new life into me, make me able and capable to do your Majesty some acceptable service. And, as I am bound in duty, I shall ever pray for the increase of your Majesty's happiness and the continuance of your glorious reign. This is the humble petition and prayer of your Majesty's most obedient

and loyal subject and servant, Denzil Holles.”

Hollis was not taken back to bask in the desired sunshine ; and biography has left upon record that he was a “man of firm integrity, a lover of his country and of liberty, a man of great courage and of as great pride. He had the soul of a stubborn old Roman in him !”

There are patriots and patriots. A contrast to Hollis is found in a contemporary patriot, Lilburne, of whom it is recorded that, “Whilst he was whipped at the cart, and stood in the pillory, he uttered many bold speeches against tyranny of bishops, etc.; and, when his head was in the hole of the pillory, he scattered sundry copies of pamphlets (said to be seditious) and tossed them among the people, taking them out of his pocket ; whereupon, the Court of Star Chamber, then sitting, being informed, immediately ordered Lilburne to be gagged

during the residue of the time he was to stand in the pillory, which was done accordingly; and, when he could not speak, he stamped with his feet, thereby intimating to the beholders he would still speak were his mouth at liberty."

The higher places in the Post Office were apparently much sought after, and there must have been a good deal of Court manœuvring on the part of those in possession to remain in, and of suitors who desired possession to get in. Here is the letter of another candidate, William Lake, who gives something of his personal history in his letter. It is addressed to Secretary Windebank from Putney Park, on the 5th August 1637:—

"I enclose copy of my former petition, which the Duke of Lennox presented to His Majesty. I hope you will find my demands such as His Majesty may approve of. He may be possessed that I acquired some very

great estate under my master, the late Lord Treasurer, but it was far otherwise. I was always more careful of my honour and my honesty than of increasing my fortune. My main hope was that, by my lord's means, I might have obtained some grant from His Majesty which might have eased me of the trouble of being a suitor. I know that his lordship meant me some good in that place which Witherings now enjoys, whereof I give a little touch in my petition. How I missed it, *nescio quid, nec quare*. I entreat that, when you move His Majesty on my behalf, you would affirm that all the fortune I got does not amount to above £5000, which is but a small thing to maintain myself, my wife, and six children. Neither will I be so immoderate in my suit as to desire more than what the late king once thought me worthy of: I mean the place for the Latin tongue."

Besides the officers of the Post Office

bearing the title of Chief Postmasters or Postmasters-General, there was an officer attached to the Court called the Deputy Postmaster of the Court. What his precise duties were, is not very apparent; but he probably looked after the despatch of letters over short distances from the Court, wherever situated, and arranged for post stages being temporarily set up in places where they did not usually exist, when the Court was on progress. The Court Deputy Postmaster did not, however, enjoy any greater punctuality, as regards payment of wages, than the postmasters of the roads. The following petition of 1637 proves this:—

“Petition of John Wytton, Deputy Postmaster of the Court, daily attending your Majesty, to the king. For his wages of 10s. per diem there is due to him about £1400; neither has he allowance of diet, or horsemeat, or any other perquisite, the non-payment whereof has brought him much

into debt. Some of his creditors have petitioned the Lord Chamberlain to have the benefit of the law against him. He has granted the request, unless the petitioner give satisfaction by the middle of Michaelmas term. Prays that the Lord Treasurer may make present payment of what is due to petitioner, and meanwhile that he may have a protection." It appears that Wytton was not the real holder of the place, although by delegation he executed the office; for by a petition laid before Secretary Coke in 1639, he states that in the first year of Charles' reign, Buckbury, the king's Postmaster, assigned to him the execution of the place, and that for his pains he was to receive the third part of Buckbury's wages when they were paid. Wytton was turned out of the place in 1637, when there were for wages eight years and a half due to him, amounting to £530. This would no doubt be one-third of the sum due to Buckbury.

“I can make it appear by bills upon oath,” says Wytton, “that during the time the debt grew I have disbursed almost £300 out of purse in executing the place. And I do humbly conceive that my own attendance, my keeping of lodgings and horses in town for eight years and a half, may be thought worthy of the remainder of the sum above mentioned.”

In July 1637, a warrant was issued to Secretaries Coke and Windebank, Masters and Comptrollers-General of the Posts, for a sum of money to be paid to the postmasters of the roads, up to the 27th September following, as under mentioned:—

| | | Per Diem. | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | <i>s.</i> | <i>d.</i> |
| Thomas Swinsed, | of Ware | 3 | 0 |
| Thomas Hagger, | „ Royston | 4 | 4 |
| Ralph Shert, | „ Babraham | 2 | 0 |
| John Cotterill, | „ Newmarket | 4 | 4 |
| John Riggshis, and William Kilborne, | } late „ Huntingdon | 2 | 0 |
| James Cropper, | „ Witham | 2 | 0 |
| Richard Leeming, | „ Grantham | 2 | 0 |
| Thomas Atkinson, | „ Newark | 2 | 4 |

| | | Per Diem. | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | <i>s.</i> | <i>d.</i> |
| Edward Wright, | of Scrooby | 2 | 0 |
| Edmund Hayford, | „ Doncaster | 2 | 0 |
| Edmund Bawne, | „ Ferrybridge | 2 | 6 |
| Thomas Tayler, | „ Tadcaster | 1 | 8 |
| John Howsman, | „ York | 2 | 0 |
| William Thompson, | „ Wetherby | 2 | 0 |
| Andrew Wilkinson, | „ Boroughbridge | 3 | 0 |
| John Scarlet, | „ North Allerton | 2 | 4 |
| John Glover, | „ Darlington | 2 | 4 |
| William Sherrington, | „ Durham | 2 | 4 |
| George Swan, | „ Newcastle | 3 | 0 |
| John Pye, | „ Morpeth | 3 | 0 |
| Alexander Armorer, | „ Alnwick | 3 | 0 |
| Thomas Armorer, | „ Belford | 3 | 0 |
| Thomas Carre, | „ Berwick | 2 | 4 |
| James Ware, | „ Dartford | 2 | 6 |
| Thomas Lond, | „ Gravesend | 0 | 6 |
| Richard Jennings, | „ Sittingbourne | 2 | 0 |
| Thomas Parks, | „ London | 2 | 0 |
| Roger Pimble, | „ Charing Cross | 2 | 0 |
| John Briscoe, | „ Barnet | 2 | 0 |
| Robert Story, | „ St. Albans | 2 | 0 |
| John Gerrard, | „ Brickhill | 2 | 0 |
| Andrew Clark, | „ Daventry | 2 | 0 |
| John Fletcher, | „ Coventry | 2 | 8 |
| Ralph Castlon, | „ Birmingham | 2 | 0 |
| Robert Francis, | „ Chester | 2 | 4 |
| James Wilkinson, | „ Staines | 2 | 0 |
| Gilbert Davies, | „ Hartford Bridge, Hants | 1 | 8 |
| Anthony Spittle, | „ Basingstoke | 1 | 8 |
| Richard Miles, | late „ Salisbury | 1 | 8 |
| Roger Bedbury, | now „ „ | 1 | 8 |
| Nicholas Compton, | „ Shaftesbury | 1 | 8 |

| | | Per Diem. | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------|----|
| | | s. | d. |
| John Smith, | of Sherborne | 1 | 8 |
| Robert Searle, | „ Honiton | 1 | 8 |
| Thomas Newman, | „ Exeter | 2 | 0 |
| Samuel Smith, | „ Brentwood | 2 | 6 |
| William Neale, | „ Chelmsford | 2 | 6 |
| Robert Bunny, | „ Witham | 2 | 0 |
| Henry Barron, | „ Looe | 2 | 6 |
| Joshua Blaxton, | „ Perryn (Penryn) | 2 | 0 |
| Gilbert Davies, | „ Hartford Bridge | 2 | 6 |
| William Brooks, | „ Portsmouth | 2 | 6 |
| Rowland Roberts, | late „ Langfenny } | 2 | 0 |
| Richard Roberts, | now „ „ } | 2 | 0 |
| William Folkingham, | „ Stamford | 2 | 0 |

These seem at first sight to be small allowances to the postmasters; but we must be under no illusion as to this; and it is proper to remember, what has already been pointed out, that in all cases of money payments at this period, and mentioned in these pages, the figures must be quadrupled in order to estimate their value in relation to the present worth of money. The payments here ordered may have been intended to keep the principal postmasters quiet until a new arrangement, promulgated under His

Majesty's directions on the 30th July 1637 (hereafter to be quoted), should come into force. The date fixed for its taking effect was Michaelmas next ensuing. But the payments above authorised did not by any means clear off the indebtedness of the State towards the postmasters; for by a petition of the postmasters to the House of Lords in December 1660, it is set forth that "in the year 1637 they were upwards of £60,000 in arrear of their wages, whereof they have never received one penny." That means that, according to our present value of money, the postmasters were in arrears of pay to the extent of about a quarter of a million sterling.

In looking over the post stages mentioned in the foregoing list, and tracing them upon the map, whether from London to Berwick, London to the stages in Cornwall, or in the other directions, one cannot fail to be struck with the very direct courses which the

post routes followed. The lines taken are straight as an arrow; and considering that the roads were not laid out by engineers, but were the product of a mere habit of travel, worked out by packmen with their horses, and travellers making for a preconceived destination, the exact result attained to is very remarkable. On the great North road, the stages are in many cases the same as those which served in the days of mail coaches two centuries later.

Shortly after the appointment of the two Principal Secretaries of State, Coke and Windebank, to be Masters and Comptrollers-General of the Posts, Witherings being their deputy for the inland posts and himself also Foreign Postmaster, a very important document was drawn up for the governance of the posts generally. It is as follows:—

“By the King.

“Orders for the furtherance of our service, as well to our Pacquets and Letters, as for

riding in Post; specially set downe, and commanded to be observed, where our Postes are established within our County of_____.

“Orders for the Pacquet.

“First, that no Pacquets or Letter shall be sent by Poste, or bind any Poste to ride therewith in poste, but such as shall be directed first for our speciall affaires, and subscribed by the Writer’s name or sender thereof; neither shall it be holden for our affaires, but as the same shall be directed and subscribed by our High Treasurer, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Lord Admirall, Principall Secretaries of State, being Masters and Comptrollers of our Postes, Lord Lieutenant of the said County, writing from the Court, or otherwise to the Court, subscribed by any Admirall, or Vice-Admirall from the Narrow-seas, Lieutenant of Dover Castle, or Mayor of any Port Town, Ambassadors, or

Agents beyond the seas for the time being, or Deputy Lieutenant of our said County, writing to any of those personages afore-named, or to the body of our Privy Councill.

“2. All Pacquets or Letters so directed shall be carried by the Postes in poste from stage to stage onley, and not otherwise nor further, they being dated and signed first on the outside by the sender or writer, and shall run therewith in summer, vizt from the first of April to the last of September, after 7 miles the houre, and 5 miles the houre in winter, which is the rest of the yeare, as the wayes and weather afford.

“3. And that it may appeare from time to time (as oft as shal be needfull) with what expedition the service is by our Posts performed, every Post shall keep a faire paper book to enter the Pacquets in, being so brought unto him, with the day, month, and houre they came to his hands, two

leather bags lined with cotten or bayes, to carry the Pacquet in, and hornes to sound, as oft as he meets and sees company comming, or foure times in every mile.

“4. And to the end our Posts attending thus our special service, may performe their severall duties in that behalfe, our pleasure is, that they and every of them shal brook and enjoy the benefit of all former favours and immunities by our Predecessors allowed them: Namely, that they and their servants be holden free and exempted from all Summons, Prests and personal attendance at assises, Sessions, Inquests, and Musters.

“5. Every Poste in his severall Stage is commanded, and hereby required to carry out and in once a week, the Maile of Letters that shall come from, and goe to the Letter Office of London, free without charge. And to that end, are from time to time to have in readinesse one good Gelding or Mare saddled against the houre the Maile shall

come that way, and not to detaine the Maile above halfe a quarter of an houre at no time; And run with the same after 5 miles in Winter, and 7 miles in Summer, which is to be done in consideration that the Master of the Letter Office is to pay them their wages according to the Reglement set downe by the Lords Committees; And that to begin at Michaelmas next, and he that shall faile, to be discharged from his place. And to enter the houre of the day or night upon a Label, which is to be annexed to the said Male, with their owne names and the names of the Stages.

“6. Every Poste is required to deliver all such Letters in the Country, either at or neere his Stage, as shall be sent to him from the Master of the Letter office, and to receive Port according to the taxe set upon every Letter; and to be accomtable for such moneys as they shall receive at the end of every three months. And like-

wise to returne such Letters to London as shall be brought to them in the Country. And in case Post paid be written upon any Letter that shall come from London, they are not to take Port for it in the Country againe.

“7. And that it may appeare from time to time when and as often as it shall be required, with what care and diligence the service is at all hands applyed and performed —First, he that is appointed by our Masters and Comptrollers Generall of our Posts, to attend this service at the Court, and also every other Post-Master shall keep a large and faire Ledger Booke to enter our Packets in, as they shall be brought to him or them, with the name of the Poste who brought the same, and the day of the month, houre of the day or night that they came first to their hands, together with the name of him or them, by whom or unto whom they were subscribed and directed, taking and entering

onely such for our Pacquets as come warranted, as is aforesaid.

“8. And further our Will and pleasure is, That every Post-Master shall write upon a Labell fastened to every or any our Packets, the time of his receite thereof, and not on the Packet or Letter, as hath been disorderly used.

“Orders for Thorow-Postes in _____.

“First, as the service of the Pacquet so the horsing of all Thorow-Posts (Through Posts) and persons riding in Poste, with horne or guide, by commission or otherwise, shall be performed by our standing Posts in their severall Stages, who to that end shall keep and have in a readinesse under their direction a sufficient number of Poste-horses, with saddles, bridles and furniture convenient; and if it shall fall out, that by the repaire of Ambassadors, or other residents of Service, men riding in Poste,

that is to say, with horn or guide, come so thick, or in such numbers, that their ordinary provision will not suffice, then the Constables of the places where they dwell, with the aid and assistance of the Cheife Magistrates there, and the countries adjoyning (being required in our name) shall take up, bring in, and supply the Posts with horses and with furniture where they may be had or hired.

“2. And that it be not any way a let or impeachment to the liberty of any man riding on his own or ordinary affaires, within the Realme at his or their pleasure; it is hereby meant that all Strangers borne, specially riding with horne or guide by themselves, or in company of our ordinary Messengers or Posts for the Low Countries, or France, all Ambassadors, riding or sending on their Princes affairs, and all other whatsoever, riding with horne and guide, shall take and change their horses onley of the Posts, and at the Post-house, of that

place, or with his consent, and appointment, they taking for each horse after the rate of iijd. (3d.) the mile beside the guide groat.

“3. And to prevent all advantages of unconscionable dealing, by such as keep horses to hire, in the horsing of strangers beyond the ordinary Stages, to the wronging of our Posts, and injury to the beast and the Rider. It is found expedient, and our will and pleasure is, that all Strangers borne, as well going forth of the Realme, as comming into the same, through our County of _____, although it be about their owne and private affaires, without horne or guide, shall likewise be horsed by our ordinary Posts from Stage to Stage, or with the Posts knowledge and consent, not taking for each horse above iijd. the mile.

“4. It shall not be lawfull for any so riding in Poste, to take and ride away the horse or horses of any man, not having first and aforehand fully paid and satisfied

the hire, nor ride them further than the next Stage, without the knowledg and consent of the Poste of that place, nor charge any horse taken to ride Poste with any Male (mail) or burthen (besides the rider) that exceeds the weight of 30 pound. And if it shall happen, any to disobey these our commandements, and orders, to the manifest wrong of our Posts, injury of any owner, or hurt of his beast ; the Officers or Magistrates of the place, upon complaint thereof made, shall stay the party offending, till satisfaction be made, or sufficient security given to repay the dammage. But if it so fall out, that the obstinacy of any herein offending, require further punishment than the ordinary power of the Magistrate of the place can or may conveniently inflict. Then we require our said Master and Comptroller of the Posts, upon notice thereof given him or them, to send for the party or parties to answer their contempt.

“5. This being in generall our Will and command, for the speedy, safe and orderly expedition of our publike dispatches and occurrents, as well in writing for our own affaires, as riding in poste, whatsoever besides shall fall out more particularly to the behoofe of our said Posts, or ease of their horses, that in these kind of services are most subject to abuses, our like care is specially to be respected; and to that end we doe hereby eftsoones recommend both the one and the other to the wisdom and protection of our said Masters of the Posts, and the aid of all Magistrates and others that love the furtherance of our service, or regard our safety or pleasure.

“Given at our Court at Oatlands the 30 day of July in the thirteenth yeare of our Raigne, 1637, of Great Brittain, France and Ireland.

“Signed by His Majesty, and subscribed by Sir John Coke, and Sir Francis Winde-

banke, Knights; Our Principall Secretaries of State, and Masters and Comptrollers Generall of our Posts.

“‘God Save the King.’”

This ordinance is important in two or three particulars. It raised the price per mile for post horses from $2\frac{1}{2}$ d, as provided by Stanhope's notice (issued in the king's name a few months previously), to 3d. per mile; it gave the postmasters a practical monopoly of hiring-out horses on the roads; but in return they were required to carry the regular mails within their several stages once a week “free without charge,” and to deliver letters directed to their own towns and districts. The meaning of the term here used, “free without charge,” is not very clear, for immediately thereafter the document proceeds to say that the work was to be done “in consideration that the Master of the Letter Office is to pay them

their wages according to the Reglement set downe by the Lords Committees." What this Reglement was it is not now possible to ascertain, for unfortunately there is a hiatus in the records of the Lords' Proceedings from 1628 to 1640, within which period the events to which we refer occurred. It may be that for the regular weekly service, no mileage rate was to be charged, a revised daily wage being granted which, together with the additional halfpenny per mile authorised to be levied upon travellers, would remunerate the postmasters for carrying the mail. But the postmasters were further required, apparently, to convey letters sent "express" to or from the king and certain specified officials, from stage to stage, without fee or payment; the arrangement being a great relief to the king's exchequer, inasmuch as, on many occasions, such conveyance would dispense with the necessity for sending through-messengers with the letters to destination.

Labels or way-bills were also first introduced under this order, and the markings on the letters themselves discontinued.

It should be borne in mind that at this period the country was in a very considerable state of commotion. Charles had had a taste of Parliament early in his reign, and he did not like it. He resented the trammels that such a body of men imposed upon his actions; and he desired to be a real king, like the continental potentates. Accordingly, he dispensed with the calling together a Parliament during the period from 1629 to 1640: he ruled by means of a Council, who made the laws, directed public affairs, and generally guided the vessel of the State. His Principal Secretaries were Sir John Coke and Sir Francis Windebank; his other chief advisers were Laud and Wentworth.

In 1637, there was much business for the post, owing to the tension between the king

and Laud on the one hand and the people of Scotland on the other, over the matter of episcopacy. Communications were constantly kept up between London and Scotland, Baillie, Principal of Glasgow University, mentioning that "from the 24th of July to the 10th of August, the posts rann thick betwixt the Court and the Counsell, which sat every other day, to finde means for peaceable introduction of the service.' In reading the history of this period, it is curious to observe what elements were at work ; among these, the active interest that women took in the question of Church service is noticeable. Everyone knows the story of the throwing of the stool at the preacher by Jenny Geddes in the church of St. Giles in Edinburgh. If she were but an instance of the feelings aroused generally among the women of the East, there is evidence that the women of the West were equally determined to have nothing to do with the service-book. Baillie

writes thus of the preachings at the Synod of Glasgow in 1637: "Mr William Annan (Moderator of Ayr) on the 1st of Timothy, 'I command that prayers be made for all men,' in the last half of his sermon, from the making of prayers, ran out upon the Liturgie, and spake for the defence of it in whole, and sundry most plausible parts of it, as well, in my poor judgment, as any in the Isle of Brittain could have done, considering all circumstances; howsoever, he did maintain, to the dislyk of all in ane unfit tyme, that which was hinging in suspense betwixt the King and the Country. Of his sermon among us in the Synod, not a word; but in the towne among the women, a great dinne. Tomorrow (next day) Mr John Lindsey, at the Bishop's command, did preach. . . . At the ingoing of the pulpit, it is said that some of the women in his ear assured him, that if he should twitch the service book in his sermon, he should be rent out of the pulpit; he took

the advyce and lett that matter alone. At the outgoing of the church, about 30 or 40 of our honestest women, in one voyce, before the Bishope and Magistrates, did fall in rayling, cursing, scolding with clamours on Mr. William Annan; some two of the meanest was taken to the Tolbooth. All the day over, up and down the streets where he went, he got threats of sundry in words and looks; bot after supper, whill needleslie he will go to visit the Bishop, who had taken his leave with him, he is not sooner on the causey, at nine of clock, in a mirk night, with three or four ministers with him, but some hundredths of intraged women, of all qualities are about him, with neaves, and staves, and peats, but no stones; they beat him sore; his cloake, ruffe, hatt, were rent; however, upon his cryes, and candles set out from many windows, he escaped all bloody wounds; yet he was in great danger, even of killing. This tumult was so great, that it

was not thought meet to search, either in plotters or actors of it, for numbers of the best qualitie would have been found guiltie."

It is no wonder that in an opposition such as this to the pet scheme of Charles and his buttress Laud, taking shape in a terrible flutter of Scottish petticoats, the posts between the Court and Scotland "rann thick."

In the year 1637, England appears to have been visited by a plague, which about the month of September had extended to Hull. On the 5th of that month, Secretary Coke writes a letter from Bagshot, which is interesting as showing the ideas then entertained as to the methods of preventing the spread of infection. It also attests that the speed of the posts was improving under Witherings' management. "This day I received at Bagshot yours dated from York the 2nd, whereby you may see what expedition is now used in the carriage of letters. . . . He

(His Majesty) is sorry to hear of the visitation at Hull, and well approves your care in prohibiting goods to pass from Hull to Howden or Malton fairs, with other particulars of the proclamation expressed; as to such cautions as were fit to be given to the Justices of Peace, I doubt not but your provident care will give the Board good satisfaction. For the letters which come weekly by post, the manner in other countries is to open and air before the fire all such letters as are bound up with silk thread, pack-thread, or such like, but for letters of bare paper they use no such observance, but suffer them to pass. Wherein, nevertheless, if any one that receives any letters from a known infected place will but take that care to air them before the fire, which the Secretaries do sometimes practice when we conceive danger, it may be well hoped no inconvenience will ensue."

CHAPTER IV

WITHERINGS had not long put the posts into some kind of order, as regards expedition and regularity, with the result no doubt of increased business and growing profit to himself, when his possession of the office of Postmaster for Foreign Parts excited the covetous heart of Windebank—one of the two Principal Secretaries of State and joint Comptroller with Coke of the inland posts, and a friend or creature of Laud.

Pigeon-holes in public offices, as elsewhere, have long memories; and a paper referring (as is supposed) to the year 1637 has been preserved, containing "Observations of Secretary Windebank for recalling the patent formerly granted to Mr. Witherings to be

Postmaster for Foreign Parts." The principal grounds suggested for getting rid of Witherings are the following:—"The inconvenience of suffering such an office to remain in the hands of a person who is no sworn officer. Suspicion that his patent was surreptitiously obtained—no signed bill was found. Persons who hold the office of Postmaster abroad are of so great quality that they disdain to correspond with a man of his mean condition. Some satisfaction may be given him, but he has very much enriched himself upon the place. He is said to be worth £800 a year in land. The office of Postmaster-General being now vested in the Secretaries, the carrying of letters is a business of State. If Witherings shall insist upon his patent, His Majesty may sequester the place into the hands of the Secretaries." We cannot say whether Witherings was aware of what was hatching in the mind of Windebank, but we know that he was not then driven from his office.

Troubles now arose out of the exclusive privilege of carrying letters as set forth and described in the king's proclamation of the 31st July 1635. It appears, by an Order of Council of the 15th December 1637, that one "Jason Grover, carrier of Ipswich and Yarmouth, was taken in custody by a messenger, upon complaint that he had transgressed the proclamation and patent granted to Mr. Witherings." The Lords could not then settle the matter, and Jason was discharged upon a bond of £200, to appear at Hilary term next, to answer what was alleged against him. In a petition to the Council in January 1638, Grover gives his version of the affair as follows:—"Petitioner, about two months ago, riding on one of his pack-horses with his pack, was arrested by the procurement of Mr. Witherings, Postmaster of England for Foreign Parts. Petitioner remained in the messenger's custody 16 days before he came to this

Board, when it was ordered that he should attend to be heard the first week in Hilary term, and in the meantime petitioner was permitted to follow his vocation. But on the 11th instant there came a messenger, and summoned petitioner to attend on Wednesday then next, all which he has punctually observed, yet Mr. Witherings threatens that he will not leave petitioner worth a groat."

Witherings gives his view of the matter in petition to the Council about the same time. "About three weeks since," says he, "the *posts* of Norwich and Yarmouth petitioned to be released, which was granted, with the proviso that they should attend after the holidays, and in the meantime be conformable to the grant of the letter office by bond, which bond Grover of Ipswich has already forfeited. On the hearing, Mr. Hieron, counsel for the *posts*, cast an aspersion on the petitioner that he should say they ought not to be heard by your Lord-

ships, which petitioner denies, and doubts not to clear himself of everything else that shall be objected to him. As the *posts* continue to carry letters contrary to petitioner's grant, he prays the Lords to consider the great charge he has been at in settling the conveyance of letters throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and other parts beyond the seas, and not to suffer the *posts* to continue carrying letters."

It should be noted that the word "posts," as used in this memorial of Witherings, applies to the common carriers or packmen.

Grover was not left to fight the battle of the carriage of letters alone. He was supported by the merchants of Norwich, and others trading in Norwich stuffs, in a petition addressed to the Council as follows:—"There has long been a constant trade betwixt London and Norwich in sundry sorts of stuffs and stockings made in Norwich and Norfolk,

which trade has always been maintained by the merchants of Norwich employing their stocks in buying the wares of the makers, and sending them up weekly in carts by common carriers to London, whence they are dispersed into all parts of this kingdom, and also exported to foreign parts, in which intercourse of trade we always had our letters safely and speedily carried by our common carrier, by a horseman, not in manner of postage by change of horses, but as is usual by common carriers, and for little or no charge to us. Of late Mr. Witherings has intercepted our letters and molested our carriers, forbidding them to carry any of our letters otherwise than to go along with their carts, and no faster." Petitioners then explain why the new system of conveying letters will prove detrimental to their trade, and pray that "they may enjoy their ancient course of conveying letters by their common carriers." A separate

memorial to a similar effect was sent up by Robert Sumpter, Mayor, and seventeen others of the town of Norwich.

After hearing Thomas Witherings and Jason Grover, and their counsel, upon this dispute, an Order in Council was drafted, on the 19th January, to the following effect:—

“ It was ordered that Grover and all carriers shall henceforth conform to the letters patent granted to Witherings of the letter office, and the proclamation in that behalf. *But their Lordships declared that it would be lawful for any carrier that should receive the letters of merchants or others, to be carried from town to town within the kingdom, to use what diligence he may, and to ride what pace he will, so as he do it without shifting or change of horses.* It was objected that Witherings took more for the carriage of letters within the kingdom than was usual; the Lords referred the consideration of all complaints of that nature

to the Secretaries of State, praying them to take courses for redress of such abuse." This draft, on being submitted to the king, did not wholly satisfy him ; and he struck out the clause in italics, writing in the margin the words, "This clause to be left out."

On the 21st January another Order in Council was drafted on this vexed question : "It was ordered that the carriers of Norwich, as was ordered on the 19th instant for the carrier of letters of Yarmouth and Ipswich, should conform to the letters patent granted to Witherings of the letter office, and to the proclamation on that behalf, and not presume to do or attempt anything contrary to the same." Three days later, namely, on the 24th January, yet another Order in Council was issued from the Inner Star Chamber, making a concession to the carriers : "It was now ordered that for the better accommodation of the said merchants, it should be permitted to the common and

known carriers of letters belonging to Norwich, or any other town, to carry the letters of merchants and others, travelling with the same letters the ordinary journeys that common carriers travel, and coming to London, Norwich, or any other town, not above eight hours before the carts, waggons, or pack-horses, whereunto Witherings and others are to conform themselves."

This concession would appear to refer to the practice of the masters of the heavy waggons performing the common carrying business of the country, riding on a horse alongside the waggons, and who, leaving the waggons in charge of their men when nearing their destination, might make a dash forward to arrange the loading for the return journey. The masters of a string of pack-horses would probably adopt the same practice.

Jason, who had been fighting for the continuance of the old state of things, seems not to have become aware at once of

the limited concession made to the carriers, and the result is described in the following *de profundis* addressed to the Earl of Dorset, Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, and one of the Lords of the Council, from the uncongenial precincts of the Fleet Prison :—

“Petitioner and the carriers of Norwich were lately questioned by Mr. Witherings touching the carriage of letters; and the Lords ordered a settled course, not only for the carriers of Norwich, but for all other carriers, by Order of the 24th January last, to which Order petitioner is willing to conform himself, but had no knowledge that the same was drawn up till the 10th February instant. And although petitioner has not broken the said Order since the drawing up thereof, yet he, with his two men, were by Witherings' procurement for 17 days committed to a messenger, and now to the Fleet, and cannot be discharged except petitioner will enter into bond to perform

such order as Witherings has prescribed, which is contrary to the Order of the Board. Prays that he may enjoy the benefit of the said Order, and not be punished before he has broken the same, nor compelled by Witherings to enter into bond, the Order being a sufficient tie."

Jason Grover must have found himself in very respectable company in the Fleet Prison, for, at the very time of his confinement, two well-known historical characters, John Lilburne and John Warton, were, under the proceedings of the notorious Star Chamber, thrown into this place of evil note. "Upon the 9th February 1638, the Star Chamber ordered that, as the two delinquents had contemptuously refused to take the oaths tendered to them, they should be remanded to the Fleet Prison, there to remain close prisoners, and to be examined," etc. It is a curious coincidence that the charge against these men was for the "un-

lawful printing and publishing of libellous and seditious books, entitled *News from Ipswich,*" etc., and that Grover's incarceration was for the carriage of letters from the same district of country.

In order to put matters beyond all doubt, as between Witherings on the one hand and the common carriers and the public on the other, and to lay down clearly the mode of working, with the claims of the whole postal service committed to the hands of Witherings, a fresh royal proclamation was issued on the 11th February 1638. Of the original issue of this document it is understood that copies are extremely rare. The main provisions of the proclamation are the following :—That as the secrets of the realm might be disclosed to foreign nations were promiscuous carriers of letters allowed to the Continent, none other were to be suffered than those employed by Witherings; that Witherings' carriers to the Continent should

travel by the sole route of Dover, Calais, Boulogne, Abbeville, and Amiens, and thence to Paris. Noticing that "sundry abuses and miscarriages" are daily being committed in respect of the inland posts to the prejudice of Witherings, the proclamation sets forth that, where Witherings' posts are laid down, "no post or carrier whatsoever within His Majesty's dominions" . . . "shall presume to take up, carry, receive and deliver any letter or letters," etc., "except a particular messenger sent on purpose with letters by any man for his own occasions, or letters by a friend, or by common known carriers, who are hereby permitted to carry any letters along with their carts, waggons, and pack-horses, travelling with the same the ordinary known journeys that common carriers use to travel. Provided always that they, nor any of their servants, at no time stay at any place from whence they carry any letters above eight

hours after their carts, waggons, or pack-horses are departed, nor bring any letters to London, or elsewhere, above eight hours before the said carts, waggons, or pack-horses shall come there." The postage exigible by Witherings for inland letters was to be as follows :—

| Miles. | Single Letter. | Double Letter. | Heavy Letter. |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Under 80 . . . | 2d. | 4d. | 6d. per oz. |
| From 80 to 140 . . . | 4d. | 8d. | 9d. „ |
| Over 140 . . . | 6d. | 1s. od. | 1s. od. „ |
| To Ireland . . . | 9d. | — | 2s. 6d. „ |

Provision is made for the punishment of any post-boy or other servant charging any sum in excess of these rates.

The Council, in managing the affairs of the country generally, must have had their hands very full, for the amount of business brought to their consideration in connection with the posts alone, judging by the records left, was by no means small. The postmasters were constant complainers of their treatment by the State, and the public equally constant

complainers against the postmasters. In November 1637, Robert Challenor, His Majesty's post of Stone, County Stafford, memorialises Secretaries Coke and Windebank as follows:—"Petitioner for 40 years has been postmaster in the said place, which office he has always faithfully executed in his own person, until visited with a long sickness, as by an annexed certificate appears. Mr Witherings endeavours to put another in petitioner's place, upon pretence that petitioner had put in a deputy, being his son, who about a year and a half since, in the time of petitioner's sickness, gave his assistance for performance of His Majesty's service; and on the 17th March 1637 petitioner, during his illness, disposed of his estate by will, and then assigned his arrears due to him for his post-wages to his son, towards discharging petitioner's debts, and benefit of his wife and children. Mr Witherings, in regard petitioner would not give him £100

for petitioner's place (over and above the carriage of the merchants' letters twice every week), has for £40 given orders for the said place to another, whose parents have been great recusants. Petitioner being still able and willing, and his arrears £368 (that stage being the longest between London and Chester, and yet is allowed only 20d. per diem), prays order that he may be continued in his place, and may receive the said £368." This petition was backed up by a certificate of the Justices of the Peace of the county, setting forth the petitioner's fitness for the office.

Another postmaster, Thomas Parks, on the stage from London to Barnet, petitions Secretary Windebank to the following effect : — "Has executed that office about six years, which has stood him in £180, without any neglect, as Mr. Railton can inform you, and has received but two years' pay at the rate of 20d. per diem. Notwithstanding his dili-

gence, Mr Witherings endeavours to bring in another, and has already taken from petitioner the through posts place of Charing Cross, which cost petitioner £63, 6s. Prays order to Witherings to deliver petitioner his orders and confirm him in his place."

David Francis, late post of Northop, petitions thus:—"There is £90 in arrear to petitioner for execution of the said place, as appears by the last account of Lord Stanhope to the Auditors. Has been three months in town soliciting payment, and received fair promises from Mr. Witherings; but now he absolutely says petitioner shall have none, so that he is like to be imprisoned. Has spent near his whole estate in coming to town to solicit for his father's arrears, who was post of Chester 60 years. Prays order to receive part with the rest who are in the privy seal, otherwise he is like to perish by the prosecution of his greedy creditors."

Richard Scott, innkeeper of Stilton, Hunt-

ingdonshire, petitions Coke and Windebank for the place of a postmaster who discharges his office by deputy. "For some years past," says he, "the place of post of Stilton, being in the high North road, has been executed by a deputy, who keeps an alehouse there, the postmaster living twelve miles distant, and his deputy no ways able to receive gentlemen and travellers, much less noblemen, whereby the posts are forced to travel at unseasonable times and are not fitted with able horses. Petitioner being an innkeeper in the town, both able and willing to give noblemen and gentlemen entertainment, prays that he may serve His Majesty in that place."

Royston, a market-town in Cambridge-shire and Hertfordshire, was an important place in relation to the posts for two reasons : it was a stage not far distant from London, on the great North road, and a place of residence for the king when he retired to hunt in the neighbourhood. Now, on these two

accounts there must have been frequent demands made upon the postmaster to provide horses, and, on occasions, considerable numbers of horses. We are little familiar with the demands then made for horses when the sovereign was pleased to go on progress. In *Nichols' Progress of James I.*, it is stated that the number of carts employed when the sovereign went on progress was, about the year 1604, reduced from 600 to 220! And even when the king moved about, not in a formal progress, it is probable that large orders were given for horses. In an account of the number of post horses taken up at Royston by four o'clock in the morning of one day in February 1638, it is recorded that, from nineteen parishes, 200 horses were so taken up, each parish contributing from six to fourteen horses. That the duties of the postmaster were more than usually onerous, is recognised in the fact that he and the postmaster of Newmarket, where there was another royal

hunting seat, were paid (or were supposed to be paid) on the highest scale allowed to postmasters, namely, 4s. 4d. a day, as will be seen by the list of wages previously given.

But all this levying of horses was extremely burdensome and irritating to the people, who, however, do not appear to have submitted quietly to the infliction. The following petition of eighteen inhabitants of Royston, to the Justices of Peace for the county of Hertford, shows how matters stood, and the estimation in which they held their postmaster; it refers to April 1638:—
“Thomas Haggar, of their town, innholder, bearing himself so irregularly by authority of his office (as postmaster), abuses his protection, to the great grievance of the town and country: breaking open some of their doors in the night without constable; taking away their horses without their privity; extorting, bribing, beating, commanding, threatening countrymen that will

not fee him, or do him service with their carts, or spend their money in tipping in his house ; hindering poor men from coming to the market to sell their corn, by taking their horses post when there is no cause ; causing the horses to be double posted, keeping them longer than the service requires ; and mis-using young colts and horses not fit for that service, whereby they are oftentimes spoiled ; as also taking more horses than need requires. They state the consequences to their market, and pray relief."

With this petition the following specific cases of abuse were set forth, some of them sworn under affidavit. One John Rutter, a husbandman of Harleton, Co. Cambridge, having his horse, along with others, taken up to go post to Ware, and seeing one of the others released, "said he feared there was underhand dealing ; whereupon the postmaster's wife, and afterwards the postmaster himself, violently assaulted him, so that he

was forced to lie at Royston all night for his hurts to be dressed, and was compelled to go to Ware after his horse, and had to pay charges for him, being paid only for one stage, although his horse had gone two ; and was much wronged thereby." The statement adds that the postmaster, and also his wife and servants, "usually take money to free horses from going post, and then take other horses to do the service." A yeoman of Croydon, Co. Cambridge, named Amps, complained of Haggar taking a horse to go post one stage from Royston, but discovered that it had been ridden to Newmarket. When the horse was returned, the postmaster refused payment ; and because Amps made complaint, he found that whenever he came to Royston the postmaster was "ready to take his horse and put an unreasonable load upon him." One of the chief constables of the Hundred of Odsey, Co. Hertford, stated that, having to serve a warrant on Haggar

for an assault, he compelled him to send on the packet, which means that his horse was taken to ride the post stage. The complainer adds, that "by taking money to excuse post horses, the market of Royston is much wronged." Another case of assault by Haggar and his wife upon a countryman is alleged; the grounds being that he had imputed bribery on seeing another man's horse released while his own was seized for service. Sundry other instances of misconduct and oppression are charged against the postmaster, one of which is: that four men were sent out with warrants to warn country towns to bring in horses; that in two days about 200 were summoned, but that most of them were believed to have been compounded for by the constables.

In reading this story of the proceedings of the postmaster and his wife, the comment suggests itself, that "the grey mare must have been the better horse."

On the 7th May 1638, a Mr. John Nicholas writes to his son, Mr. Edward Nicholas, to the following effect, complaining of his local postmaster :—“ Edward Nicholas may do his country good, and especially that neighbourhood, who are much oppressed by the postmaster of Sarum, Roger Bedbury, the innkeeper of the Three Swans, in Sarum. Sends copy of a warrant Bedbury has procured from the Secretaries of State. By virtue thereof he sends his warrants to the constables to bring in horses furnished, and to pay for their keep, and employs them, not in His Majesty's service, but to his own benefit. Leonard Bowles, one of the constables of the Hundred of Alderbury, being required, brought in horses; and in his presence a minister, coming to the postmaster to hire horses, he delivered to the minister one of them. The constable asked the postmaster wherefore the minister rode post, imagining he was not employed in His

Majesty's service, to which the postmaster answered, he rode for a benefice, as he thought. If Edward Nicholas may prevent the postmaster's knavery, prays him to do so." From an enclosure with this letter, it appears that, in issuing his warrant to the constables to send in on the 9th May "six able horses, with furniture, for His Majesty's service for two days and two nights, at the charge of the owners," the postmaster relied upon and recited a warrant from Secretaries Coke and Windebank, dated 13th February, "for sending to the postmaster ten or twelve horses from New Sarum, a six-miles' compass."

A week later, Mr. John Nicholas, finding that the prosecution of the complaint was likely to prove troublesome, declares that he will have nothing more to do with it. "Touching the postmaster," he writes, "I will meddle no further, if there be such a business in it; but let the constable, or who

else finds himself wronged, follow it and inform against him. It will be good service in any that shall do it, and good for your own understanding to know the ground of the warrant, and whether the postmaster may require the owner of the horse to pay for his meat two days and two nights. It may be my own case, for the constable has been to me for a horse. I put him off with good words; but how I shall do it again, I know not; yet if it be too troublesome to you, I pray you meddle no further." Mr. John Nicholas was one of a very common type of men, who are ever ready to make a fuss over a grievance in the first instance, but who are at all times forward to draw someone else in to fight their battles for them.

There are grounds for supposing that at this time some order had been issued, empowering the postmasters to keep in their stables supplies of horses, taken up in the neighbourhood, and, while standing in the

stables, to be fed at the owners' expense. This seems the meaning of a presentment made at the Grand Inquest at the Assizes holden at Bath on the 2nd July 1638. The statement made is : "That of late there are come commissions into the country, under the hand of the two Secretaries of State, to all postmasters, for taking up such numbers of horses as the postmasters shall think fit ; and the postmasters take into their stables ten or twelve horses at one time, and keep them two nights, and then take in so many more ; and if they have employment for any of them, they pay the post price, otherwise they make the owners pay for their meat and dressing what rate they please ; but some, upon composition, they release, which makes the burthen the heavier upon the rest. We beseech you to present this grievance to His Majesty."

The way in which traffic was carried on in the places of country postmasterships, and the duties delegated to deputies, is set forth in a

petition to the king, of February 1638, from Randolph Church, one of His Majesty's gentlemen pensioners. Petitioner "has for sixteen years served as serjeant-at-arms, and, since he left that place, in the place wherein he now serves ; during which time he never received benefit by any suit ; but he purchased some post places under Lord Stanhope, which he has executed by deputies for many years. But now Lord Stanhope, having surrendered his patent, petitioner's post places, to the value of £200 per annum, are taken away, there being £650 due to him for wages upon the said places ; and now petitioner, being employed in the prosecution of delinquents for converting timber to coal for making iron, and having expended much money therein, and being likely to bring great sums into the Exchequer, the means by which he should subsist are taken away. Beseeches some such satisfaction out of moneys brought into the Exchequer by his

present service as may equal his places and arrears."

There seems almost no end of the petitions which came up from the postmasters upon all phases of their duties and pay. Thomas Carr, postmaster of Berwick, thus complains : " Thomas Witherings, in consideration of his grant of the letter office of England and foreign parts, is to pay the posts their wages. Witherings has reduced the wages of Thomas Carr from 2s. 4d. to 1s. per diem, all the rest being cut off only but the third part of their pay, which will not be sufficient to find horse and man to perform the service ; moreover, they are enjoined to more service than formerly, viz. to carry his mail of letters forward and backward once a week gratis. Witherings employs one at Berwick to carry his letters from thence to Edinburgh for 20s. a week. Carr has offered to perform it for a great deal less ; but Witherings not only denies the same, but threatens to put Carr

out of his place if he go not speedily down, he waiting only for the arrears of his post wages, without which he is not able to subsist. Requests that his pay may be made 1s. 8d. per diem, that he may carry the letters from Berwick to Edinburgh, and also that he may be sworn His Majesty's servant, as the other posts are."

In a position such as Witherings held, and in a period when the public mind was greatly disturbed, it must have been a hard task for any man to keep free from entanglements and quarrels with the public. We have several notices of differences, more or less serious, in which Witherings was concerned. In May 1633, he is reported to have "misbehaved himself toward my Lord Marshal and his son Lord Maltravers," but in what respect is not stated. Again, in May 1636, Captain Carterett writes (to Sir John Coke, apparently), from on board his ship in the Downs, complaining of Witherings, as follows:—

“Being in Dover Road, there came unto me one Mr. Thomas Witherings (who is also called Postmaster-General) for to have Captain Dunning’s vessel to carry him over for Calais, having a packet (as he said) from your honour to my Lord Ambassador at Paris. I told him he should have the *Roebuck*, or I would go over with him myself. I desired him to show me the packet, but he told me he would neither show me order nor packet; he began to use me in very rough and coarse language, notwithstanding that I did use him with all the civility I could. I have heard that he had never a packet, but only went over to Calais about his own businesses. He gave out that he doth belong to your honour.” There are always two sides to a story; and when Witherings’ version had been heard, the tables were turned upon the captain. This appears by a letter, written by Secretary Coke to (probably) the Governor of Dover about the

same period. "Finding our foreign letters," says Coke, "come with less expedition than they were used to do, and requiring account thereof from the Postmaster of Foreign Parts, he excused himself by a certificate that Captain Carteret, who is trusted with that business, refuses to put to sea with merchants' letters only. He formerly charged Mr. Witherings with uncivil usage, which I discovered to have no ground. His Majesty requires your lordship to rectify this disorder ; and to charge Captain Carteret, to whom you give this trust, to be careful to convey the merchants' packets as his own. And if he be not conformable, that you appoint some other more proper for that duty ; which Captain Drury before him performed with good content, and may haply be still ready to undertake. But two years later Witherings had a difference with a man of much higher standing, namely, the Earl of Northumberland, then Lord General of the Forces at Sea,

arising out of some failure in the conveyance of a packet. The precise facts are not clear ; but the immediate action taken by the earl is described in a letter from Witherings (to Secretary Coke, no doubt) dated 29th September 1638 :—“ It was my unhappy fortune,” says Witherings, “ to meet with Mr. Smyth, secretary to the Earl of Northumberland, who told me that his lordship had sent a warrant directed to a messenger for me. I went to his lordship's house—was there by six of the clock in the morning, where, after two hours' stay, I spoke with his honour ; and the weather being extreme cold, I got an ague, and am now forced to keep my bed. The stage at Farnham, he told me, was a stage in pay ; and I promised (if it were so) I would move your honour to compel him (the postmaster) to carry his lordship's packets. He also told me I had abused his lordship in not sending forward the packets which were brought to my house ; to which I answered :

that belonged not to me, but to the ordinary posts of the road" (probably the ordinary carriers are meant). "I also told his honour that I had sent for the packet books of all the posts betwixt London and Dover, to the intent if any abuse were committed it might be punished. Notwithstanding his honour was very well satisfied with my answers to him, his servant Smyth delivered the warrant to the messenger; and though I was in bed, yet he came up to my chamber, and, in a very violent way, asked me if I would obey the warrant or not; to whom I answered, that in regard of my sickness I could not at this time do it. Your honour may be pleased to satisfy his lordship in this business." In perusing this letter, we are struck with two things—the peremptoriness of the proceedings taken against a man in Witherings' position, and with his treatment at the earl's house. The latter is reminiscent of Dr. Johnson in the ante-room of the Earl of Chesterfield.

CHAPTER V

IN August 1638, Witherings was returning from a journey he had made into the north, when he was laid-up ill at Ware. On the 8th of that month, his servant Waad writes to Secretary Coke, that "yesterday I found my master ill at Ware, intending this day to set forward to Walthamstow." It immediately became rumoured in London that Witherings was dead. "The wish" may, in some minds, "have been father to the thought"; for Windebank had been looking into the possible removal of Postmaster Witherings, and Burlamachi, merchant and financier, lost no time in taking steps with a view to securing the office to himself. The very next day after the rumour was set

about, a letter was written by Burlamachi to Sir John Coke, bespeaking the succession to the supposed vacant place. "Since Witherings is dead," says Burlamachi, "I write to offer my services to your honour; assuring you that you may dispose of me; and I hope I shall be not less capable of advancing the interests of His Majesty than Witherings has been." But Witherings, although he had had a sharp attack of illness, was not dead. A week later, he was no farther on his way towards London than Walthamstow, whence he writes a doleful letter to Sir John Coke, dated the 14th August 1638. The letter is as follows:—"It pleased the Lord, in this last northern journey (wherein I was sent by Mr. Secretary Windebank), to inflict upon me two great fevers, which have been so heavy, that indeed, had not the Lord been more merciful, gracious, and favourable towards me, I should no ways have been able to endure them for one hour of the

time. I am a weak and miserable man ; yet no doubt of life nor fear of health, if God (for my manifold sins) do not again lay His heavy hand upon me. To-morrow (God willing) I shall be at London," etc.

The period at which we have now arrived, 1638-39, was one of widespread distraction and trouble throughout the whole kingdom, the people being divided into two very marked parties,—the Covenanters in Scotland and Presbyterians in England being on the one side, and the King's Council, with the bishops and the Church party, on the other. In circumstances such as these, it must have been very difficult for a man at the head of the Post Office to steer a middle course, as in all cases of interception or delay of letters suspicion was likely to fall upon the postmasters. Advice was given by one of the King's party, that "because there be divers Scots Covenanters about Court, who give intelligence (both by the ordinary and

posters"—that is, by men riding post—"and journiers into Scotland), a course should be taken that the letters may be opened; and that the Governor of Berwick may give order for some strict searching and examining the Scots travellers." And as a matter of fact, the posts were waylaid and the letters carried to Secretary Coke. In a letter written from Berwick to Secretary Windebank, on the 26th September 1638, Sir James Douglas complains that "he who carries the running post letters betwixt Berwick and Edinburgh plays the rogue with all the letters that come from Edinburgh to me, so I have prohibited any to write to me that way." It is not clear whether Witherings lent himself to this espionage of the letters, or whether he tried to keep clear of it; but subsequent events might almost seem to suggest that Witherings inclined to the Presbyterian or popular party, and that he was distrusted by the Court. Reference has been made to Burlamachi, who

lately applied for the place of Chief Postmaster. This man, as has already been mentioned, was a native of Sedan in France, but naturalised in England. He was largely employed by the King and Council in financial matters of State, and had a hand in negotiating a loan of money upon the Crown jewels taken over to Holland early in Charles' reign. These jewels remained in Holland until November 1636; and while there, Burlamachi seems to have had power to pawn and repawn them at pleasure, to the tune and measure of Court necessities. At one time Burlamachi was a broken man; he was granted a protection from the diligence of his creditors in 1633-34 and 35; yet he still enjoyed the confidence of Charles. This is not, however, surprising; for, in a petition from Burlamachi's daughters, at the time of the Restoration, it is stated "that their father was ruined by his advances to the king." Under these circumstances there would be a potent tie between

these men, for Burlamachi could only hope for the recovery of his money through the good fortune and favour of the king. It is well that all this should be borne in mind, for Burlamachi's name will come up hereafter.

The public do not realise how effective, as a trap, the Post Office is, until they find themselves in the position of having written and posted a letter which, upon cooler reflection, they would fain withhold from the eyes of the person addressed. Cases of this kind occasionally happen in our own day, when proof is given of the irrevocability of the act of dropping a letter into the letter-box. Writers in such cases can then do nothing, —they are left to settle the business with their correspondents as best they may,— and no difficulty or trouble, as a rule, results to the officers of the Post Office. In the earliest days of the post the trap existed, as is shown by the following account of an attempt to recover a letter, after it had

been committed to the care of Witherings' officers, in the year 1639. The incident shows that in these days, as well as in ours, men could write letters in haste and repent at leisure. The account comes to us in a declaration by Laurence Kirkham, an assistant in one of the offices appointed in London for the taking in letters for the post. It states that "upon Tuesday the 4th June came William Davies to my master's shop, my mistress and I being there present, to take in letters for Mr. Witherings, His Majesty's Postmaster both for the Northern road and West, etc., for conveyance of letters both by sea and land. Davies, coming as above, demanded a letter again which he said was his own, and that he delivered it to me that same day to go by post. I, not remembering any such thing, and he being a stranger to me, I told him that it was more than I could answer or dared do, to deliver any man's letter again,

being once in my hands, especially not knowing it to be his letter; but, for quietness' sake, he being so outrageous for his letter, I told him that if he would stay until the box were opened wherein his letter was, if I found any such letter with such a superscription as he expressed his to have, I would deliver it to him, provided that he carried it not away nor break it open; but he might add something outside, or stick a note in it, if I saw it were no hurt; or rather, if he would write another letter after it, I would give him the portage of it. But this would not satisfy him; he swore I should not keep his letter from him, but he would have it; and thrust his hand into a heap of letters which lay before him in the shop, he well knowing that his letter was not there, and took what he could get of letters and packets, and put in his pocket—some scattering in the street and some in the shop, a multitude of people being gathered together. What he

took and what he lost is uncertain, as also what damage my master and others may receive thereby, there being letters to the nobility and many others to the army in the North, and divers to other countries. My mistress, striving with him, was hurt, and her hand bruised; and I, holding him in the street for the letters, he fell upon me, beat and pulled me by the hair, kicked me, and tore my apparel, by which abuse I received damage." This must have been a very pretty little scene, and it would have been interesting to know how the law took notice of Mr. Davies' obstreperous conduct.

The proceedings of these times have a smack of dramatic interest, surrounded as they are by conditions which do not obtain in the present day. In May 1639, a scene was enacted in the market-place of Ware, of which a description is given in a letter from Edmund Rossingham, dated the 8th of May. The reader can perhaps imagine the open

space of this town where the market is held, thronged with country folks with their produce for sale, stalls of vendors, horses and carts of the farmers, and idlers hanging about to see what might turn up to their advantage. A clatter of horses' feet is heard, and into the market-place dash three men on horseback, who draw rein at the post house of Ware. With the preliminary statement that the king was at this time lying with his army at Berwick, the letter must itself describe what took place. The letter, which is addressed to Viscount Conway, proceeds: "Lord Carr (Ker), the Earl of Roxburgh's son, riding post the other day into the North, having letters from the queen, came to Ware, and the postmaster went out to take up three horses for his use; but out of malice would have taken a great carthorse which carried corn to the market, only the owner, a poor countryman, would not part with it, saying his horse was not to ride post. The

postmaster and he being in strife together in the market, three Deputy Lieutenants, Justices of the Peace, namely, Sir Richard Lucy, Sir John Butler, and Sir John Watts, convening there about county business, saw this contention out of a window of the inn, and they relieved the countryman, bidding the postmaster seek out other horses more fit for the service ; whereupon the postmaster, in a great chafe, goes back to Lord Ker and tells him the Deputy Lieutenants had taken one of those horses he had taken up by his warrant. Lord Ker frets at this, and learns of the postmaster where the Deputy Lieutenants' horses stand, and commands three of these horses to be saddled to ride post with. The Deputy Lieutenants have notice of this, and will not let their horses be saddled, whereupon a great contention ensued between the lord and these Deputy Lieutenants ; so hot grew Lord Ker, who had a case of pistols by his side, that he and his two men challenged

the three Justices into the field to end the difference. Sir John Butler and Sir John Watts had good stomachs to go out with them ; but Sir Richard Lucy, a more temperate man, would rather use his authority than his courage that way, as being much the more justifiable course ; and so sent out to provide post horses for them, which were brought to the gate. Sir Richard then tells Lord Ker there are post horses for him, and, if he will not take them, himself will make his lordship fast and take from him the queen's letters, send them to His Majesty, and do his errand, which would be little to his lordship's advantage ; whereupon the Lord Ker cools a little, and, grumbling at being thus thwarted, takes the horses provided for him, and away he posts."

The Justices were well aware of the advantage of being early in the field with their account of this business ; and accordingly they forthwith wrote a statement of the

whole matter to their Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Salisbury, who was then with the king in the North, and which "they sent post after the lord, to be at Court so soon as he should be."

The better to keep up communications between the king, then in the North, and the governing powers in Ireland, a packet was at this time employed between Whitehaven and Dublin. The agreement with the master, Nicholas Herbert, was that his barque should be provided "with one sufficient master and other meet and able sailors" . . . "to carry the letters of His Majesty or the Council to the Lord Deputy at Dublin, and shall receive £10 per lunar month."

As has already been remarked, there is reason to suppose that Witherings had come to have leanings towards the Parliamentarians, a posture which would alienate him from the Court party. At anyrate, on the 29th July 1640, the office held by Witherings was sequestered by the king's privy seal into

the hands of Philip Burlamachi, "who was directed by proclamation to execute the office." The proclamation here referred to is probably that dated the 6th August 1640. The first clause sets forth the reason for the proceeding as follows:—"Whereas we have received information of divers abuses and misdemeanours committed by Thomas Witherings in the execution as well of the office of Postmaster of Foreign Parts as also of the Letter Office within our own dominions, and thereupon have been pleased to sequester the said office into the hands of P. Burlamachi of London, merchant, who is to execute the same, under the care and oversight of our Principal Secretary of State, till we shall signify our pleasure to the contrary; and have accordingly declared the same under our royal hand and signet, and commanded our said Secretary to see the sequestration put into speedy execution, and to take such course that neither our service nor

the business of the merchants nor our other subjects might thereby receive any prejudice or interruption." In pursuance of this ordinance the business of the post was removed from Witherings' offices to other premises.

When a man is down there are always a lot of unthinking or interested persons ready to give the unfortunate individual another kick, and the king's followers were not slow to avail themselves of the chance presented by Witherings' sequestration. Sir Francis Windebank writes from Paris in April 1641, whither he had found it convenient to remove, as follows:—"I wrote lately to Mr. Treasurer (Vane) by Mr. Frizell, who touched here in his passage out of Italy toward England. He was Postmaster before Witherings, and drew him in to be his partner; but Witherings, in token of his thankfulness, joined with Sir John Coke and thrust the poor man utterly out. He is able, and not unwilling, if he be

dexterously managed, to discover much of Witherings' miscarriage in that place, which I have desired Mr. Treasurer to make use of, and you will do well to put him in remembrance of it from me." In another letter about the same date Windebank complains of the miscarriage of his letters, and remarks: "How they are come to miscarry now I do not understand, presuming that Witherings, though he want no malice to betray anything that may fall into his hands concerning me, yet dares not intercept any packet addressed to Mr. Treasurer, as this was." About the same time a letter from Robert Reade, residing at Paris, makes mention of the failure of letters, and proceeds: "But the world grows every day worse and worse, and is so full of deceit and malice that I think there will be no living shortly for an honest man in it. Perhaps Witherings has met with it again; if he have, my comfort is that no better fortune

will befall him in that than usually does to harkeners, who never hear good of themselves; yet, methinks, since the House of Parliament were more noble than to countenance him in his last unworthiness of that kind, he should not have much courage to do it again." In another letter the same writer says: "I think your honour will have very uncertain dealing from Mr. Witherings, for in all his affairs he appears so." There is a marked indefiniteness in the references made by private persons who at this period were ready to speak ill of Witherings—a want of specific charges against him. But in a report appended to certain resolutions of the House of Lords, dated 8th September 1642, information is supplied showing how Witherings had been badgered, and what the various complaints were. The allegations set forth are: "Misdemeanours in opening letters, not giving advices in due time, taking greater rates than usual, transporting prohibited com-

modities, not suffering the passage boat to be searched, not able to hold correspondence for want of language, breach of correspondence for want of paying foreign posts." Happily for Witherings none of these charges were found proved.

Witherings seems to have believed that Burlamachi had had a principal hand in bringing about the sequestration of his office, for we find him writing to Sir John Coke, on the 8th November 1640, as follows:—Burlamachi stands upon his justification, which is, that these offices were forced upon him. My humble suit unto your honour is, that you will be pleased to deliver to —, your son, upon his coming up, such letters as your honour received from him years past, whereby he was a practiser from time to time to take from me my office, contrary to his own declaration. Your honour may be pleased to certify something therein to your son, who may declare it to the House of Parliament."

Burlamachi was not, however, Witherings' only enemy in this matter; for, in a letter from Thomas Coke to Sir John Coke, of 12th May 1640, two months before the sequestration, it is stated that "the two Secretaries do now, since the Parliament, prosecute him again for the right of his place; but they cannot yet fasten anything upon him, neither can Mr. Attorney find any imperfection in his patent; so that he hath now great hopes again that the question will be to save him a thousand pounds a year in his purse." At the time of the sequestration Witherings was put in prison, but probably his detention was of short duration. Witherings found himself hard pressed by his enemies, and, feeling himself not very able perhaps to contend against large odds, he assigned an interest in his office to the Earl of Warwick. This is mentioned in a letter to Sir John Coke from his son, the 15th of March 1641: "He hath now, without the

advice of his friends, put himself under the protection of the Earl of Warwick, by passing some interest in his places to him. This the violent prosecution of his adversaries hath driven him unto, out of fear to be oppressed. I wish by this means he do not lose all in the end." In April 1641, the Earl of Warwick was sworn a Privy Councillor, and thus, in point of interest, Witherings had secured an important ally. While his friends may have thought the step taken by Witherings of uncertain advantage, Witherings no doubt considered that "half a loaf would be better than no bread."

It is a troublesome business to unravel all the records of the proceedings in the Parliament and Council of this affair of the possession of the posts. There were two offices held by Witherings, as the reader will remember,—the Postmastership of the Foreign Posts (held by patent) and the Postmastership (by delegation from the Principal

Secretaries of State) of the Inland Posts. In the records we have of Witherings' present troubles, these two offices are not always clearly defined, and it is somewhat difficult to understand the references. But this much is quite clear, that, on the 10th February 1640, a committee of the House of Commons was appointed "to consider of the complaints of the Inland Posts, foreign courriers and carriers, and foot posts, and the several abuses of Mr. Witherings and the rest of the postmasters." The proceedings of this inquiry dragged on for a period of over two years. At length, on the 28th March 1642, the House of Commons gave a deliverance, by resolution, in favour of Witherings, respecting the Foreign Posts as follows, namely, "that this sequestration of the office of Foreign Postmaster from the possession of Witherings is a grievance and illegal, and ought to be taken off and repealed" . . . "that the pro-

clamation for the putting Mr. Witherings out of possession of the exercise of his place of Postmaster for Foreign Parts is a grievance and illegal, and ought not to be put in execution" . . . "resolved that Mr. Witherings ought to be restored unto the possession of his place as Postmaster for Foreign Parts, and to the mean profits received since he was out of possession, deducting the reasonable and usual charges of execution" . . . "that for the legality of his patent, it shall be referred to a trial at law." Then, on the 16th August 1642, the following resolutions were passed by the House of Commons respecting the Inland Posts:—
"That the sequestration of the Inland Letter Office to Philip Burlamachi is illegal and void, and ought to be taken off" . . .
"that Philip Burlamachi and his deputies shall forthwith bring in an account of the profits of the office received by him or his deputies since his illegal sequestration to

the Committee for the Accounts where Mr. Trenchard has the chair" . . . "that the proclamation in pursuance of the sequestration is illegal and void." It will be observed that nothing is said in these latter resolutions indicating that Witherings should again take charge of the Inland Posts, by delegation or otherwise. But a deliverance was also given at this time on the subject of Witherings' interference with the public carriers in conveying letters for the public, which events occurred in 1637-38, and have already been mentioned. The House resolved "that the taking of the several letters in this case from the several carriers, and the several restraints and imprisonment of Grover, Chapman, Cotton, and Mackerill, is against the law and liberty and freedom of the subject" . . . "that these several persons ought to have reparations and damages from Sir John Coke and Sir F. Windebank, then Secretaries of State, and Mr. Witherings respectively" . . .

“that Sir J. Coke, Sir F. Windebank, and Mr. Witherings are delinquents.”

Now, although Witherings' office had been in sequestration from 1640 till 1642, it would almost seem that he was not entirely suspended from all share in the management of the place during that period, for in writings of 1641 reference is made to services performed by Witherings in the transmission of foreign correspondence. In a letter, dated from Edinburgh 2nd November 1641, from Secretary Vane to Edward Nicholas, the latter is requested to instruct Mr. Witherings as to the forwarding of two packets, “much concerning His Majesty's service,” one of which was for Hamburgh; and this Witherings was to forward by an express, which by his office he was bound to provide for and pay. In a letter from Witherings, dated at Walthamstow 7th November 1641, to Edward Nicholas, respecting these instructions, Witherings

writes: "I have sent the one express for Hamburgh with my own packet-boat, which not only carries the king's colours, but is of defence and well known on the seas. Be confident there shall be no neglect, neither of the one nor the other in me."

During the proceedings against Witherings, he was unquestionably handled in a very rough manner; for a warrant was issued in 1641 (as is supposed) by the Secretary of State to a messenger of the Chamber in the following terms:—"These are by His Majesty's command, to require and authorise you to repair to the office and house of Thomas Witherings, Postmaster for Foreign Service, and there to search for and take into custody all papers, pamphlets, and letters."

On the 5th October 1642, Robert Earl of Warwick petitioned that, in virtue of the assignment of the Inland Letter Office to him by Witherings, and in view of the fact

that Burlamachi had failed to obey the ordinance delivered by Parliament, by continuing to hold and administer that office, Burlamachi should be ejected from the place and punished for his disobedience.

CHAPTER VI

ON the 25th November 1642, "It was thought fit, and ordered by the Lords, that the said office—that is, the Inland Letter Office — shall be delivered to the Earl of Warwick or his deputies, and that Burlamachi and his deputies shall, within eight days after serving of this Order, bring in a particular account upon oath to the Earls Clare and Bolinbroke, and Lord Grey of Werke and Lord Bruce, of the profits of that office during all the time of their being in possession of the same. The lords above mentioned are to make reports to the House, that thereby the Earl of Warwick may have the profits of that office, to be paid to him by the parties aforesaid; and

the posts and their agents are hereby commanded to bring the mails, with letters, to such place as the Earl of Warwick shall appoint." Another Order, dated 2nd December 1642, was issued confirming the foregoing Order, and also giving authority to the earl, in the event of the country postmasters refusing to carry or deliver up the mails as directed, "to seize upon the mails, and to put the postmasters out of their places, until they conform themselves unto the Order of the House." It was further ordered that all colonels, captains, justices, constables, and others, His Majesty's officers, should aid and assist in the execution of this Order.

On the 9th December, the House of Lords seem to have issued a peremptory Order to Burlamachi to produce the "books of accompts for receipt of the profits of the Inland Letter Office, with the warrants and acquittances," etc. But this Burlamachi

neglected to do, and, in consequence of his contumacy, the House make a further Order on the 21st December to the effect "that the Sheriffs of London or their deputies shall, by virtue of this Order, seize the said books of accompts, etc., and send them to the Clerk of the Parliament on Saturday, the 24th present." The Lords at the same time confirm the previous Orders of the 25th November and 2nd December, "for that it appears that the possession of the Inland Letter Office, settled by the Order of this House on the Earl of Warwick, has been interrupted by divers refractory and obstinate persons." The Lords further give Order "that all colonels, mayors, sheriffs, and other officers shall have full power and authority to seize all mails of letters in all places, both coming in and going out, and to deliver the same to the Earl of Warwick or his deputies at his office near the Royal Exchange, London, and this Order to be their sufficient warrant."

Events were developing very rapidly at this period, for, on the 24th December 1642, Burlamachi was in custody for not bringing in the books of account already referred to, and on that date he petitions for his discharge. He was not, however, then released.

On the following day, 25th December, a brief return was made by Burlamachi of the revenue and expenditure of the Inland Letter Office, from 4th August 1640 to 25th December 1641, as follows:—Moneys received, £8363; moneys expended, £4867; balance in hand, £3496, whereof £1400 has been paid to the Secretary of State. Of the other £2000, Burlamachi states that "those that keep the office are to be considered for their pains and attendance, which are great," and he adds something about a probable increase from the Irish correspondence. On the 29th December, Burlamachi draws up a fresh petition, this time to the effect that his

accounts may be audited by one of His Majesty's auditors, and he again prays that his liberty may be granted to him. On the 31st December, an Order is issued from the House of Lords requiring that "Philip Burlamachi shall within eight days account upon oath to John Worfield, the City Auditor, for all moneys derived from the Inland Letter Office since the sequestration, and how the same have been disposed of, upon which Mr. Worfield is to report to this House."

The precise issue of these varied proceedings cannot readily be made out; but it would seem that at this time, 1643, the Foreign Letter Office remained in possession of Witherings, and that the Inland Letter Office was handed over to the Earl of Warwick.

The period from 1642 to 1660 was one full of incident and surprises, a time when every man had to risk all by declaring him-

self either for the King or the Parliament, or remain, if this were possible, in passive obscurity; and, in the former case, unhappy was the man who chose the losing side. To men in positions like that of Witherings, the situation must have been most trying, for however he might strive to serve the party in power, his proceedings would be open to suspicion. And so later experience will show.

Leaving Witherings for a moment, we will refer to an officer of the Post Office who did important service for the king. This was James Hickes, one of Witherings' clerks, the only member of the staff who threw his lot in with the royal cause. When, in 1643, Charles held his Court at Oxford, he was cut off from the service of the postal system having its centre in London; and he took steps for erecting a rival post system for his own use. Hickes was ordered by warrant to "receive and demand from all postmasters

on the Western and other roads obedient to His Majesty, the arrears in their hands due to the Letter Office; all refusers of the arrears to be dealt with according to their deserts." He had other directions generally, to the effect of establishing a system of posts in the West, well affected for the king, and extending south to Weymouth, from which port to Cherbourg a weekly service by packet was being set up. More complete instructions were given to Hickes on the 27th January 1644, as follows:—"Knowing your experience in the Letter Office, we hereby appoint you to reside in Weymouth, for the receiving and despatching all packets and letters coming to your hands, either from Court or any part within this kingdom,—not possessed by the rebels,—or from beyond seas, and to receive money for their port, such only excepted as are for His Majesty's service, or to tax them according to the rules of the Letter Office; as also to hire one or more passage boats as Sir

Nicholas Crispe, our deputy, shall direct you, taking special care that all letters passing through the said port, and all passengers and goods passing in the said passage boats, be duly taken notice of by you, and all duties paid before you dismiss them, the master of the packet boat to be answerable to you for the passage money of all goods and passengers he shall take on board; and generally in this employment to demean yourself as may be most for His Majesty's service, and the just benefit of the Letter Office under us, and to observe all directions you shall receive from us and from the said Sir Nicholas Crispe, and to render a constant true weekly account of all your receipts and disbursements to Mr Thomas Nevile at Oxford. And we desire the Governor, Mayor, constable, etc., of Weymouth, to aid you therein."

Hickes is a somewhat remarkable figure in post-office history. Sometime before the Re-

storation he was again employed in the Post Office in London ; and in a petition addressed to the king in 1666, he describes the services rendered by him during the period above mentioned. In that memorial he says that he then "carried personally His Majesty's foreign letters and packets to Oxford, with the hazard of his life"; that "in the year 1643 he was committed to prison by Corbett the traitor, and in great danger of being tried for his life by the unjust laws then practised, for holding correspondence with Mr. Secretary Nicholas in His Majesty's service, and, having with much difficulty escaped to Oxford, he was employed in several expeditions and employments of trust, by both the then Principal Secretaries of State ; and settled at Weymouth to manage two packet boats, for conveyance of His Majesty's despatches to and from foreign parts, as will appear by their several commissions, and under his said Majesty's royal hand and signet ; during

which time he exposed his wife and children to the charity of others, himself to daily dangers, and his small fortune to an utter diminution." "Corbett the traitor" referred to is no doubt one of the regicides afterwards taken in Holland, and who was hanged and quartered at Tyburn on the 19th April 1662. His full name was Miles Corbett.

About the year 1644, Thomas Witherings must have been, or considered to be, a man of a respectable estate, for, according to the proceedings of the Committee for the Advance of Money, he was, on the 18th June of that year, assessed for a contribution of £800. Now, as the assessment was based upon one-twentieth of real estate, and one-fifth of personal estate, the sum assessed represents a condition of fair wealth. The full amounts of these assessments were seldom, however, exacted, and Witherings seems to have been let off after making payments amounting to about £550.

By an Order in Parliament of 23rd February 1649, the appointment of Robert Earl of Warwick as Lord High Admiral and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports was revoked; and on the same day, at the the Council of State, a request was made that Mr. Prideaux should come to the Council to settle stages for all the posts. From this it may be inferred that the posts also had been taken out of the Earl of Warwick's hands. Warwick's brother, Lord Holland, being dissatisfied with the proceedings of the Parliamentary party, had gone over to the King's side, and taken active service against the Parliament, on account of which it may probably have been considered unwise to continue the Earl of Warwick at the head of the Inland Posts. On the 29th March, the Council appointed Sir Henry Vane, Alderman Wilson, and Messrs. Heveningham, Holland, and Robinson to be a committee on the postal service. Things at the Post Office

were becoming very unsettled, On the 27th March, by Order of the Council, the mails were that night to be searched for the book called the *New Chains*; on the 5th April instructions were issued that any person named Edward Broun, calling for letters at the post office, was to be detained; in the same month Mr. Witherings was ordered to prosecute "Wilkes" for the seditious speeches mentioned by him. The Council of State gave orders, on the 8th June, to stay all letters brought to the post, directed to Mons. de la Caille, Marchand Français, demeurant à la Haye, and to bring them to the Council. And in the following month the Council gave further orders that all letters which might be thought to contain anything prejudicial to the State should be examined. Later, complaints were made against Captain Stephen Rich, for miscarriages in the execution of his place as postmaster in not transporting the State's packets between Holyhead

and Dublin. Rich, it appears, resided at Dublin, and the matter was referred for investigation to the authorities in that city. In a letter from a lady in London to her brother at Rochelle, dated 20th February 1650, the following account of the state of the posts is given :—"The jealousies of the time are great, and consequently the danger of writing ; all packets are stopped, which is the reason you do not hear from me, for a high court of justice is erecting, and all intelligence with the king or his ministers is voted treason." These particulars exhibit something of the business that was proceeding in the Post Office.

In 1649, a crisis occurred in Withering's official career. On the 2nd April of that year, information was laid against him "that he had assisted Lord Goring in the late insurrection in Essex (1648), by going into arms and setting out three armed men,—one with a horse,—for which he was sequestered

in Essex." Shortly thereafter orders were issued for the seizure of all his money, plate, goods, rents, debts, and estate, and the Essex Commissioners were required to send up copies of all depositions against him. In May he petitioned to be freed from further trouble, alleging that he had always faithfully served Parliament. He had previously asked for the charge against him, and went down to the County Commissioners, who unanimously agreed that there was no cause for the seizure or sequestration of his estate. Thereupon orders were given "that he be discharged, and no further proceedings taken against him."

About this time Witherings had a serious illness, brought on, in all probability, by the worries with which he was surrounded. He thought proper now to make his will, and in the preamble he refers to his indisposition in the following terms. He states that "he was taken upon a sudden with a dizziness in

his head, and being thereupon very ill-disposed in body, yet well and perfect in memory, doth dispose, in case of mortality, his will to be," etc. Witherings was owner of the estate called "Nelmes," near Hornchurch, Essex, where was a fine old house, which still remains, and is inhabited to the present day.

In 1649, one of the packet boats plying between Holyhead and Dublin, named the *Patrick*, of Waterford, was taken by the Irish; but it was afterwards retaken by Capt. Fearmes, of the *President*, and restored to its owner, the salvage due to the mariners being paid by the State. In 1650, authority was given for employing a post barque for the conveyance of letters, etc., to ply between Liverpool and Carlingford or Carrickfergus. The boat proposed was the galiot *Robert*, and the sum to be paid for its use, £11 a month. About the same time, two post barques were settled to ply between Milford

Haven and the headquarters of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, to carry letters "from Attorney-General Prideaux or any other public Minister." The cost of maintaining the packet boats between Holyhead and Dublin at this period was £9, 6s. 8d. each per month. In order to keep up a constant correspondence between the forces in Ulster and the standing army, a packet boat was also ordered to ply between Ulster and Carlisle.

An important step was taken, in respect of the posts, by the Council of State, upon a paper given in by the Attorney-General, on the 14th March 1650. The Council ordered that their opinion be reported to Parliament, that, "as affairs now stand, it is safe and fit that the office of Postmaster shall be in the sole power and disposal of Parliament." On the 21st March, an Order was passed in Parliament, "that the offices of Postmasters, Inland and Foreign, ought to be in the sole

power and disposal of the Parliament. That it be referred to the Council of State to consider of the offices of Postmasters, and of all the interests of those persons who claim any, how the same may be settled for the advantage and safety of the Commonwealth, and to take order for the present management thereof." Two days later, the Council of State resolved that Mr. Prideaux, the Attorney - General, should undertake the management of the Inland Posts, and to be accountable to the Commonwealth for the profits quarterly. And in further proceedings of the Council of the 5th April, Sir William Armyne was instructed to inform the House of the arrangement. Witherings would appear not to have been disturbed in his position of Postmaster for Foreign Parts at this time; for on the 9th May the Council issued a warrant to him and the other masters of the letter packet boats, "not to carry any male passengers to France or

Flanders until further orders." And, again, on 10th July, the Council of State ordered Witherings to forbear paying any money to William Jessop or Benedict Moore, "to the use of the Earl of Warwick, or Lord Rich, or to Col. Charles Fleetwood, until further order."

On 29th June 1650, the Council of State issued orders to Serjeant Dendy (Serjeant-at-arms to the Council) and his assistant to make a raid upon the country mails coming to and going from London, in the following terms:—"You are to repair to some post stage twenty miles from London, on the road towards York; seize the letter mail going outward, and all other letters upon the mail rider, and present them, by one of yourselves, to Council; the other shall then ride to the next stage, and seize the mail coming inwards, and bring the letters to Council, searching all persons that ride with the mail, or any other that ride

post without warrant, and bring them before Council or the Commissioners for the examination ; all officers, civil and military, to be assistants." Like orders were also given in respect of the mails on the Chester and Western roads.

The seizure of the mails was doubtless due to a desire on the part of the Council to discover such persons as might be holding correspondence with the enemy. The vigilance of the Council continued, for, on 4th December, the Deputy Governor of Dover was required to examine the master of the post barque, lately come over, as to his bringing a person who (as he had been previously informed) "was dangerous, and brought commissions and letters from the enemy." And, again, on the 13th May 1651, the Council of State gave order to the Committee of Examinations, "to inquire into the opening of Capt. Bishop's letter between England and Scotland, and to write

such persons as they think fit for the discovery of the same. The Attorney-General to bring in a list of the persons employed as postmasters upon the several roads throughout this nation, with their character." "To write the Lord General to cause an inquiry to be made after the persons who presumed to break open some letters directed to him, and, if he finds any of them to be near the southern parts, he is to give notice thereof to Council, that they may prosecute them."

Again, on the 21st August 1651, the Council gave directions that "the packet brought in this day from the northern parts be searched before the letters be delivered out." These are specimens of the measures taken at the period in question with the view of preventing the post-office service being used in the interest of the King's party.

On the 10th March 1651, the Council of

State gave order for the revival of a Committee, which was set up the year before, to consider the business of the Foreign Post. They were to send for Mr. Witherings and "confer with him as to what money he had on hand that was formerly wont to be paid to the Earl of Warwick." It is not clear whether this inquiry had reference to any supposed irregularity on Witherings' part, or merely to the question of moneys claimed by the earl. Be this as it may, a fresh storm was soon to break over Witherings' head. In the month of June 1651, the charges of delinquency of which he had been acquitted in 1649 were levelled at him in an aggravated form. The information laid against him was to the effect "that when Oxford was a King's garrison, he compounded with delinquents, and paid moneys for them, by order of Sir Edw. Sydenham. That in the Essex insurrection he sent a man and horse to Lord Goring, and was in person at Bow Bridge

when held by the enemy. That he was at many private meetings at the Hoope Tavern, Leadenhall Street, plotting about the revolt of Capt. Batten and the fleet (1648). That he conveyed moneys into France for the relief of Cavaliers, some of which was taken. That he concealed an annuity of £1200, and several sums due to the State which are in his custody, and paid several sums to Sir Edw. Sydenham, a delinquent, contrary to the Order of the Council of State. That he is very familiar with delinquents, stands bound for them, conceals their letters, and conveys letters and intelligence to them beyond seas." A few days later, witnesses were summoned to appear against him, including Sir Edward and Lady Sydenham. Sir Edward was a county neighbour of Witherings, residing at Gidea Hall, Hornchurch, and is said to have been a moderate Royalist. After full hearing, Witherings was finally dismissed from the charges on the

25th July 1651. It is somewhat difficult to fit in all the events connected with these prosecutions owing to the conflicting dates under which they are recorded. But this much appears, that one of the processes took place before the Committee of Essex, that it continued over a period of seven months, and that Witherings carried thirty witnesses from London to Chelmsford in support of his case. Witherings tells us that Wilkes, "with the assistance of some butchers whom Witherings had sued for great sums," prosecuted him maliciously, and that Wilkes and others offered from £20 to £50 to witnesses to swear against Witherings. This man Wilkes seems to have been a troublesome fellow, for Witherings relates that "Wilkes was committed prisoner by Parliament for furnishing horses to the enemy," and that, "after his enlargement, he accused Parliament of being rogues, villains, and devils, and declared he hoped to see the destruction

of them all; for which words he was indicted, by order of the Council." Witherings, in his defence, and as showing his attachment to the party then in power, makes mention of the fact that he had been "very serviceable to Parliament, contributing £1000 on the going away of the Lord-Lieutenant for Ireland." The indebtedness of the butchers, above referred to, may have had its origin in sales of cattle reared or fed on Witherings' property in Essex; or it may be that he traded in cattle, for he seems to have carried on business in a variety of ways. It is recorded of him that, about this period, he and several other merchants of London contracted with the Navy Commissioners "for the supply of provisions at London, Dover, etc., and at Kinsale, for the Navy, at the rate of 8d. a day per man at sea, and 7d. when in harbour, the State bearing all charges of transport."

Witherings did not long survive these

unsuccessful attacks of his enemies, for on the 28th September, two months after his acquittal, he was stricken down by death. He was one of the two elders of the church at Hornchurch; and on the day mentioned, being Sunday, whilst proceeding to service, he died suddenly on the way. His remains were laid under the chancel of the church, and a mural tablet was erected to his memory. This has since been removed from the chancel to the north-east side of the entrance immediately under the old tower.

The inscription upon the tablet is as follows :—

“Sacred to the Memory of Thomas Witheringe, Esqr., Chiefe Postmaster of Greate Britaine, and foreigne parts, second to none for unfathomed poilesicy, unparalleled sagacius and divining Genius; witness his great correspondence in all parts of ye Christian World.

“Here lies interred who God from hence did call,
By speedy summons, to his funerall.
Upon his sacred day, the world by Love
May judge it was to sing his praise above.
When on his way unto God's house Love brings
Him swifter passage upon Angell's wings
Full spread with zeal wherein his soul doth fly
To Mercies throne in twinkling of an eye.
This Epitaph may all him justly give,
Who dies in Christ he dies not but to live.

In Christo mori est vivere.

Obiit Anno. Dni. 1651, Ætat. Suxæ 55.”

In *Memories of Old Romford*, it is stated that Witherings was a Puritan; in any case his profession in later life seems to have been that of a Protestant. It may be that the charge of being a papist in his earlier years was but a base invention of his enemies. Reference has previously been made to a suggestion that Witherings had been a mercer in London in his earlier life. We find, on inquiry, that one Thomas Witherings was admitted a member of the Mercer's Company, by redemption, on the 15th February 1625. This means that he

purchased his admission; but it does not follow that he was a mercer in the present meaning of the word.

From the conflicting statements made in regard to Witherings during the course of his official life, it is perhaps now impossible to arrive at any true estimate of his character. He lived in a troublous time, surrounded by enemies covetous of his office, and during a period of civil war, when to steer a course free from strife and collision would be impossible. He must have been a man of originality and of persevering disposition. In a negative sense, it may be said that he was no tin-plate man, devoid of stability, reflecting only the opinions of others, and capable of being cut into any shape by the scissors of expediency; he was possessed of fight and determination, and must have lived a trying and exciting life. What his pursuits or predilections were, apart from business, it is not now

possible to determine. During his official career he was twice sequestered in his office; once he was put in prison; twice his property was seized; and twice he was declared to be, or was charged with being, a delinquent. The probabilities are that the worries and anxieties of office thrust him into his grave, for he died a comparatively young man. From the point of view of work done, he has some claim to be regarded as an early Rowland Hill; it was he who first organised the inland posts generally in Britain for the use of the public; though it is to the credit of the deputy postmasters on the road from London to the West of England, that they had anticipated Witherings by several years in setting up a horse post for the benefit of the people on that line of road. He was the forerunner of a long line of able, zealous, and accomplished men, whose lives have been spent in, and have adorned, the Post

Office for two centuries and a half, whose work has been swallowed up in the ever-advancing tide of improvement, and whose names, when their work was done, have disappeared from view and have hardly left an echo behind.

CHAPTER VII

Two days after Witherings' death, namely, on the 30th September 1651, by Order of Parliament, a previous Order of 21st March 1650, touching the office of Postmaster, inland and foreign, was revived, and the Council of State were directed to report their opinion thereon forthwith. On the 4th October, the Committee for the Posts pass an order, "that the Committee sit in the Inner Horse Chamber on Thursday, at 2 P.M., to receive the claims of all persons pretending any interest in the Foreign or Inland Letter Office, as also the propositions of any person about the improvement and management thereof." This invitation to claimants to come for-

ward opened a very large door, as will be seen presently.

It had all along been insisted upon by Witherings that, as his patent for the office of Foreign Postmaster stood in favour of two lives,—his own and that of William Frizell,—the possession of the office was in his right (having many years before bought out Frizell), and must remain of his right so long as either of the two lived. Now, by a provision in Witherings' will, he left £300 a year to Sir David Watkins to execute the office after his death, and to maintain and educate his son Thomas until he should be of sufficient age to take his father's place. Witherings' son died about 1652, and, as a matter of fact, Sir David Watkins carried on the office of Foreign Postmaster, in favour of Witherings' son, and afterwards of his nephew, who became heir, until the 30th June 1653, when a change was made in the

whole postal arrangements, both Inland and Foreign.

In response to the invitation of the Committee for the Posts of the 4th October, the following claims were sent in, in addition to the claim of Sir David Watkins. That of Henry Robinson by deputation from Endymion and George Porter, who previously had been granted a deputation by Charles Lord Stanhope. This claim was for both offices, Inland and Foreign. That of Walter Ward, merchant, also to both offices. That of Thomas Billingsley to the Foreign Office; and that of Benedict Moore and William Jessop, on behalf of the creditors and three daughters of Robert Lord Rich, to a payment of £900 a year out of the Foreign Letter Office. A claim was also preferred by Mrs. Witherings, on behalf of herself and daughter, on the ground that a large part of her fortune had been spent in purchasing and developing the

Foreign Letter Service. The Council of State and various Committees had much trouble in dealing with these various claims, the legal opinions obtained upon them, which still remain, having apparently been of little use in clearing matters up. The Committees, by way of escape from their difficulties, were fain to throw up the whole business, so far as deciding the question of the claims is concerned; and, proceeding upon a resolution of the Committee on the Posts of the 7th November 1651, it was determined that "the offices should be let to farm." References continued to pass, however, between the Parliament, the Council of State, the Committee on the Posts, and the Irish and Scotch Committee; and it was not till the year 1653 that any final step was taken. In May of that year, the Committee for the Management of the Posts made certain suggestions for the future carrying on of the posts. Among these

were, that the Inland and Foreign Posts be placed under one and the same control. That the inland rates should be as follows :—

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| For single letters to places within | | |
| | 100 miles from London | 2d. |
| do. | over 100 " " | 3d. |
| do. | to Ireland | 6d. |
| do. | to Scotland | 4d. |

That the Irish mails should go by way of Milford and Waterford, and Chester and Dublin; and that all letters to or from Scotland should circulate by way of Leith or Edinburgh.

That public letters—letters of Government—should be carried free. That the rental for both offices should not be less than £6300 per annum.

Soon after this time tenders were called for, in connection with which the following conditions were prescribed :—

“(1) The undertakers are to be of known integrity and good affection, and responsible in outward estate.

“(2) They are to carry all extraordinary despatches to or from the supreme authority, Lord - General Cromwell, the Council of State, Commissioners of Admiralty, General of the Fleet, General Officers of the Army, Army Committee, and Irish and Scotch Committee, or any person entrusted with the management of a public affair wherein private interest is not concerned.

“(3) All such letters by, as also those to and from, all members of the legislative power, are to be carried free from postage, provided that such as are not known by their seals have an endorsement as follows:— ‘These are for the service of the Commonwealth,’ signed by the persons themselves or their clerks.

“(4) That the sum of £—— be paid by the undertakers of this business every three months.

“(5) They shall receive for single letters carried into Ireland, 6d.; into Scotland, 4d.;

to all parts above 80 miles from London, 3d.; to all parts less remote, 2d.—with note of the difference between single, double, and triple letters.

“(6) That a weekly intercourse may be continued between England and Ireland, they are to maintain one or more packet boats weekly between Milford and Waterford, and between Chester and Dublin.

“(7) That besides the several post stages now in use, there is to be a post settled between Dover and Portsmouth, Portsmouth and Salisbury, London and Yarmouth, and Lancaster and Carlisle.

“The persons nominated by the undertakers for posts in their several stages, as also all other officers subordinate to them, shall be approved by persons authorized thereto by the Lord-General and the Council of State.”

On the 29th June 1653, offers were considered by the Posts Committee, under the

foregoing specification of conditions, as follows :—

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|----|-----|------------|
| Henry Robinson | £8041 | 0 | 0 | per annum. |
| Ben. Andrewes | 9100 | 0 | 0 | ” |
| John Goldsmith | 8500 | 0 | 0 | ” |
| Ralph Kendall | 1103 | 12 | 9 | ” |
| John Manley (with good security) | 8259 | 19 | 11½ | ” |
| Richard Hicks | 9120 | 6 | 8 | ” |
| Rich. Hill | 8160 | 0 | 0 | ” |

Two other offers at least had been made ; but they do not seem to have been taken into serious account for certain reasons—one being, apparently, that the offerers had prescribed conditions outside the specifications set down.

No time was now lost by the Council of State. On the very next day they passed the following resolution :—“ John Manley to carry all packets, public and private, inland and foreign, according to the terms agreed on between him and a Committee of Council for that purpose, and to enter on the execution of the said office to-night, and receive the profits thereof, and a warrant to be drawn for that purpose ; power given him to stop

all mails of letters carried by any person not authorized by him ; and his office for postage of letters to be freed from all taxes." The terms agreed upon as to payment were not those in Manley's offer, but £10,000 a year.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to revert to the year 1649. In this year the Common Council of London set up a rival post of their own on the several roads leading from London, and, as a report of Prideaux states, they "have employed a natural *Scott* into the north who has gone into Scotland and hath settled postmasters (others than those for the State) on all that road." The alleged reason for this proceeding was, that the Common Council required another weekly conveyance of letters for their uses. They were pressed to come before Parliament in order that they might set forth their claim to the right of setting up an independent post, but they declined to do so. Prideaux represented that his rivals,

besides "intrenching upon the rights of Parliament," would cause a decrease of his revenue ; and, under these circumstances, he could not be expected to carry on the business of the Posts ; for under the arrangement then existing, the "charge of all the postmasters of England were taken off the State." These representations were made by Prideaux in March 1650. The Government was more arbitrary than particular as to the strict observance of precedents in law, and the Posts of the Common Council of London were promptly put down. But shortly after Witherings' death, in 1651, a combination of men, relying upon the votes of the Parliament of 1642, under which it was declared that the Secretaries of State and Witherings had no exclusive monopoly in the carriage of letters, succeeded in setting up a system of posts in opposition to the officially recognised posts of Prideaux, and actually drove the latter from the field. The men who

conducted this campaign against Prideaux were—Clement Oxenbridge, Richard Blackwell, Francis Thomson, and William Malyn. Oxenbridge was Checkmaster to the Collector for Prize Goods (1652); Blackwell was at the same period a Collector for Prize Goods; Thomson is probably a man of the name who, in 1654, resigned his interest in Windsor Little Park and other property (of course, for a consideration), which he had purchased some time before from the State; Malyn appears to have been connected with one or other of the public offices. These men called themselves “the first undertakers for reducing letters to half the former rates.” They tell us that Prideaux continued to exact the high rate of 6d. for every letter. In the account given by them of their proceedings, they say that:—“The undertakers, observing this extortive rate to be held up, as well in Witherings’ lifetime as after his

death,—when the pretence of that illegal grant was ended in point of limitation’—and observing that the whole benefit went into one private hand, . . . they conceived it would be a work both acceptable to the State and beneficial to the people, to contrive the abatement of those excessive rates ; and therefore, maugre all oppositions and abuses of the monopolizer and his interest, they at first dash adventured on postage at the rate of 3d. a letter beyond eighty miles, and 2d. a letter within or to eighty miles ; and to make return three times weekly.” The “undertakers ” thus started upon their venture by reducing the minimum rate for a letter from 6d. to 2d., and by running the mails three times a week instead of once as hitherto. Prideaux tried to put down this combination by reducing his rates and establishing extra mails, but without avail ; for the public were so grateful for the reform introduced by the undertakers, that they

gave him no encouragement, and he was obliged eventually to give up the business. As Prideaux was written to by the Council of State about neglects on the Portsmouth Road on the 23rd May 1652, his giving up the Posts must have been subsequent to this date.

The rival concerns were carried on, as might be supposed, in a spirit of bitter antagonism, in which the deputy postmasters had their share. Prideaux's agents on one occasion murdered a mounted post riding with the opposition mail, and threw his body into a river; and near the same place a son of one of the old postmasters assaulted another of the rival messengers with a drawn sword. The account goes on to say, that "these practices not accomplishing his (Prideaux's) aim, an Order from the Council of State was procured—not to stop us or our mails, that being too apparently illegal, but in such doubtful terms as might affright the weak from sending their letters to us.

Libels also were posted up and down the city by him or his agents, signifying that our mails should be stopped, but his go free. This project failing, Mr. Prideaux, out of a hypocritical pretence of keeping the Sabbath day, by his own warrant commanded his postmasters to require the justices of peace in the several counties to stop our mails on the Sabbath, whereas his own went free." . . . "Whilst we were labouring amidst these difficulties, it pleased God to devolve authority on such worthy persons as had from the beginning countenanced us in our work ; who, in their first entrance on their management of public affairs, intrusted us with their ordinary and extraordinary despatches." This appears to refer to the period of the breaking up of the Long Parliament, 20th April 1653, when the undertakers "were the only persons who performed the service of conveying the State's despatches."

“We continued to perform the service of the State freely, fulfilling all things concerning the postage of inland letters; we reduced the same into one channel, and entertained as many of the old postmasters as were honest and well affected, according to direction of the Council of State (which constrained us to lay aside divers of those honest persons ready to assist us in carrying on so good a work), took the old post-house in London, where three days a week the State and all persons were accommodated,” etc. From this account it seems clear that the old Post system under Prideaux was ousted by the new company, and that the latter had established itself as the recognised Inland Post of the country.

On the very day on which Manley was appointed to the farm of the Posts, the 30th June 1653, he was furnished by the Council of State with a warrant as follows : —“ To Clement Oxenbridge, and all others

concerned in the inland and foreign post. John Manley having contracted for and farmed these offices, we authorize him to enter on his duties this night, to receive and carry all packets, and to receive the profits to his own use. And you are required to permit him to do this without interruption or molestation." Upon the strength of this warrant Manley proceeded to enter upon his new duties, and, as regards the Foreign Letter Office, there seems to have been no difficulty. But with the Inland Letter Office the case was very different. Up to the day when Manley was appointed, the managers of the Inland Post were hopefully negotiating with the Council of State for the farm of the Posts. Their hopes of success were, however, suddenly blighted. The account of the transactions at this time given by these men, which is somewhat amusing, is as follows:—"After we were withdrawn (from the Council), Col.

Rich, after private conference with a member of Council, so represented the business that an Order within half an hour was passed by Council immediately to invest Manley with the management of the inland and foreign letters. He, that very night, without further warning, demanded the letters which we had received, and the profits of the letters then brought to us by our own servants, at our own charges. With much persuasion we prevailed with Manley that the money should be deposited into a clerk's hand intrusted by him, till the pleasure of the Council were known; yet before that could be obtained, Manley, with some old clerks and postmasters of Mr. Prideaux's company, violently with swords broke into our house, where our letters and goods were, thrust out our servants, and by force kept possession. The same night, Manley and others violently broke into the dwelling-house of some of

us in Wood Street, demanded the letters there, and would by force have broke into the room where some of us were, had we not by main strength kept the door against them; and he, with threatening speeches, required us not to receive any more letters. On complaint to Col. Rich, he, with rough words, commanded us not to meddle with receiving or sending any more letters, declaring that such was the sense of the Council's Order, and that, if we persisted, those of us who had any employment under the State should be turned out, and soldiers should be sent to our houses to stop persons bringing any letters to us. From real tenderness to the present posture of public affairs in that juncture of time we forbore contest, in expectation of justice from the supreme authority, rather than occasion disturbance." In this hustling way was the post-office business transferred to new hands.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Inland and Foreign Post Offices were now combined under the management of John Manley, to whom they were farmed for a sum of £10,000 a year. This was in 1653, and the grant was limited to a period of two years. Manley was a Justice of Peace for the county of Middlesex, and is referred to in some contemporary records as Justice Manley. He made himself useful on the bench to Cromwell's party in connection with many political cases brought before him for trial. It is probable that he had previously been a soldier, as he is sometimes referred to as Captain Manley. In 1655, when Manley's term was up, the office changed hands. On the 3rd of May in that year, an

Order in Council was passed, to the effect that the management of the Post Office should be performed by John Thurloe, Secretary of State, "security being given for the payment of the present rent of £10,000 a year, and for keeping the conditions of the contract with the present farmer, etc., beginning from the expiration of Manley's contract." Manley's contract fell to expire on the 30th June following. In pursuance of this Order, Thurloe succeeded Manley in the management of the Posts.

During Thurloe's possession of the office an Act was passed for settling the postage of England, Ireland, and Scotland (June 1657). The Act sets forth that "Experience having shown that the settling a Post Office is the best means to maintain trade, convey dispatches, and discover dangerous designs, it is enacted that there shall be but one Post Office, and one Postmaster-General and Controller to settle Posts, who shall carry all

letters except those sent by known carriers, or merchants' letters of advice sent by ship-masters ; also, except private letters sent by messengers. He is to have the horsing of all who ride by post." The rates of postage for letters were as follows, viz.:—

| | Single. | Double. | Per Oz. |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| To or from any place within 80 miles } of London . } | 2d. | 4d. | 8d. |
| „ „ at a greater } distance . } | 3d. | 6d. | 1s. |
| „ Scotland } | 4d. | 8d. | 1s. 6d. |
| „ Ireland } | 6d. | 1s. | 2s. |

WITHIN IRELAND.

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| To or from any place within 40 miles } of Dublin . } | 2d. | 4d. | 8d. |
| „ „ at a greater } distance . } | 4d. | 8d. | 1s. |

FOREIGN.

| | | | |
|---|-----|---------|---------|
| To Leghorn, Genoa, Florence, Lyons, } Marseilles, Smyrna, Aleppo, and } Constantinople . } | 1s. | 2s. | 3s. 9d. |
| „ Bordeaux, Rochelle, Nantes, Ba- } yonne, Cadiz, and Madrid . } | 9d. | 1s. 6d. | 2s. |
| „ St. Malo, Morlaix, and Newhaven ¹ } | 6d. | 1s. | 1s. 6d. |
| „ Hamburgh, Frankfort, and Co- } logne } | 8d. | 1s. 4d. | 2s. |
| „ Dantzic, Leipsic, Lubeck, Stock- } holm, Copenhagen, Elsinore, } and Queenesbrough ² . } | 1s. | 2s. | 4s. |

For every through post, or persons riding in post, 2½d. the mile for each horse, besides the guide groat for every stage.

¹ Havre-de-Grace.² Königsberg.

All persons save the Postmaster-General or his deputies were forbidden to supply post horses on pain of a fine of £1000 a month—half to the Protector and half to the discoverer. Many other provisions are set down which need not be quoted here.

Two months later, 27th August 1657, on a report from the Committee on the Postage, it was ordered that a lease be granted of the office of Postmaster-General to Thurloe, at a rent of £10,000, to be paid quarterly; "he to be at all charges, take no greater rates of postage than expressed in the Act, and send all Government letters free: the grant to be for as many years as His Highness thinks fit, not exceeding 11, or one life."

During Thurloe's time, the Post Office was made very serviceable in the discovering of "dangerous designs"; for it is said that the control of the office gave him an "immense advantage in intercepting letters and collecting intelligence, abroad as well as at home."

The truth is, that not only in Thurloe's time, but in the years immediately preceding the Restoration, during the settlement of the kindgom after the Restoration, and probably for long after that, the Post Office was regarded as the pulse of all political movements, the deputy postmasters in the country serving as a hydra-headed agency for the State—seeing, hearing, and reporting everything of importance that transpired in their districts ; while the opening of letters in the Post afforded a means of securing evidence against the enemies of the ruling powers for the time being. One or two examples of how these things were done may be interesting. On the 9th August 1659, the Council approves of "Col. Crompton's stopping the Irish mail, not knowing of how dangerous consequence some of the letters might be, and judging it fit that they be perused before passing further." Then Major - General Lambert, to whom this communication is

addressed, is desired to "examine all the letters, send up any that are dangerous, and send the rest forward to Ireland." On the 9th January 1662, the postmaster of Northallerton reports to the Postmaster-General, that "four disaffected Scottish ministers,—Dunkinson, Ord, Douglas, and Jamieson,—thought to be spies and deluders of loyal subjects, are at Northallerton, and write many letters to Berwick and different parts of Yorkshire. Asks whether the letters should be received, and, if so, whether they should be opened in presence of a magistrate." These facts being communicated through Secretary Nicholas to the king, the former writes to the postmaster as follows :—"The king being acquainted with his letter to Col. Bishop, about Scottish ministers and disaffected persons now in Northallerton, and corresponding with others in Berwick and elsewhere, wishes him to carry to Sir W. Penniman, a deputy lieutenant, all letters

from the four ministers whom he names ; to be opened, perused, and sent up to London if they contain anything prejudicial to the public peace ; otherwise to be forwarded as addressed." On the 31st January 1662, a warrant was issued to the head of the Post Office "to permit John Wickham and John Hill to search the next mails from Holland for counterfeit gold, and, if any be found, to accompany them with it to Secretary Nicholas, it being reported that much base gold has lately been imported by the mails." These incidents show how the interception and perusal of letters in the post were carried out—all under sufficient authority.

There were no newspapers in these days, as *we* know them, and no telegraphs ; all news, except such as might be conveyed by special messengers, or clandestinely by carriers, passed in letters through the post. The possession of the office was therefore, under the conditions previously stated, of the

first importance to the powers holding the reins of government ; and as parliamentary parties, having various and conflicting political views, were constantly changing positions at this time, the control of the Post Office changed hands with almost equal frequency.

To return to John Thurloe. Thurloe was Secretary of State under both Oliver and Richard Cromwell ; and, after the resignation of the latter, he continued to hold his Secretaryship till the 14th January 1660. "In April 1659, he used his utmost efforts to dissuade the Protector from dissolving the Parliament ; a step which proved fatal to his authority." He had previously been "very obnoxious to the principal persons of the army, to whose interests, wherever they interfered with those of the civil government, he was a declared enemy"; and it is not improbable that this antagonism led to his being relieved of the farm of the Post Office. But his deprivation of the office of Postmaster-

General and Farmer of the Post did not take place till later in the year, and under circumstances which Thurloe describes in his State Papers. In a document of February 1660, he writes :—"I humbly offer to consideration, that within less than a fortnight of the 29th Sept. last"—that is, a fortnight after—"my farm was, by virtue of an Act of Parliament dated the 11th Oct., made null and void ; and the office itself, as it stood at that time, set aside ; and consequently no more rent payable ; and it was then lawful for any other person to set up other posts for the carrying of such letters as should be brought to them, which very many accordingly practised."

The State records during the closing period of the interregnum are very imperfect, but sufficient has been left to enable us to trace the position of affairs as relating to the Posts. Two months before the passing of the Act just men-

tioned,—namely, on the 8th of August,—the Council of State resolved that the Post Office should be farmed, that is, let out to some farmer other than Thurloe; but, until Thurloe should be removed, this could not be arranged.

Now, as a consequence of these proceedings, and of the Act of the 11th October, the office passed into the hands of Dr. Benjamin Worsley, to whom the farm was then granted for a term of seven years, at a rental of £20,000. This seems a large advance upon the previous rent of £10,000; but Thurloe states that he improved the office £4000 per annum to the State voluntarily, which he might have put in his own purse; and the rent he was paying when he vacated the farm must have been £14,000 a year. But Worsley did not long enjoy the position, for shortly thereafter he was “violently turned out.” Worsley had been selected, as one of several persons, for nomination to Parliament

as a general officer by the Committee of Safety in July 1659. In October following, the government was in the hands of a Committee of Safety composed for the most part of officers; and Worsley being a military man, the Post Office might be supposed to be in safe hands if placed under his care.

We have been unable to discover to what family Dr. Worsley belonged. It is not improbable that he was connected by family ties with Charles Worsley, who had been one of the colonels of Cromwell's own regiment of foot. According to the Journals of the House of Commons, Benjamin Worsley was, in July 1647, appointed to be one of the Physicians, General-Surgeons, and Apothecaries of the Army in Ireland, and was then sent to Dublin. In March 1650, he was appointed Secretary to the Commissioners under the Act for regulating Trade, and, in 1653, Secretary to the Commissioners for

Ireland. He was then selected as a fit person to accompany Viscount Lisle, as secretary, in a projected embassy to Sweden ; but the embassy, so far as Lisle was concerned, did not proceed.

Now, on the 26th December 1659, the Rump was again in the ascendant, and constituted themselves a House. On the 3rd January 1660, Parliament appointed a new Council ; on the 9th January, the House of Commons resolved to take the Post Office into its own hands, and that it should "be managed for the best advantage of the Commonwealth" ; on the 10th January, Thomas Scott, a member of Parliament, one of the Council of State, and a hot-headed republican, was appointed by the House of Commons "to receive informations of private and public intelligence, as the Secretary of State heretofore had and used, and present them to the Council of State" ; and, a week later, he was appointed Secretary of State to the

Commonwealth. Now these events, taken in connection with the fact that, on the 21st January 1660, the Council of State issued an order "to apprehend Benj. Worsley and bring him in custody before the Council," may warrant us in concluding that this is the time when Worsley was "violently turned out" of the Post Office.

In succession to Worsley, Secretary of State Scott seems to have become Postmaster-General, but his connection with the Post Office was of brief duration; for a Parliament more favourable to the Restoration commenced sitting on the 3rd March 1660, and all persons who had been active in their opposition to the Royal House began to consider what was best for their own preservation. Scott was one of the men who had signed the death-warrant of King Charles I., and no doubt he would be forward in clearing out. That Scott was virtually Postmaster-General for a time seems to be

proved by a warrant, issued by the Council of State on the 9th March 1660, "for intelligence, from the proceeds of the Post Office, paid by Wm. Scott and Isaac Dorislaus, whilst they managed it under Thomas Scott, £1000."

Like most of the Postmasters-General of these early days, Scott had an experience of imprisonment. After the Restoration he was taken; he had been excepted out of the general indemnity given by Charles II.; and on the 17th October he suffered death, with several others, in the presence of the king. Evelyn thus refers, in his diary, to the closing scene in the career of Postmaster-General Scott:—"I saw not their execution, but met their quarters, mangled and cut and reeking, as they were brought from the gallows in baskets on the hurdle. Oh! the miraculous providence of God!" So much for a royalist exclamation, and the laying of responsibility on the shoulders of Providence.

For a short period after Secretary Scott quitted the Post Office, it is not very clear how it was managed; but a State paper of 3rd August 1660 shows that an account was rendered of its business from 25th March to 25th June of that year by Job Allibond and Francis Manley—the former a clerk in the office, and the latter Riding Purveyor to His Majesty. The receipts for the quarter were stated to be £5578, 9s. 5d., and the disbursements, £5431, 9s. 6d. Manley speaks of himself as being late Manager.

CHAPTER IX

THE Restoration was now an accomplished fact, and the Post Office passed into the hands of Col. Henry Bishop of Henfield, Sussex, to whom was granted the farm of the office for a period of seven years, dating from the 25th June 1660, at an annual rental of £21,500. Bishop was the third son of Sir Thomas Bisshopp, Knight, of Henfield. The Bisshopps were formerly a Yorkshire family, some of whom served under Lord Wharton in his proceedings against the Scotch in a previous age. Henry Bishop, the Postmaster-General, was married to Lady Elizabeth Plumley or Plumleigh, a widow who, in religion, was a papist. Before proceeding to deal with Bishop's

work in the Post Office, we may here mention, as a matter of interest personal to the individual, that in the impropiator's chancel of the church of Henfield is a mural monument to his memory, setting forth that he died in 1691, at the age of eighty.

It is not apparent upon what grounds Bishop obtained the farm, or whether he had performed any services entitling him to such an appointment. Under his indenture he was required to pay one quarter's rent in advance, namely, £5375, to bear all the expense of transmitting Government letters, and to carry, free, single letters from members of Parliament. He was required "to give in a true catalogue of all postmasters employed by him, and dismiss those excepted against by a Secretary of State, to whom all alterations in postage, or erection of post stages, were to be submitted." He was, however, to be granted certain allowances

in case of plague, civil war, etc., which might affect the revenue of his farm.

In connection with Bishop's appointment, there is a curious circumstance related in a State paper of September 1667. The document, although written under the initials "A. B.," is evidently the production of Clement Oxenbridge, who, it will be remembered, was one of the "First Undertakers for the reduction of postage," and who was the means of Prideaux's giving up the Post Office. Indeed the paper is indorsed "Mr. Oxenbridge." It reads as follows:—

"Statement of A. B.: That he was in youth a servant of the Princess Royal, and was also allied to a grandee under the late powers; that in 1652 he got Prideaux put out of the Post Office, by reducing the price of letters from 6d. to 3d., and bringing in a threefold weekly postage; that, to recompense him for £5036, 8s. spent therein, he was to have a weekly payment from the

post office; and he took the office in 1660 in Bishop's name, and settled a foreign correspondence, but, being dissatisfied with Bishop, had the office transferred to his Cousin O'Neale" (O'Neale was successor to Bishop) "on condition of continuing him £800 a year therefrom, but this has not been done," etc.

Whether Oxenbridge was able to exercise the interest here pretended is not clear. He was employed in the Post Office under Bishop for a time, but, as will be seen hereafter, there is little doubt he was turned out of it.

The return of the king from exile was signalled by a general scramble for offices, the king and his ministers being inundated with petitions for all kinds of places. While the king came in upon a promise of general pardon, his return was followed by measures of great severity; and it is perhaps not far from the truth to

attribute much of what took place to the clamour of the Royalists, whose claims to place could not be satisfied without turning other men out. In order to clear the way, it would obviously be necessary to proceed against the then holders upon some plea or other. The petitions are founded on every variety of alleged service or suffering, from the most trivial to the most important. For example, one suitor begs for the place of Groom of the Great Chamber to the King or the Dukes of York or Gloucester, stating that he "had been clerk of the chapel to the late king, and served His Majesty, when prince, as keeper of his balloons and paumes, and of tennis shoes and ankle socks." An aged widow, named Elizabeth Cary, begs a place as page for her son, on the ground that she had suffered greatly for her loyalty. She had had her back broken at Henley-on-Thames, and a gibbet was erected to take away her life. She was

imprisoned at Windsor Castle, Newgate, Bridewell, the Bishop of London's house, and lastly in the Mews, at the time of the late king's martyrdom, "for peculiar service in carrying his gracious proclamations and declarations from Oxford to London, and only escaped with her life by flying into her own country." Many petitions were received for places in the Post Office. The plaint of one applicant is, that "his father's property was destroyed by Lord Fairfax at the siege of Leeds." In another case it is set forth that the petitioner "should have succeeded his father, but was put by for taking arms for the late king." A suppliant in the West says, that he "has been a constant sufferer from the tyranny of His Majesty's enemies. Would not mention his sufferings, in the joy of the Restoration, but for his wife and children, those patient partakers of all his troubles. Was the first man in Exeter to be taken up and imprisoned in all occasions

during the late rebellion," etc. A former postmaster of Lichfield says, that "he suffered much loss by pulling down of his house and plunder of his goods, and was displaced by the then Parliament." The prayer of Thomas Challoner, postmaster of Stone, is based on the fact that he is brother to Richard Challoner, martyred for his loyalty before the Royal Exchange in 1643, and has often been plundered," etc. Thomas Taylor, of Tadcaster, solicits the postmastership of that place: urging his claim upon the fact that his ancestors had served since Queen Elizabeth's time; that his father, Thomas Taylor, had been seized and executed by Lord Fairfax for carrying an express to Prince Rupert, when York was besieged, to hasten to its relief; and that his family had been kept out of the place ever since. A former postmaster of Newcastle-on-Tyne, Thomas Swan, claims restoration to the place of postmaster because the "pretenders

who oppose him have not the least interest"; that his family had been loyal almost to their extirpation and banishment from the town; and that £674, 13s. is still due to his late father as postmaster, Burlamachi not having allowed him to pay himself out of the letter office, etc. These are specimens of the memorials sent in immediately after the Restoration, and which the new powers were called upon to satisfy.

The working staff of the Post Office in London at the period of the Restoration seems to have been a very mixed company. A number of them had been continued from the time of the Commonwealth; some had been brought in by Bishop; and the system of intercepting and opening letters, for the discovery of sedition, so largely practised during the Commonwealth, being still carried on, there was a great outcry against these officers who were not regarded as staunch Royalists. Bishop himself was distrusted.

In December 1660, the postmaster of Newbury complains that many members of the Post Office are ill-affected, and "that Major Wildman, and Thompson and Oxenbridge, Anabaptists, put in and out whom they please." In the autumn of 1661, an account is given of the condition of the Post Office. Therein it is stated, that "it is managed by those who were active for Cromwell and the late Government: first, Major Wildman, a subtle leveller and anti-monarchy man; second, Oxenbridge, a confidant of Cromwell and betrayer of many of the King's party; third, Dorislaus, the son of the man who pleaded for the king's death at his trial; and, fourth, Vanderhuyden, agent of Nieuport, the Dutch Ambassador to Cromwell, now treating, underhand, to settle the postage by way of Amsterdam. The letter officers are chiefly disloyal: Col. Bishop himself and the office are under Major Wildman's control." The writer

of this statement urges that the office should be put under fresh management. Shortly after this time, as would appear, there had been a clearing-out of several of the persons objected to; for in "a perfect list of all the officers, clerks, and others employed in and about the Post Office in London by Henry Bisshopp, Esq., His Majesty's farmer of the said office," the principal names mentioned above do not appear. The staff and constitution of the office, as exhibited by this paper, are as follows:—

IN THE INLAND OFFICE.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Job. Allibond } | Clerks of the Northern Road. |
| Anselme Fowler . . . } | |
| James Hicke } | Clerks of the Chester Road. |
| Matthew Hanscomb . . } | |
| Thomas Chapman . . . } | Clerks of the Eastern Road. |
| Benjamin Lamb . . . } | |
| Thomas Aylward . . . } | Clerks of the Western Road. |
| Robert Aylward . . . } | |
| Andrew Leake } | Receivers of letters at the windows of the office. |
| Samuell Allibond . . . } | |
| Cornelius Glover . . . } | |
| Thomas Bucknor | General Accomptant. |

Benjamin Andrews . . Clerk and Accomptant of the moneys in the office.

John Rea, son of Mr. }
 John Rea, between ye } Letter Marker or Stamper.
 Temple Gates. . . }

Mr Francis Thomson . . "Agent to ryde ye severall rodes and find out abuses, and take care of ye due carriage of ye mayles and of all post-masters' doing their severall and respective duties."

Of Porters or Letter Carriers, whose names need not be given here, there were 28.

IN THE FOREIGN OFFICE.

Thomas Harper . . . }
 Jeremiah Copping . . } Clerks.
 Richard Bostock . . }

John Mansfield . . . Office-attendant.

This return is exceedingly interesting on several grounds. It shows that in the autumn of 1661 the total effective force of the Post Office in London numbered 47 persons; it contains the first recorded mention, probably, of a surveyor,—“agent to ryde ye severall rodes,”—a numerous class of officers nowadays, who perform the same duties as then, taking into account the changes in the methods and work of the

Post Office; and it also contains the first record of a stamper of letters being employed.

As regards the stamping, this is also mentioned by Bishop, in an answer made to the Council of State respecting alleged abuses in the Post Office, under date 2nd August 1661, as follows:— . . . “that he only employs old officers because new ones cannot serve for want of experience”; and he shows the precautions he has taken to rectify abuses, “by setting up printed rules, taking securities of the letter-carriers, stamping the letters,” etc.

In complaints made of irregularities in the Post Office, very unflattering comments are made upon some of its officers. Thus: “Bishop’s agent, Thompson, is a very juggler; they both”—that is, Bishop and Thompson—“will be complained of next Parliament.” A clerk, Ibson, who had been dismissed, refers, in a vindication he attempted of himself, to the “dangerous

character of the disaffected and scurrilous men who witness against him"; and that, "having accused them to Secretary Nicholas and Col. Bishop, they procured his dismissal." James Hickee, a clerk in the Post Office, on the other hand, recriminates that, during the late troubles, Ibson was accustomed "to open and read the letters, and give news therefrom; that he was careless of the letters; and often wrong in his accounts"; and that on these grounds he was dismissed. In another information, Thomas Chapman is described as being a leveller; and Glover, a servant of Hugh Peters—both being accused of speaking disrespectfully of the king and Parliament. In a memorandum of Secretary Nicholas it is stated that "Glover of the Post Office was last Sunday at Mr. Jenkins' church, whispering among the people to take heed what they write, as their letters are often opened." The period was evidently one of very severe

examination, and the weeding out from the Post Office of unreliable servants.

Col. Henry Bishop did not escape in the general round of attack. A statement, dated 31st December 1661, is left on record to the following effect:—"That William Parker, who keeps the Nonsuch, formerly Commonwealth Club, in Bow Street, Covent Garden, was Wildman's man, the wife his servant, and the house furnished by him for meetings in Cromwell's time. That Col. Bishop often met Wildman there, and revealed the design of the late King's party, wherein Lord Mordaunt, Major Smith, and others were betrayed, and Dr. Hewitt lost his life; Major Smith declared on his deathbed that he never spoke the words by which he was betrayed to any but Bishop. Most of the post-office clerks used to meet and dine weekly at this house; and those now in hold, on suspicion of the plot, had meetings there. The night before

Wildman was committed, a clerk of the Post Office, and another, rode to the post house at Hounslow, stopped the two Western mails, carried the letters into a private room, and, after spending two hours with them, charged the boy who carried the mail forward not to speak of what they had done." In a petition of the discharged clerk Ibson, some time later, Ibson states that "he was bound in loyalty to disclose the horrid and dangerous practices of Henry Bishop, for which Bishop dismissed him in disgrace, and imprisoned him on several feigned actions." Bishop's farm of the Post Office must have given him much trouble and anxiety, arising partly from the nature of the staff employed by him, and partly from the conditions of unrest pervading society, these two things inspiring distrust and suspicion in the management of the office. When the time arrived for his forced retirement from the farm, he would doubtless be

glad to get quit of it. This event occurred in 1663. The immediate cause is not made quite clear. No less an authority than Dan. O'Neale, who succeeded Bishop, states that "Col. Bishop was turned out for continuing disaffected persons in the management of the Post." But Bishop was about this time harassed with suits at law, and the king thought fit to step in and arrest the proceedings. The following document, addressed to "Our Attorney-General and all others," was issued with this intent from Whitehall on the 20th March 1663:—"Whereas we are informed that John Hill hath caused an information to be exhibited against Henry Bishop, Esq., for the exercising of the office of our Postmaster-General, and that other suits are intended to be brought against him by the said Hill, which will much tend to the disquieting of the said Henry Bishop and to our disservice; our Royal pleasure therefore is, that the said suit be no further prosecuted

against him, and that our Attorney-General do enter a *non vult ulterius prosequi* upon it, and that no other suit be commenced or prosecuted against him for the same, and that our Counsel at law do appear in the behalf of our servant the said Henry Bishop.' About the same time,—a few weeks later,—a formal pardon of all indebtedness to the Crown was granted to Bishop; the document setting forth that Bishop had surrendered his grant on the 6th April; and proceeding that "by reason of some supposed variance between the letters patent, indentures of covenants, and the said late Act for establishing a Post Office, Bishop may be liable to suits and questions concerning the execution of the said office or yearly rent due for same; the king therefore pardons and releases to Bishop all sums of money the Crown may now or hereafter claim of him," etc. Under a cloud of proceedings of this nature Bishop ceased to be Postmaster-General.

The farm of the office was now transferred to Col. Dan. O'Neale for the remaining portion of the seven years' lease granted to Bishop. It would seem that a money consideration was made by O'Neale to Bishop for the transfer of the office; for in a statement of some proceedings (before the Council apparently), it is stated "that Colonel Bishop, before his last appearance at Council, would have taken £4000 for resignation of his grant, but has since advanced to £8000, which he says Mr. O'Neale has offered to him; O'Neale also offers to Secretary Bennet £2000, and £1000 a year during Bishop's lease; this can be no disservice to the Duke of York, who can expect no improvement till Bishop's lease terminates." Apparently O'Neale took up the grant under the whole conditions, privileges, and obligations applicable to Bishop's tenure.

O'Neale, an Irish gentleman, was the king's Harbinger and Groom of the Bed

Chamber. During the rebellion in Ireland, wherein Owen Roe O'Neale was concerned, before the downfall of Charles I., the Marquess of Ormonde engaged Daniel O'Neale, a relative of Owen's (said to be a nephew), in an endeavour to win the latter over to Charles' interest. In this, however, he was unsuccessful. Later, during the Commonwealth, he was declared a delinquent, impeached, and thrown into the Tower; but from this durance he managed to effect his escape. Clarendon says of him that "he made his escape in a dexterous way, clad in a lady's dress." When the Duke of Ormonde crossed over to England from the Continent, in disguise, with the view of ascertaining the hopes then existing for a return of the royal house, he was accompanied by Dan. O'Neale, at the hazard of his life. He also took part in an attempt upon Scotland, for the Royal cause, in 1650, but was apprehended and banished by the

Council, being then put under a written obligation "by which he consented to be put to death, if he were ever after found in the Kingdom." O'Neale is known as the builder of Belsize, at Hampstead, which he is said to have erected at vast expense. He would appear to have been a special favourite of Charles II., for he enjoyed several grants or monopolies besides that of the Post Office.

O'Neale's grant, dating from the 25th March 1663, was for a period of four and a quarter years, at a rental of £21,500, but, like several of the other grantees, he did not complete his term, his death taking place about October 1664. Pepys, in recording this event, adds the remark, "I believe to the content of all the Protestant pretenders in Ireland." O'Neale left, as his widow, Katherine Countess - Dowager of Chesterfield, who was his executrix. The countess was allowed to have the benefit of the remainder of the term; and Henry Lord

Arlington and John Lord Berkeley were empowered, by warrant, to make contracts with Foreign States on behalf of the Post Office, and to act for "the better carrying out of that office."

The interception and inspection of letters in the Post for Government purposes, so largely carried on under the farmers immediately preceding, had the inevitable result of engendering discontent and suspicion, and of driving the public to make use of other means for the conveyance of their correspondence. Recoiling upon the farmers would necessarily be the loss of revenue. No sooner had O'Neale entered upon his trust than steps were taken to put down or curtail the irregularities both inside and outside the Post Office. On the 25th May 1663, a proclamation was issued forbidding all persons except Dan. O'Neale or his deputies to carry or deliver letters for hire, and ordering searches to be made for the discovery of

unlicensed letter-carriers. As evidence of compliance with the royal views, all postmasters were required to produce, within six months, a certificate of their conformity to the Church of England, on pain of dismissal; and a very important clause in the proclamation provided that no letters should be opened by any but the persons to whom they were addressed, "without immediate warrant from a Secretary of State." About the same date Secretary Bennet issued a warrant "to all Mayors and other officers, and particularly to Richard Carter and eight others, specially appointed for twelve months, to search for and apprehend all persons carrying letters for hire without licence from the Postmaster-General, and to bring them before one of the Secretaries, delivering their letters into the Post Office." The searchers were what, in a later period of post-office history, were officially called "apprehenders of letter-carriers."

These restrictive measures had not been a month in operation when O'Neale found it necessary to make a representation with respect to them. He complained that the means at the disposal of Bishop for dealing with offences against the Post Office were quicker in operation than those prescribed to himself; and he expressed himself to the effect that he would rather quit the office than go to law against every offender. O'Neale further says that the Lord Chancellor had declared the opinion that the Secretaries, being superintendents over the Post Office, should take notice of offences. It is quite evident that O'Neale did not find the Post Office a bed of roses.

O'Neale also discovered, soon after entering the Post Office, that while his grant purported to cover all the king's dominions, the postmaster at Edinburgh, Robert Mein, was independent of him, Mein having had a gift of that office made by His Majesty at

Stirling, and confirmed since the Restoration. For the loss of revenue in this quarter, O'Neale claimed a deduction from his rent of £2000 a year.

It may be well here to mention that, shortly after O'Neale's grant of the Post Office, an Act was passed—15 Chas. II. c. 14 (1663)—settling the profits of the business upon James Duke of York and his heirs male. That is to say, the rentals were the claim or right of the Duke of York; but they were subject to payments to be made, under Privy Seal, in favour of the king, to an amount not exceeding £5382, 10s. per annum. By a later Act—22 & 23 Chas. II. c. 27—this reservation in favour of the king was made perpetual.

CHAPTER X

A CURIOUS connection between the Post Office and Music is referred to as existing at this period. To Pepys we are indebted for a knowledge of the fact. In his *Diary*, under date Wednesday, the 5th October 1664, he has the following note :—“To the musique-meeting at the Post Office, where I was once before. And thither anon come all the Gresham College, and a great deal of noble company ; and the new instrument was brought called the Arched-Viall, where being tuned with lute-strings, and played on with kees like an organ, a piece of parchment is always kept moving ; and the strings, which by the kees are pressed down upon it, are grated in imitation of a bow, by the parch-

ment; and so it is intended to resemble several vyalls played on with one bow, but so basely and so harshly, that it will never do. But after three hours' stay it could not be fixed in tune; and so they were fain to go to some other musique of instruments." It might be supposed that the Post Office would be the last place on earth to which "a great deal of noble company" would resort for musical entertainment. But, fortunately, Evelyn in his *Diary* throws some light on the subject by referring to the same meeting in the following terms:—"To our Society.—There was brought a new invented instrument of musiq, being a harpsichord with gut strings, sounding like a concert of viols with an organ, made vocal by a wheele, and a zone of parchment that rubb'd horizontally against the strings." "Our Society" referred to by Evelyn, and Pepys' allusion to Gresham College, as also the fact that the Minutes of the Royal Society record a

meeting on this day, leave little room for doubt that the gathering at the Post Office was a meeting of the Royal Society. Evelyn was one of the original Council when the Society, a couple of years before, obtained its charter, and Pepys became a Fellow some four months after this meeting at the Post Office. But the question arises—Why was the meeting held at the Post Office? The usual meeting-place of the Royal Society was Gresham College. It is necessary to understand that the Post Office, at the period with which we are dealing, was located in the Black Swan, Bishopsgate Street, at a trifling distance, probably, from Gresham College. It was no doubt one of the old city inns, built with an interior courtyard, and possessing a number of rooms more or less adapted for public meetings. Within the inn lived certain of the principal officers of the Post Office. It may be that some of these officers were interested in the

Royal Society, and, as a matter of favour, afforded accommodation at the Post Office for exceptional meetings. At anyrate, an original member of the society, Andrew Ellis, became Deputy Postmaster-General in 1667, and Joseph Williamson, secretary to Lord Arlington (who, by the way, practised music as an amateur), was also a member, the last mentioned (Arlington) becoming Postmaster-General in the same year. Or it may be that, as the members of the Royal Society moved in the best circles, they were granted accommodation for special meetings by the Farmer of the Posts, Col. Dan. O'Neale, who would doubtless be on intimate terms with many of the members. Another supposition is, however, open to us. It may be that the Post Office occupied only a part of the Black Swan premises, that the business of an inn was still carried on within the building, and that the meetings referred to by Pepys were held in a room rented for

the purpose. However this may be, the entertaining diarist has left it on record that he went "to the musique-meeting at the Post Office."

About the time of O'Neale's death, or a little later, occurred the Great Plague of London, 1664-65. The officers of the Post Office did not escape the fatalities of that terrible scourge. The senior clerk of the establishment, James Hickes, with whom the reader must now be familiar, describes, in a petition written shortly thereafter, how the Plague affected the Post Office. He says "that dureing the late dreadfull sickness, when many of the members of the office desert the same, and that betweene 20 and 30 of the members dyed thereof, your petitioner, considering rather the dispatch of your Majesty's service then the preservation of himselfe and family, did hazard them all, and continued all that woefull tyme in the said office to give dispatch and convayance

to your Majesty's letters and pacquetts, and to preserve your revenue ariseing from the same." Now, as in August 1661 the number of officers attached to the London Post Office was only 47, it would appear by Hickes' statement that from one-half to two-thirds of the staff were carried off by the Plague. In a letter written to Jos. Williamson (who, like a great many other principal officers of the Government, had fled from the scourge), dated the 14th August 1665, Hickes gives some further particulars of how things proceeded at that time. He tells Williamson that the postmaster of Huntingdon has been directed to forward his letters, "airing them over vinegar before he sends them." Then he adds, that the chief office is "so fumed, morning and night, that they can hardly see each other; but had the contagion been catching by letters, they had been dead long ago. Hopes to be preserved in their important public work from the stroke of the

destroying angel." Williamson had asked Hickes to give £5 on his behalf to the poor of St. Martins-in-the-Fields; but the latter answered that he did not know where to get it at this time, "where all doubt ever seeing each other again." Hickes adds, that the sickness is increasing, and that their gains at the Post Office are so small that "they will not at the year's end clear £10 of their salaries." The whole business of the City of London seems to have become paralysed. On the 3rd August an ambassador in London wrote to his Government that "there was no manner of trade left, nor conversation, either at Court or on the Exchange." On the 17th of the same month one Richard Fuller wrote that not one merchant in a hundred was left in the City; that every day seemed like Sunday; and that though he had a great deal of money owing to him, he could not get in a penny, nor could he sell any goods.

The concluding portion of Hickes' petition,

above referred to, may merit perusal. In justification of his prayer, he says: "Soe that your petitioner, being now arrived to neere 60 years of age, hath acquired for all the service of his life nothing but weaknesses and severe distempers, which his dayly attendance and assiduitie hath contracted. May it therefore please your most sacred Majesty, in consideration of your petitioner's service and sufferings, his age and weakness, haveing gained noe estate, but a bare subsistence by his hard services, that your Majesty wilbe graciously pleased to give him such a Compensation as may suport and preserve your petitioner and his wife, now in their old age."

Hickes did not, however, immediately retire from the Post Office: he remained in its service some time longer. In another petition at the time of the Restoration, he makes mention of some of his official antecedents. He says that "he sent the first letter from Nantwich to London by post

in 1637, a road now bringing in £4000 a year." He settled the Bristol and York posts, and conveyed letters to the late king at Edgehill and Oxford. He refers to his committal to prison, previously mentioned in these pages, in 1643; and gives us the further information that his aged father was one of the 5000 Royalists who are said to have been slain on the field of Edgehill. Hickes, after his imprisonment, was employed in the king's service; but somehow he got back into the London Post Office, under the Commonwealth, about the year 1651. In yet a further petition, Hickes, again claiming credit for keeping the Post Office open during the Plague, begs that he may have an order to the Commissioners of Prizes, to deliver to him some brown and white sugar granted to him by His Majesty from the ship *Espérance* of Nantes, condemned as a prize at Plymouth.

Shortly after the Plague, the Great Fire

of London broke out. It commenced on the 1st September 1666, and on the 3rd September it reached the Chief Post Office, in Bishopsgate Street. In these early times, as has already been mentioned, some of the officers lived on the premises—the higher officials, at anyrate. Sir Philip Frowde was then one of the Controllers, and James Hicke was senior clerk. On the 3rd September the latter writes to Williamson as follows, dating his letter from the post house at the Golden Lion, Red Cross Street (this inn was probably a branch post office at the time):—“ Sir Philip and his lady fled from the office at midnight for saftey ; stayed himself till 1 A.M., till his wife and children’s patience could stay no longer, fearing lest they should be quite stopped up ; the passage was so tedious, they had much ado to get where they are. The Chester and Irish Mails have come in ; sends him (Williamson) his letters ; knows not how to

dispose of the business. Is sending his wife and children to Barnet."

It is not very clear whether the Post Office in Bishopsgate Street was entirely destroyed,—it was certainly destroyed in part. At any rate, on the 24th August 1667, nearly a year after the fire, an official notice was issued that the Kentish office had been removed "from the Round House to the Grand Office in Bishopsgate Street, for the better dispatch of business." Whether this Grand Office was in the old Black Swan or in other premises we are unable to say. These records make it tolerably clear that the Chief Post Office was still placed in Bishopsgate Street for some time subsequent to the fire.

The early locations of the Post Office in London seem to have been as follows:—

1635.—In Sherborne Lane, King William Street.

1642.—Inland Letter Office (under the Earl of Warwick) in Bartholomew Lane, at the back of the old Exchange.

Removed afterwards to Cloak Lane, Dowgate.

Removed later to the Black Swan, Bishopsgate Street,
where it was at the time of the Great Fire.

Was again in Bishopsgate Street after the Great Fire.

Later it was removed to the Black Pillars in Bridges
Street, Covent Garden.

In the new regulations laid down for working the posts in 1637, it was ordered that each mail should be accompanied by a label, or what would now be called a time-bill or way-bill, and that upon this label the arrivals at the several stages should be noted, instead of upon the letters or packets as had previously been done. The labels used in 1666, specimens of which exist in the Public Record Office, are curious documents. They are like a double sheet of foolscap, but longer and narrower, and are furnished with a printed heading as follows:—



*FOR THE SPECIAL SERVICE AND AFFAIRS
OF HIS MAJESTY.*

HASTE, HASTE.

POSTE-HASTE.

WHEREAS the Management of the Poste Stage of Letters of England, Scotland, and Ireland, is committed to my care and conduct ; These are therefore in His Majesties 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 from London to _____, and from thence to return ; And hereof you are not to fail, as you will answer the contrary at your perils. Given under my hand this _____ past _____ in the morning.

To the Several Postmasters
on _____ Road.

The bills were signed in writing by Phillip Frowde, the then working head of the Post Office.

The stages, and the official distances be-

tween the stages, at this time from London to Berwick, were as follows:—

| | | | |
|--------------|----|--------------------|-----------|
| London | to | Waltham, . . . | 12 miles. |
| Waltham | „ | Ware, . . . | 8 „ |
| Ware | „ | Royston, . . . | 13 „ |
| Royston | „ | Caxton, . . . | 9 „ |
| Caxton | „ | Huntingdon, . . . | 7 „ |
| Huntingdon | „ | Stilton, . . . | 9 „ |
| Stilton | „ | Stamford, . . . | 14 „ |
| Stamford | „ | Witham, . . . | 8 „ |
| Witham | „ | Grantham, . . . | 8 „ |
| Grantham | „ | Newark, . . . | 10 „ |
| Newark | „ | Tuxford, . . . | 10 „ |
| Tuxford | „ | Scroby, . . . | 12 „ |
| Scroby | „ | Doncaster, . . . | 7 „ |
| Doncaster | „ | Ferribrigs, . . . | 10 „ |
| Ferribrigs | „ | Tadcaster, . . . | 10 „ |
| Tadcaster | „ | Yorke, . . . | 8 „ |
| Yorke | „ | Burrowbridge . . . | 12 „ |
| Burrowbridge | „ | N. Allerton, . . . | 15 „ |
| N. Allerton | „ | Darlington, . . . | 12 „ |
| Darlington | „ | Durham, . . . | 12 „ |
| Durham | „ | Newcastle . . . | 12 „ |
| Newcastle | „ | Morpeth, . . . | 12 „ |
| Morpeth | „ | Alnwicke, . . . | 16 „ |
| Alnwicke | „ | Belford, . . . | 12 „ |
| Belford | „ | Berwick, . . . | 14 „ |

The number of despatches weekly to the principal continental cities, and the times

allowed for transit to or from London, were these :—

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Madrid, | once a week, | transit, 21 days. |
| Venice, | „ „ | „ 15 „ |
| Geneva, | „ „ | „ 17 „ |
| Marseilles, | „ „ | „ 11 „ |
| Paris, | twice „ | „ 4 „ |
| The Hague, | „ „ | „ 3 „ |
| Brussels, | „ „ | „ 3 „ |
| Frankfort, | once „ | „ 12 „ |
| Dantzicke, | „ „ | „ 16 „ |
| Stockholme, | „ „ | „ 20 „ |
| Cologne, | twice „ | „ 6 „ |
| Mayence, | once „ | „ 10 „ |
| Hamburg, | twice „ | „ 8 „ |
| Copenhagen, | „ „ | „ 14 „ |
| Leghorne, | „ „ | „ 21 „ |
| Naples, | once „ | „ 25 „ |

About this time Joseph Williamson became editor of the *London Gazette*; and for his purpose, as well as for the use of the Government, all manner of news was collected through the Post Office. Williamson had a rival in the news business in one Muddiman, who had previously had charge of Williamson's correspondence. Hicke

exerted himself to the utmost in opposing Muddiman, writing to his correspondents "to assure them that Muddiman, being dismissed by Williamson from the management of his correspondence, for turning it to his own advantage, could not communicate much news, and that his letters were no longer to be franked." The zeal of Hicke carried him so far as to violate Muddiman's letters; and as listeners often hear unpleasant things of themselves, so Hicke had a like experience in looking into the rival's letters. A copy of one of Muddiman's letters to his correspondents, left in Hicke's own handwriting, runs as follows:—

"James Hicke, a little fellow of the Post Office, having written about him, he informs them that, on a misunderstanding with Williamson about the *Gazette*, he has quitted that office, turned his correspondents to Secretary Morice, and will write fully

and constantly as before. Has discovered Hickes in some practices, and has not therefore given him his letters to sign, nor a copy of them to write after." The following are specimens of the news sent up from the country to Hickes:—

7th March 1665—from Richd. Foster, Newcastle. "In the impress of seamen, the Mayor, Sir Ralph Delaval, and others agreed to make volunteers of Capt. John Wetwyng's pressmasters, who, knowing the haunts of most of the seamen of the town, managed so well that almost as great a number of volunteers and pressed men will be returned as will be had out of Scotland; as none can escape the pressmasters, many come in as volunteers because they will not be pressed; there are hundreds of stout young keel and barge men who could do good service, and hundreds would go volunteers, if they may be employed."

19th March 1665—from Luke Whitting-

ton, Hull. "Col. Morley, the present governor of Hull, sent out several files of Musketeers to Serjeant Bullock's house, two miles off, where a conventicle of 100 to 300 fanatics was held; only 20 were seized, as their scouts were out, and they fled."

10th June 1665—from Edward Suckley, Landguard Fort. "On the 9th, the Duke of York with all his fleet came to Sole Bay, where they are at anchor, with 15 Dutch ships taken and 2000 prisoners; 35 sail are sunk or taken; Opdam, Trump, and Eversen, and other commanders, killed. On our side Lords Fitzherbert and Falmouth, and two other Lords, are killed."

20th October 1666—from Fras. Newby, Harwich. "A mighty eagle lighted yesterday on the ropedhouse on the Green; her wings seven feet long, and one claw 9 inches long; she is thought to have come from some far country, and to have been extremely weary, for she budged not at the

first shot made at her, and was killed by the second. Has sent him a dried salmon," etc.

At this period (1666), the riding work seems to have been very slow indeed. On the 18th May of this year, Hickes gives a return which shows the following results:—

Plymouth to London, at the rate of 3 to 4 miles an hour.

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|----|---|---|
| Yarmouth | " | " | " | 3½ | " | " |
| Bristol Road | " | " | " | 4 | " | " |
| Gloucester | " | " | " | 3½ | " | " |
| Chester | " | " | " | 4 | " | " |
| York | " | " | " | 4 | " | " |

The speed at which the mails should have been carried between Lady Day and Michaelmas was seven miles an hour, so they were travelling at little more than half their speed.

Yet severe measures were taken by the post-office authorities against the post-masters. By a petition of John Paine, post-master of Saxmundham, it is set forth that he was taken into custody "for not having seven horses ready as soon as Sir Philip

Howard expected, though they were ready within half an hour." The postmaster of Witham, Essex, was also summoned before Lord Arlington for neglect, and imprisoned. So great had been the effect of the pressing of men for the fleet at this period that, on the 2nd July 1666, Sir Philip Frowde writes to Williamson, that "most of the postboys on the Kentish Road are pressed, so that unless some course be taken, expresses or envoys cannot come or go."

CHAPTER XI

ON the expiry of O'Neale's grant, the office of Postmaster-General was conferred upon Henry Lord Arlington, the grant in his case being for a period of ten years, dating from Midsummer 1667. During the Commonwealth, Arlington, as Sir Henry Bennet, had been a faithful adherent of the king while in exile on the Continent, and for a time was his representative at the Court of Madrid. As a statesman, after the Restoration, he was held in high esteem by Charles, and is well known as a member of the Cabal. He was a busy man in the affairs of his country, and, consequently, was unable to fulfil, in person, his duties at the Post Office. And so we find that he discharged these duties

by deputies, the two men intrusted in the first instance with the work being his brother, Sir John Bennet, and one Andrew Ellis. Ellis died in 1672, and in his place was appointed his cousin, Colonel Roger Whitley, who continued to hold the office of Deputy Postmaster-General till the close of Lord Arlington's first term in 1677. The precise conditions of Arlington's grant, as regards rent, are not known. The patent roll sets forth that the sum of £5382, 10s. was to be reserved to the order of the king as in previous grants, but that the remaining rent payable by Arlington was to be determined by a tripartite indenture, of the same date as the patent, to be executed between James Duke of York of the first part, Henry Lord Arlington and Lord Berkeley of Stratton of the second part, and Mary Dowager-Viscountess Falmouth of the third part. The terms of this indenture have not apparently come down to us. The third

party to the indenture was the widow of Viscount Falmouth, who fell in the battle with the Dutch off Lowestoft, on the 3rd June 1665, and the arrangement here made was probably with the view of securing her some allowance. Haydn, however, places Lord Arlington's rent, in 1674, at £43,000, but we are unable to say from what source these figures are taken. Lord Arlington's advent to the Post Office in 1667 was marked by measures that were held to be very oppressive by the staff of that office. This is abundantly clear from letters written at the period by James Hicke, the senior clerk. He writes to Williamson, secretary to Lord Arlington, with whom he had intimate relations in connection with the *Gazette* business, as follows:—"Many post-masters are in London, or coming up, in order to their future settlements: understands his lordship's pleasure to be that they must pay a fine; and has given reasons therefor to

those who applied to him for advice, so as to prevent hard thoughts of his lordship, and prepare them for quiet submission." The fine here mentioned is a payment that was demanded for renewal of employment, something after the plan previously in vogue whereby the deputy postmasters obtained their places by purchase. To obtain places by purchase was the common practice during the reigns of James I. and Charles I. Again Hickes writes about himself, that he "expects little compassion, notwithstanding all his services and diligence, if Williamson do not stand firm to him." Then, upon some interference by Sir John Bennet with the clerks sending letters or news books post-free, Hickes says that "he would rather withdraw and live on salt and water," and that he refused to pay for his own letters or news books. He "told Sir John that the governors had rather blamed the clerks for not corresponding more with the postmasters to keep things right, as

by so doing a correspondence had been settled with all parts of the kingdom. Told him there was not a man in the office who did not deserve continuance and encouragement instead of reduction of salary, and that such severity would ruin the office." Sir John, "said he could have 40 officers who wanted employment. Told him that blades with swords at their sides, and velvet jackets, would not do the business, as some had proved very rogues and cheats, and were rooted out. . . . Sir John said that as his lordship had to pay a greater rent than before, other things must be improved." He again writes, that "Sir John Bennett tries to reduce the postmasters to 20s. a mile, which lowers them from £40 to £20 a year; and that he makes and unmakes contracts, so that they fear they may be removed at pleasure. The two porters are reduced from 10s. to 6s. a week, and are no longer to have 6d. for each express sent to Whitehall; the

30 letter carriers are reduced from 8s. to 6s. . . . Will do his best, though told he is designed for ruin when he has served their turn," etc. In a further letter Hickes writes, that he "will wait upon Williamson and his lordship shortly, and if no more kindness is shown him for services done, shall take his leave, and rest upon God. Is hardly dealt with, as whatever care and pains he takes, it contribrites not a candle, nor a cup of beer as formerly granted; and the taking away of these poor petty things is the present reward for the most considerable and advantageous service done. Writes all this to him, as being the only person to whom he can unbosom himself." We will add but one more extract, from a later letter written in Hickes' despair. He intimates a desire to wait upon Williamson, but he pleads that "his service is so severe that he has not two hours' rest between the post going out and coming in, and seldom has half an hour's

sleep, by which means he is becoming decrepid and dropsical." Then he adds, that "he will wait with patience; and if he die without consideration, it will be a comfort to know that he has discharged his duty faithfully in all hazards and hardships."

Incidentally, Hickes mentions in one of these plaintive letters that his salary as senior clerk was £100 a year. He also indicates that Sir John Bennet¹ was no favourite with the staff; for he says of him, that when he comes into the office "it is with such deportment and carriage that no king can exceed."

These letters afford a fair idea of the measures which were being applied to the service under Lord Arlington's Postmaster-Generalship.

The paucity of information left to us of the internal working of the Post Office in its

¹ Andrew Marvell says of Bennet that he "got of the poor indigent Cavaliers' money £26,000, and other wayes near £40,000 more."

earlier years, is doubtless due to the fact that the books in use under the various Farmers of the Post were removed at the termination of each farm, being the property of the farmer, and in most cases these books have disappeared with time. Fortunately, however,¹ one set of books remains, that referring to the period from 1672 to 1677, when, under Lord Arlington, Colonel Roger Whitley was Deputy Postmaster-General. These books contain the correspondence with the deputy postmasters throughout, the country, and afford much interesting information as to the state of the posts in that limited term.

Colonel Roger Whitley, as appears by the *Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports*, was either the individual of that name who, when Governor of Aberystwith Castle, had to surrender to the Parliamentary troops, or a son of that person. He was, at anyrate, an

¹ The property of Sir Philip Mainwaring, Bart., of Peover Hall, Knutsford, by whose courtesy they have been consulted.

attendant upon King Charles II. during his exile, and, in the semblance of a Court then maintained, he held the position of a member of the Privy Chamber. A letter is extant in which the king begs from Whitley the loan of £100. At the Restoration, Whitley received the appointment of Harbinger to the King, and now the appointment of Deputy Postmaster-General. It is not improbable that he was a Cheshire man, from the facts that his daughter was married to Sir John Mainwaring of Peover, in that county, and that Colonel Whitley himself, or his son, was Mayor of Chester in 1693. During the time of Whitley's Deputy Postmaster-Generalship, he represented Flint in the House of Commons. Andrew Marvell says of him that by the farm of the Post Office "he got a vast estate."

In some loose sheets prefaced to the first volume of Whitley's office letter-books, referring apparently to the year 1667, is

a schedule showing a rearrangement of the salaries of the deputy postmasters in the country, when Lord Arlington assumed the farm of the Post Office. The fragment of the document on the opposite page shows how the matter was arranged.

For the renewal of their deputations under the new Postmaster-General, the postmasters were mulcted in a fine or payment equal to one year's salary as adjudged to be proper to the several offices, the rate allowed being about 30s. per mile per annum. Now, as the mails, as a rule, at this time travelled three times a week, the rate per single-journey mile carrying the mail works out at about twopence and one-third of a penny.

It is worthy of note, that on the admission of the deputy postmasters to office they were required to pay, in addition to the fine above referred to, fees for their deeds of deputation amounting to £3, 10s. These fees went to the clerks at head-

CHESTER ROAD.

| Miles (up and down). | Stages. | Postmasters' Names. | Old Salary. | Salary according to Derby Road. | Salary according to judg- ment. | | Fines. |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--|--|--|-------------------|
| 10 Single | London . | J. Bennett | £ s. d. 30 0 0 | £ s. d. 10 0 0 | £ s. d. 21 0 0 | {Viz. for riding, £15 per annum, and £6 per annum for send- ing his horse each night to the office.} | £ s. d. 21 0 0 |
| 10 and 10 | Barnet . | Walter Yorke | 40 0 0 | 20 0 0 | 30 0 0 | | 30 0 0 |
| 10 ,, 10 | St. Albans | Sarah Simpson | 40 0 0 | 20 0 0 | 30 0 0 | | 30 0 0 |
| 7 ,, 10 | Dunstable | Robert Joxon | 40 0 0 | 17 0 0 | 25 10 0 | | 25 10 0 |
| 13 ,, 7 | Brickhill . | John Younger | 40 0 0 | 20 0 0 | 30 0 0 | | 30 0 0 |
| 10 ,, 13 | Towcester | Andrew Snape | 40 0 0 | 23 0 0 | 34 10 0 | | 34 10 0 |
| 14 ,, 10 | Daventry | Valentine Suckborough | 40 0 0 | 24 0 0 | 36 0 0 | 36 0 0 | |

quarters, among whom they were divided, as a payment, apparently, for the drafting and preparing the necessary papers. This must have been a heavy tax upon the postmasters, the sum mentioned being equivalent in value to at least £14 of our present money.

The letters of Roger Whitley on subjects relating to the appointment of deputies, to the riding work, the packet services, and to his dealings with the public, are interesting in many ways. They are somewhat curious in language and style, and show a quaint relationship existing between himself and his subordinates. To the country postmasters, Whitley ordinarily subscribed himself, "your very loving friend," "your assured loving friend," and the like. The salaries of the postmasters were usually arranged after negotiation by letter, and, in many cases, by a subsequent visit from a friend on behalf of the postmasters. Whitley rather discouraged visits from the deputies them-

selves on the subject of salaries, and the object of the friend's visit is not very clear.

While Lord Arlington had reduced the scale of pay in 1667 to something like 30s. a mile per annum, the scale was further reduced under Whitley to about 20s. a mile. The postmasters were not entirely remunerated by salary. They enjoyed privileges not allowed to other innkeepers, which brought them profits and immunities. They had the old monopoly of providing horses for persons riding post, at the fixed rate of 3d. per mile, with 4d. per stage for the guide. They were exempt from serving in the militia and in certain other public capacities, and they frequently had relief from the quartering upon them of soldiers. This exemption did not, however, apply to the regiments of Guards. In some cases, also, they were favoured with a couple of *Gazettes* weekly, out of which they probably made something

by attracting thereby customers to their inns, or by circulating them in their towns and districts. From these various sources did the postmasters receive a return for their services to the posts. Beyond this, however, the riding work brought travellers to their houses; and if the wages paid by the Deputy Postmaster-General were not high, the deputy postmasters probably "took it out" of the public. At anyrate, Colonel Whitley had himself some experience of high charges, as appears by a remonstrance made by him to one of his postmasters, as follows:—
—"I much admire to have a bill of charges sent after me (for I use not to leave any place till these be defrayed), especially since my son paid all that could be demanded, which was judged by all that had skill in these affairs to be extreme (or rather unreasonably) dear. Mr. Davies, I made use of your house out

of civility and kindness to you, but did not expect your exactions. I could have had better entertainment, on better terms, elsewhere. Consider well of it; and as I have always been civil and just to you, so let me receive the like from you."

The postmasters were very dilatory in sending up their moneys to the head office, and admonitory letters were daily sent out urging upon them greater punctuality. These varied in terms from a gentle reminder to the veriest threat. The following is a fair specimen of the latter: — "By yours of the 8th you promise to pay the money due for last quarter when you receive this quarter's accounts. I am resolved no man shall be employed by me (in this office) that does not clear every quarter immediately after it is due. Wherefore, I once more require you to send up your money upon the receipt of this letter, or I will endeavour to get it some other

way, and find a more punctual man for the employment.—Your loving friend.”

Whitley was greatly troubled, or had every reason to be troubled, by the very frequent delays of the mails. It would be tedious to cite case after case, and more interest will be found to lie in the terms of Whitley's letters, two of which run as follows :—

“To Mr. Sadler, Postmaster of Marlborough.

“I can no longer endure your shameful neglect of the mails. I have grievous complaints from Bristol of the prejudice they receive thereby ; and find that it is 7, 8, 9, or 10 hours commonly betwixt you and Chippenham, which is but 15 miles, and ought to be performed in 3 hours. This is a most abominable shame and scandal to the office ; and I tell you, Mr Sadler, in few words (for I will not any more trouble myself to write you on the subject), that if this be not speedily amended, but

the like abuse be committed again, you may expect a messenger for you to answer it before those that will be impartial judges and just rewarders of such shameful neglects. Be advised to look better about your business, or you will suffer for it."

"To Mr Ballard, Monmouth.

"I am tormented with complaints from the gentlemen of Glamorgan and Monmouthshires, of the neglect and slow coming of the mails to these parts. I observe the labels, after they have passed Gloucester, commonly omitted to be dated, that it may not so easily be discovered where the fault lies. I have writ so often on this subject that I am weary of it; and admire you should be so little concerned, when it is evident you are so far from performing your duty as you ought, and are obliged to do. I acknowledge to have much respect for you, but cannot suffer the

public to be wronged by anyone I employ. I pray let this neglect be amended, or it will make a breach ; consider well of it."

The threat held out in the former of these two letters of a messenger being sent for the postmaster was really a serious affair, for it meant the taking the postmaster into custody, and his being probably involved in expenses to the extent of £20 before he could obtain release.

It might be supposed that the farming of the posts was a most unbusinesslike way of carrying on the work of the public conveyance of letters. But there is another side to the question ; and arguments are not wanting that, for the development of the service, the farming was, in some respects at anyrate, a very satisfactory arrangement. The work was committed to the hands and control of a single individual, who was unfettered by Treasury or other restrictions, and who was bound to find a sum sufficient

for the payment of his rent. He was further under the influence of a personal interest in the way of securing a profit to himself, and as a consequence, while his tenure lasted, he put forth his utmost endeavour to make his office useful to the public, and to extend its scope. Further, upon each increase of rent came a new incentive to fresh exertions in the way indicated, and the growth of the Post Office was steady and rapid.

Whitley was a man of a very conciliatory nature: his letters attest it. He was always anxious to please the public. In disputes over irregularities, and matters relating to alleged overcharges, he was most indulgent. In a letter of apology to Dr. Bathurst, President of Trinity College, Oxford, he writes:—"I will not permit him (the post-master) to dispute, but submit my interest to your pleasure, being assuredly safe therein. I have ordered him to wait on you, and not only to do you right in this

matter, but conform with your demands in all things ; and I humbly beseech you to have that goodness and charity for me as to believe me of another composition than to be guilty of such low unworthy practices, but own me as one that is ambitious of the honour of being esteemed, your," etc. To the postmaster of York he writes in a strain advising like conciliatory dealings with the public. "I cannot imagine," says he, "why you should not think yourself sufficiently empowered by my last and former letters to do right to the merchants in all their just demands ; nay further, to gratify them sometimes in little disputes (though they be in the mistake) rather than exasperate and disoblige gentlemen that support the office by their correspondence. If you reflect on my last letter, you will find that I refer it to you and them to do with me (almost) what you please. . . . I hope when you acquaint these gentlemen

with what I write, it will give them satisfaction, especially seeing I make them chancellors in their own case." In a like matter of dispute at Norwich, Whitley writes to the postmaster:—"I know their own ingenuity will prompt them to consider the usefulness of this office to their commerce, and how we work and travail night and day for them. . . . I never found, in all my experience, that I lost anything by submitting to the justice and civility of conscientious men." A similar strain of patient forbearance towards the public runs through the whole of Whitley's correspondence.

Whitley was at all times alive to the interests of the office and himself, by giving additional facilities for the sending of letters. Writing to the postmaster of Oxford, he says:—"In my opinion, the College butlers may be useful to you in receiving and dispersing letters, etc., and I wish you would be in a good correspondence with them; and

let your letter-carriers call there for letters, to be sent to London, immediately before the post goes away, as well as to bring letters to them when the post comes in." It was seen that a field for extended business presented itself at Tunbridge Wells. Accordingly Whitley seizes the opportunity and makes the necessary arrangements, giving the postmaster advice and instructions as follows :—" I have ordered the mails to go from hence sooner than ordinary, that the letters may be at Tunbridge early in the morning ; wherefore fail not to be there ready to receive them, and then make all possible haste with them to the Wells, that the gentry may have them before they go to their lodgings." This arrangement would doubtless appeal to the love of gossip in the frequenters of the Wells, who would naturally have some rivalry to receive the most recent *items*, and to discuss them while they lingered over the morning cup. The post-

master was further ordered to call every post-day "on Mr. Miles, confectioner on the Walk, who will deliver you what letters he receives for London or elsewhere." During the season the posts ran daily between London and Tunbridge.

The by-letters occasioned uneasiness to Whitley, because he was entirely in the hands of the postmasters for the accounting of them. He thus defines them:—"By by-letters I mean all letters of your stage and branch sent by your agents or boys, to any place but London or beyond it." The revenue from this class of letters was a matter of arrangement between the Deputy Postmaster-General and the country postmasters, the former finding it a convenient plan to farm this correspondence to the postmasters. Whitley distrusted the returns of by-letters made by his agents, as the following letters to Postmasters show:—"I wonder at your great mistake in your by-letters; the

account you give me amounts to much more by the year, and yet I have good reason to believe (I speak it without any disrespect or reflection on you) that I have not account of the fourth part of your stage. Your servants may be negligent, and boys abuse you; however, I am at the loss; but resolve, where I find any injustice of that kind hereafter, to sue the bond, and doubt not but some postmasters will be so kind and honest as to give me true information." Again, "I find a great decay in our by-letters of late. I hope you are a person of more integrity than to design (by this means) to beat down the price. Do not do it; I have other measures to go by; you will but wrong yourself as well as me. You do not offer the third part of the value. However, to avoid suspicion, the trouble of accounts, and possibly suits at law, I will let you have it for thirty pounds the year (Hull gives fifty), and take the benefit of by-letters into the

bargain. You know I could have other chapmen." Colonel Whitley may have had painful experience of law suits, for he expresses himself to one of his postmasters in the following strain:—"Being forced by Mr. Vaughan's ill-payment to have recourse to the law to get my money, I cannot meet with a sincere attorney, but they juggle and will not serve the writ, pretending they cannot; wherefore, relying much on your kindness and ingenuity, and having no other way to get my right, I send the enclosed writs to you." He gives directions as to the serving of them, and adds, that "it will be an extraordinary kindness to me."

On the 5th July 1673, Whitley wrote his views on the subject of conformity to the postmaster of Belford (Mr. Carr) in the following safe terms. In some respects the letter is amusing. It runs:—"I think it not only convenient but necessary for every

postmaster to conform to the late law about the sacrament and oaths ; not that it will anyway concern me or this office, only in the safety and wellbeing of those that relate to it. I pray consult the law itself, being too nice a point for me to give my opinion of, and the judges themselves are shy in the matter ; but on the one hand you are sure not to err, therefore that is the safest way." The postmaster of Ware having, by a like omission, got himself into trouble, is thus written to :—

" I am sorry to hear that information is given into the Exchequer of your neglect in not taking the oath of allegiance and supremacy and the test lately ordained by Parliament.¹ I fear this may be troublesome to you, it being unsafe for anyone to bear an office that will not conform to the laws established."

¹ The declaration required was in the following terms :—
" I do believe that there is not any transubstantiation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or in the elements of bread and wine, at or after the consecration thereof, by any person whatsoever."

CHAPTER XII

As compared with the sober and temperate style of official correspondence in the present day, when a civilly expressed request is generally held to convey all the force of a direct command, Whitley's letters to his deputies savour of smartness and incisiveness that are somewhat striking. Mr. Pye, the deputy at Morpeth, having quarrelled with some of the postmasters at neighbouring post stages, by sending travellers bound for Scotland by the road through Oowler (Wooler) instead of by Belford and Berwick, Whitley had to fall upon him. One of Whitley's letters to Mr. Pye is as follows:—"I understand you well and your designs, but you shall not prevail with me (for all your

specious arguments or applications to great persons) to countenance you in your indirect ways. As for the Scottish lord that *pufft* at my letter, I value it not. I would rather he did so than applaud me for doing otherwise," etc. The postmasters were very tenacious of their rights as to the posting work, which was probably the most remunerative part of their business, and they did not stick at trifles in asserting these rights. The postmaster of Dartford, Mr. Glover, got into trouble in December 1675 by laying hands upon several French gentlemen of quality, Monsieur Vendome among the rest. It appears that these persons had hired horses in London for their journey; but on reaching Dartford they were pulled off their horses, and forced to take post horses from the deputy.

Down to the year 1673, Liverpool was without a horse post. Correspondence took place in that year between Whitley and the Mayor of the town with the view of

improving the service. In one letter Whitley writes :—" I agree with you that the trade of that industrious place ought to have quicker despatch in its correspondence, and may deserve a horse post as well for expedition of letters as conveniency of travellers ; but if the charge be imposed on the office, the benefit will not balance the expense." Negotiations were thereafter entered upon with Alderman Chanler of Liverpool, with a view to his taking up the work. The proposal was "to carry the Preston mail from Warrington to Wigan (as it is now done), to send to Liverpool by a horse post, also to Prescod and Ormskirk (if a foot post will not be as convenient to this latter), and to carry the mail back again to Knutsford ; and I hope you will do this for forty pounds per annum." Previous to 1673 Irish letters from Manchester were carried up to London, to be thence forwarded to their destination by way of Chester and Holyhead, from

which latter place the Irish packets sailed. In this year, however, a more direct circulation was arranged: the Manchester letters being carried south to Stone in Staffordshire, where, striking the post road for Holyhead, they were carried forward with the London mails for Ireland. Between London and South Wales the transit of letters was of the slowest possible kind, and gave rise to much complaint. On the 24th July 1673, Mr. Courcy, postmaster of Pembroke, is written to on the subject in these terms:—"Yours of the 16th came not to hand till the 23rd, the usual despatch of the South Wales posts, 7 or 8 days in the way; if you can tell me who opens your bag I know how to have satisfaction, but without that discovery I am in the dark, and know not what to do."

In London at this period there must have been but one delivery a day by letter-carrier. This appears by the terms of a complaint

made to the postmaster of Harwich concerning the late arrival of the mails, which resulted either in the keeping the "letter-carriers in the office to attend your bag, or not issue out your letters till the next morning." The country mails were at this time due to arrive in the very early hours of the morning. In 1676, there were at least seven branch post offices in London for the receipt of letters for the mails, and from these offices letters were required to be sent up to the central office nightly as despatches were made every week-day for one or other of the roads, or for foreign parts.

The packet service was the occasion of much trouble and anxiety. The French and Flanders packet boats sailed from Dover, and those for Holland from Harwich. Whitley had a great deal of correspondence with the agents at these two ports on the subject of their irregular proceedings. To

the agent at Dover he writes:—"There is an information that the boats stay at Calais (sometimes) 24 hours after the mail is on board to take in goods, and that occasions the irregular coming over of the mails." The agent at Harwich is informed that "the Commissioners of Customs complain that you refuse to enter and pay custom for some rack wine which you (or some of your masters) lately took up at sea; they are much offended at it." The same agent has conveyed to him, "Lord Arlington's command to require the masters of the Holland packet boats not to refuse passage to any English soldiers that shall desire to come over in their boats; but that care be taken, as soon as they arrive in England, to secure them and put them into safe custody. This you are to give them in charge and see it strictly observed." The soldiers here referred to were doubtless deserters from the English force in Holland, with which

country we were then (1672) at war. Peace, following this war, was proclaimed in London on the 28th February 1674, and the same night an express was despatched to the Duke of Lauderdale, a member of the Cabal, then at Edinburgh. It no doubt contained tidings of the peace. The instructions issued to the postmasters for the special urgency of the express were as follows:—
“All postmasters between London and Edinburgh are hereby required to forward this express with all possible expedition, and not detain it in any stage for the ordinary maile, but hast itt away as soon as received, as they will answer the contrary.

“Dated at the Generall Letter Office in London past six att night this 28th Feb. 1674.”

Colonel Whitley was greatly annoyed by the neglect to secure letters from the merchant fleets when they arrived off our coasts. On this subject he writes to the

agent at Deal:—"I am much troubled to find so small an account of letters from the great merchant fleet that came lately into the Downs. Such a fleet was wont to allow me 7 or 8000 letters, and now I have not so many hundreds. There was certainly a great neglect in your boats, which, turning so much to my loss, I know not how to pass by." In a similar matter the agent at Dover is remonstrated with. "I wonder," says Whitley, "how I came to be disappointed of the great abundance of ship letters that came in with the last fleet, and were brought on shore at Dover by the pursers and others—great bags and portmantlesfull. Here they are carried to the Exchange and round the town in great quantities, and those they cannot get off they bring to this office. The parties confess that they brought them on shore at Dover without control." Dissatisfaction was also given through the irregular carriage of

freight by the packet boats. "I have yours of the 3rd," says Whitley to the Dover agent, "but do not understand why your masters should pretend to such a privilege as to carry over silver or any commodities in the packet boats without giving me account thereof. I find that that practice hath been longer, and is more used than you mention. I expect satisfaction. The Harwich packet boats would not carry over oysters without my order, and give me account of all they do; but I know it much otherwise at Dover." The good opinion thus expressed of the virtues of the Harwich people was not of long duration, for a few days later we find Whitley writing the agent there in the following very irate fashion:—"You are very brisk in yours of the 6th; perhaps I may be so too when I see you. I deny that you ever told me of your bringing over any goods in the Packet Boats upon your own or any merchant's

account without paying for them ; and why should you do it? Are not the boats mine? Should I suffer you or others to drive so profitable a trade in my boats, and by the assistance and management of my servants (as those seamen are that I pay wages to), and I to have no benefit for freight, nor thanks, but the contrary? I need not tell you how this comes to be a prejudice to me ; you are not so ignorant as to require information in the case ; you are free to follow any lawful callings, but not at my charges, in my boats, and with my seamen. You cannot justify it (as you say you can) ; but I will justify that in this and other things you are ungrateful, and (perhaps I shall make it appear) unjust too. I have deserved better from you."

On the 21st September 1675, a letter is written to the agent at Deal, wherein Whitley puts his finger on the cause of the neglects at that port. "I am daily

tormented," says he, "with the complaints of the merchants, and my ears are filled with the noise of seamen's wives and others concerning the neglect of their letters, who are now fully resolved to redress themselves to His Majesty. . . . It will be proved that your boats very seldom go on board with letters, to force the seamen to come ashore to drink at your house. . . . They go on board other ships with brandy and other liquors."

The boats sailing in the packet service to and from Holland were Galiot-Hoys, of which three were regularly engaged—two of 60 tons and one of 40 tons, and in each six men were employed. The tonnage of these boats was not greater than that of a decently-sized Stonehaven fishing boat; yet they were supposed to provide adequate accommodation for passengers. In 1675, the passenger fare from Harwich to Holland was 12s. In February

1674, a proposal was on foot for conveying letters from Flanders and Holland to Spain and Portugal by way of England, but it does not appear that the plan was given effect to. The idea was to set up a packet service for this purpose from Plymouth to some port in Spain, the boats to be employed being of 40, 50, or 60 tons, "with good conveniency of cabins, and able to encounter storms," and furnished with crews of not under seven or eight good men. In one of his letters on this subject Whitley writes, that "the gentleman that demands £50 per mensem for a vessel of 60 tons is much out of the way"; and he adds, "I have two of that burthen to Holland at a less rate." A service of this kind from Plymouth is stated to have been kept up in Cromwell's time; but possibly the reference is to the packets set up by Charles I. when he was in the West of England and at war with

the Parliamentary party. The port of despatch then was Weymouth.

Whitley was very sympathetic over the hardships to which the seamen were exposed in his service. To the agent at Dover he writes, on the occasion of a disaster:—"I am very much afflicted for the loss of Mr. Lambert, who had the character of an honest, able man. It was a great mercy that the rest were preserved. I pray God send us good accounts of our other boats, with better weather. We must resign ourselves and all our concerns to the will of God, and depend on His providence." On another occasion, he expresses himself thus:—"I pray God keep our men and boats in safety these terrible storms; I assure you my heart aches often for them." About the same period, Whitley deplores the loss of the captain of one of the Dublin packet boats, who was washed overboard.

Reference has been made to the packet boats conveying passengers as well as mails. These, it seems, were not always kept in a tidy condition, and the Deputy Postmaster-General had to speak his mind on the subject, drawing an unpleasant contrast between his own countrymen and foreigners. "Your boats," says Whitley to the agent at Harwich, "are also rendered so contemptible, so nasty, ill provided, and out of order, that we do not only lose many passengers, that will not venture with them, but it is a reproach to our nation to have such bad accommodation, when our neighbours are so neat and exact in theirs." In some respects the reproachful contrast is one not confined to Whitley's days.

Not only was it the case that separate rooms were not always provided at the country post offices for the treatment and safe custody of letters, but the following complaints from the Deputy Postmaster-General

prove that at certain places the letters were very carelessly dealt with. To the postmaster of Rochester, Whitley writes:—"I hear there is great neglect in your sending out of letters, and that there is a great abundance of them scattered about your house, especially in your chamber and upon the tester of your bed. This shows want of order in your business. You should get some room apart to be your office, in which only you should bring your mails, open and close them, and where you should sort letters, and let nobody come into it but yourself." The position of affairs at Hereford was perhaps worse. In June 1675, the postmaster, Mr Philpotts, is thus written to:—"I have complaints from persons of very good credit, that their letters are not safe in your hands; they do not directly accuse you, but allege that your office being kept in the prison, it gives opportunity to prisoners, by countenance

with some of your servants, to intercept letters of business with writings, and whereby the parties concerned are much damnified and the office abundantly scandalized."

At Witham, on one occasion, the mail was allowed to lie at the stage from ten o'clock at night till six the next morning, "the servants refusing to rise out of their beds to forward it." At times the mail seems to have been intrusted to anyone who could ride a horse. For carelessness in a matter of this kind the postmaster of Sittingbourne was challenged, in July 1675, in the following terms:— "Now have you completed the score of your neglects and miscarriages, in sending the Flanders mail yesterday by a stranger, a Dutchman (without any guide or servant of your own), who suffered it to be broke open on the way, the Secretaries of States' packets and letters to be visited and tore, and many

letters lost," etc. About the same time, the postmaster of Rochester offended in a like fashion. "You sent the mail," writes Whitley, "by a seaman last Saturday, who rid alone, thinking he had some gentleman's portmantle behind him; but coming to Dartford, and understanding it to be the mail of letters, he presently swore that if he had known what it had been, he would have cast it into some ditch by the way, for he scorned to be a post-boy." The post-boys employed were not certainly of high character in all cases. In an inquiry respecting the opening of a mail by the way, Whitley writes thus to the postmaster of Colchester:—"I have made inquiry what has become of the Post Boy that formerly lived at Whitechapel, whom you rendered such a notorious rogue, whose father was hanged, and he deserved the same; and I find you have got him to your house, which I much wonder at, you

knowing him to be such a wicked villain. I cannot conceive any place to be more likely for such rogueries to be committed than where such are employed." The boys employed were in some cases very young. About delays at Sarum, Whitley writes :— "I am apt to believe the boys that ride are very little, and so discouraged in a dark night, which may be the chief occasion of the slow coming of the mails." Well might the little fellows be discouraged in a midwinter's night, riding through lonely country, along ill-kept roads lying at times under water and full of ruts and stones. Frequent mention is made at this time of the waters being out covering the ways, and one postmaster was desired to provide "able and high horses" in order to secure the forwarding of the mails. In one of Whitley's letters, the road from London to Dover is described as the "best and fairest in England," although, compared with our

own fine system of highways, it may have been a very sorry affair. But relatively it carried the palm at the time we are dealing with. The horses supplied for riding the posts were at some places very poor creatures, and in certain cases the postmasters appear not to have had any horses of their own. On the 1st December 1674, the postmaster of Berwick was complained of for not having a horse and boy to carry the mail for Edinburgh, and for having sent it forward to Cockburnspath by carriers, thus causing great delay. On the 15th January 1675, the following letter on this subject was written to Mr. Glover, postmaster of Dartford :—“This day your boy brought the mail on his back to the office, about one o'clock in the afternoon. His horse, as he says, died on the way; which was, as I understand, one that was hired, and very unfit for His Majesty's service, your boy having been often forced to drive

him before him. I am also informed that you keep your own horses for posters, and hire one for the mail, though never so bad." The Post Office certainly did not get the best of the animals.

During the time of Whitley's control of the posts, the Foreign mails were closed not only by means of a seal, but also by a chain which in some way rendered them more secure.

Great care was taken to avoid complaints from Members of Parliament. On occasions when Parliament was about to assemble, or to break up, the postmasters were put upon their guard by means of a circular-letter addressed to them. On 11th March 1675, the following letter was sent out on the subject :—" These are to advise you that the Parliament being speedily to assemble, it is probable that many members may come up by Post, wherefore I desire your especial care for the speedy and well accommodating

of them for their satisfaction, and the honour of your employment. Also to receive and deliver their letters free during their time of privilege."

On the 30th July 1675, the agent at Dover was instructed to facilitate the bringing over from the Continent of certain tradesmen, as follows:—"His Majesty being informed that there are several weavers and other handy craftsmen that are desirous of transporting themselves for England, to whom His Majesty (being desirous to give encouragement) has commanded me to order you to give directions to your masters of the packet boats to give passage to such of these weavers and handy craftsmen as shall bring passes with them from Mr. Linch, Consul of Ostend, or His Majesty's Minister at Brussels, and are desirous to come and inhabit here in England."

Whitley had a long and troublesome correspondence with Mr. Mein, the postmaster

at Edinburgh, on the subject of settling the remuneration to be made to the latter as agent for the English correspondence. Mein held an independent appointment from the king as head of the Letter Office in Edinburgh, and Whitley was not his master. The terms on which the business was arranged are set forth in a letter to Mein of the 8th August 1674, to this effect:—"I am content to allow you your full $\frac{1}{3}$ th of unpaid letters from hence, with your £20 salary from the commencement of my time till our late agreement of £100 per annum takes place; and upon examination you will find that it exceeds what you have now contracted for and are content to accept of." At this time two boys were employed in Edinburgh to deliver the letters; and the rate of postage for one ounce weight from London to Edinburgh was 2s. 2d.

Whenever the king went to reside at Newmarket, Windsor, or elsewhere, daily posts were put on between London and

the Court, the deputy postmasters being required to keep additional horses at call for the service.

It is recorded that in the Midlands of England more irregularities happened with the post riders than elsewhere. This appears by a letter to the postmaster of Lichfield in 1675, wherein it is stated that "your riders are oftener lost in the night, and have more unfortunate accidents happen to them on your road, than half England besides."

Undelivered letters were returned by the deputies to the head office in London once in three months. At this early period (1677), the term "Dead Letters" was already applied to these returns. Whitley had reason to suspect unfair dealing in connection with returned letters at the office of a certain deputy, to whom, in December 1672, he wrote the following letter, which explains itself:—
"This day Mr. Lambe brought me a parcell of Returned Letters from you to ye damage

of above eight pounds; ye losse being soe considerable and unusuall made me more inquisitive into the particulars; and opening 3 or 4 bundles, I found that almost all of them had bin apparently opened; which causes my greater admiration (wonder), comeing from soe discreete a person (and one of soe much integrity and reputation as Mr. Gloyne is esteemed to be). If they were opened by ye partyes to whom they were directed, they ought to have bin first payd for; when ye contents are read, most letters are of small use afterwards. Perhaps ye persons you imploy may buy such letters at easy rates, and so impose them on you. I cannot tell how to understand it, but under one of these notions, and soe must returne them to you; resolving not to submit to such a practise, whether it proceed from ye ignorance, corruption (or perhaps want of care and diligence) of your officers; the respect I have for you keeps me from any

reflection on your self; onely I must oblige you to more circumspection hereafter, for if the like were done in other stages, wee should not be able to support ye charge of ye office."

Notwithstanding the sharp and severe terms of many of Whitley's admonitions to the postmasters, his letters contain repeated offers to serve and oblige them, if only they would do their duty to the office; and the same spirit of kindly disposition is shown towards persons outside the service. In reply to an application from the agent at Harwich, in the matter of finding employment for a relative, Whitley writes:—"By yours of the 13th, I understand that a relative of yours will be in London this summer, with a design to get some employment, wherein I should think myself happy could I be serviceable to him; but the world is so altered of late to the disadvantage of young gentlemen in

point of education, that there is little encouragement to be had. In times past (before the wicked rebellion), a nobleman, or great officer of State or Court, would have half a score or a dozen gentlemen to attend him, but now all is shrunk into a *valet de chambre*, a page, and 5 or 6 footmen; and this is part of our cursed Reformation. If I can serve you in this or anything else, you shall always find me to be," etc. In the matter of a lost horse, belonging to a private friend, Whitley engages the services of a postmaster in the West of England, with a view to its recovery. He writes thus to the postmaster:—
"Sir John Hanmer (a worthy gentleman) hath lately lost a large white gelding, about 15 hand fulls high, with a blew velvet saddle, silke and silver fringe, silver nailes, etc.; the horse trots and gallops, but not pace. He was stole from Chester, and heares is seised on at Bristoll. I pray

enquire after it ; and if it be there, secure it, and give me speedy notice, whereby you will oblige," etc.

This kindly spirit was not altogether on the side of the Deputy Postmaster-General, for repeated instances are given of good offices performed for Whitley, and of presents made to him by the postmasters. In many cases Whitley's letters commence with an acknowledgment in brief terms, thus: "With thanks for your kind present." It may be ungenerous to put a meaning upon these presents apart from mere feelings of kindness on the side of the postmasters; but there is reason to suspect that the presents often took the shape of money, and were the complement of expectation on the part of the Deputy Postmaster-General. In one acknowledgment Whitley says: "I have received your token, and thank you for it, as coming from an honest man for whom I have a great respect and kindness."

The "honest man" was the postmaster of Manchester. Replying to a letter of the postmaster of Doncaster, he remarks: "I thought the seven guineas you sent by Mr. Butcher had been in recompence for the damage done me last year in your stage in the matter of By-Letters; or a present upon some other account; but it seems you intend it to clear what you owed to the office at midsummer."

Reference has been made to the exaction of fines upon the postmasters at the time of Lord Arlington's assuming the position of Postmaster - General. The deputations received by the postmasters were generally for a term of a few years; and on their renewal, the practice appears to have been to make a present to the Head of the Post Office, or at anyrate a present was expected. This seems very clear by some letters of instruction sent by Whitley to his confidential servant, Saladine, when on a

visit of inspection in the West of England. In one letter he says: "Haste the settling all my business (but on safe terms), that you may haste homewards; get the £10, and what you can for the expense of this journey, and get what you can for me from the several Postmasters by way of Fine, or Gratuity, for renewing their Deputations." The meaning here is plain enough, but in a further letter Saladine is given more particular instructions how to proceed in the matter:—"I think," says Whitley, "I shall renew (the deputations) but for a year, because Lord Arlington hath no more time in the farm, but doubtless the Postmasters will be continued if they deserve it. Get what Gratuities you can from them, without lessening their salaries; or if any will increase their salaries, they must fine proportionably—this to yourself." "At Sarum nothing is to be done. Let him know I am so sensible of his civilities

that he shall be continued as long as I have to do in the office. If he offers of his own accord to make me a present, receive it; or you may drop some words as if others did it, and is usual upon renewing Deputations; but not propose it; and make him sensible that I have a greater kindness for him than any of the rest. If you can prevail fairly with Mr. Westcombe to make a Present, I pray do it; but he is a touchy person, and must be gently handled."

Some of the presents and civilities were, however, of a less questionable character. From Beccles he receives a red-painted box containing a turkey; from Shrewsbury, a cheese; from Newcastle, a salmon; and he sends his humble thanks to the gentlemen of Amsterdam for their kind present. To Captain Langley, the agent at Harwich, Whitley writes: "I have received a single barrel of oysters by a Colchester waggon, for which I thank you." The carriage of

the barrel is stated to have been 9d. At another time he acknowledges to have received from Harwich ten lobsters; and to the agent at Edinburgh he writes: "I thank you heartily for your kind present of herring. I will send to look after them, and they shall be disposed of as you desire." To the postmaster of Colchester, Mr Hollister, the following request is made:—"I desire you to send me every week two barrels of Oysters, and keep an account of them, and you shall be allowed for them in your account. But let them be the best; or when you cannot get the best, send none." The best were not always forthcoming; for some months later, 20th March 1677, Mr Hollister is informed that: "The last oysters you sent me were so bad they could not be eaten, and one of the last was but half full; if you cannot help me with better, and better ordered, I desire to have no more; but if you could get such as

are very good, and contrive some way to seal the barrels, that they may not be abused, you would oblige me to send me 4 barrels a week for a month to come." To the postmaster of Hull, Mr Mawson, Colonel Whitley makes the following request :—" I pray do me the kindness to bespeak two barrels of Ale (as good as you can get), and send it with as much speed as you can to Monsieur Muilman, at the Post Office in Amsterdam. Let it be sent by an honest, careful (*man*), that will not suffer it to be wronged by the way, and presented from me to him. Pray take care that it be excellent, and speedily sent, and let me know the cost ; I will remit the money."

The sums due to the country postmasters for conveying expresses on His Majesty's special service were claimed every six months by the deputies, whose accounts under this head had to be accompanied by an affidavit sworn before a Master in

Chancery or other Magistrate. The amounts were afterwards obtained from the Exchequer ; but it is mentioned that the claims for 1674 were only paid shortly before January 1677, while those for 1675 were still outstanding at that period (1677).

Whitley's correspondence in 1677 discloses a very curious fact, and one that has been entirely overlooked or forgotten, namely, that the Duke of York, afterwards James II., had at one time the Post Office in his own hands ; and he has a claim, therefore, to be ranked as one of the early Postmasters-General. On the 12th April of that year, Whitley wrote the following circular-letter to 155 postmasters, probably the whole number of postmasters at the time :—

“ The Farm of this office expiring at Midsummer, and his R.H. the Duke of York having declared his pleasure to take it then into his own management, commands me to give you notice of it, requiring you (if

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“The Farm of this office expiring at Midsummer, and his R.H. the Duke of York having declared his pleasure to take it then into his own management, commands me to give you notice of it, requiring you (if

you intend to continue your employment as Postmaster of —) to come yourself, or authorize some other to appear for you at this office, before the 10th of May next ensuing, in order to your future contract; and in the mean time to send me the names, quality, and abode of your security, that there may be time to enquire after their sufficiency. If you fail herein, care will be taken to provide another for your stage, that the Public may not suffer by your neglect. I expect your speedy answer, and remain," etc.

Some of the postmasters thought the occasion favourable for asking an increase of pay; but Whitley gave them no hopes of success, to one of them writing that "his R. Highness will expect all Postmasters should serve him on their present terms." Three months after the first intimation of the proposed change, a further circular-letter was issued to all the deputies

as follows :—“This is to give you notice, that as money grows due to the office since Midsummer last, you are to order payment thereof, by bill or otherwise, to Sir Allen Absley, his R.Hs. the Duke of York's Treasurer and Receiver - General, making your bills payable to him or his order, enclosing them under cover directed to him ; herein you are not to fail.” These letters seem to leave no doubt that the Duke of York actually entered upon the management of the Post Office, and carried it on (it may be nominally) for a time in his own hands.

In connection with this royal direction of the posts, however, the historical records produce a strange complication ; because, according to the Patent Rolls of 29 Charles II., a grant of the office of Postmaster - General for life was made to the Earl of Arlington, dating from June 1677, the period when his previous grant for ten

years expired. Lord Arlington died on the 28th July 1685. Whether it be that the Duke of York had entered upon the new situation in the belief that he could draw to himself the whole profits of the affair without bearing any serious personal burden of troubles and anxieties, and found it far otherwise ; or whether the new duties interfered in an unexpected way with his pursuits of hunting, hawking, and love-making, and that he threw aside the more troublesome business in consequence, does not appear. We know from the correspondence that Whitley, after his term expired, was to continue the management of the office for the Duke of York ; and as (according to Evelyn), Arlington was "now beginning to decline in favour (the Duke of York being no great friend of his)," it may be that the Duke was dissatisfied with the returns from the office, and entered into it in the position of Deputy Postmaster-General,

aided by Whitley in the practical management.

As regards Arlington's extended tenure of the position of Postmaster-General, it should be remembered that he had not only been intimately associated with the King as a Minister of State, but had become nearly connected in another way—through the marriage of his only daughter and heiress, when an infant, in 1672, to the natural son of Charles II. by the Duchess of Cleveland. The son-in-law afterwards became the Duke of Grafton; and Arlington's continued connection with the Post Office may have been arranged by the king with a view to enhancing the Postmaster-General's fortune in the interests of the Duke and Duchess of Grafton. All this, however, will remain for elucidation when the history of the period is better known.



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