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HISTORY OF
THE POST-OFFICE PACKET SERVICE





Frontispiece.

WINDSOR CASTLE—CAPT. ROGERS, COMMANDER.

HISTORY OF
THE POST-OFFICE PACKET
SERVICE

BETWEEN THE YEARS 1793-1815

COMPILED FROM RECORDS, CHIEFLY OFFICIAL

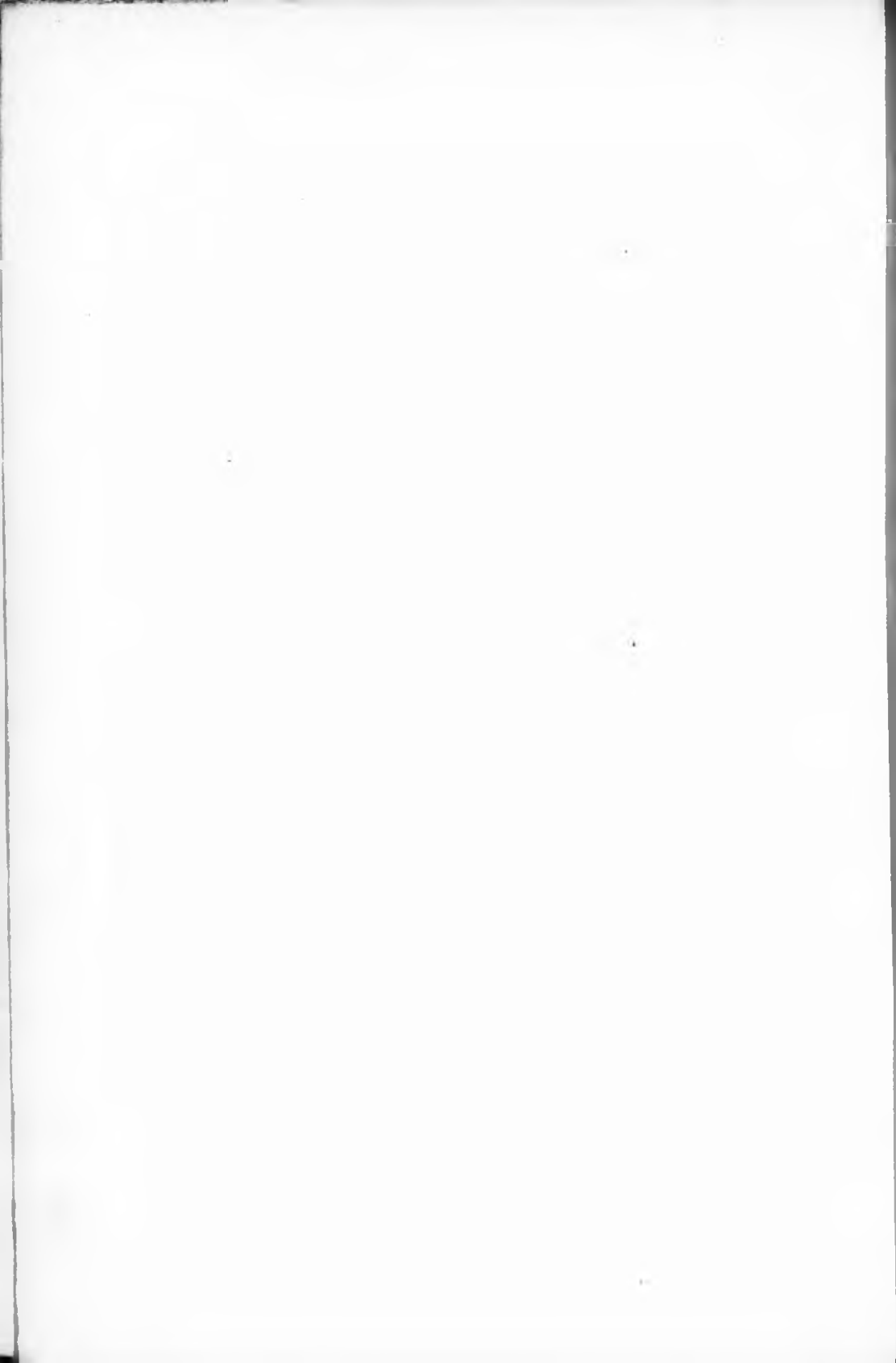
BY

ARTHUR H. NORWAY

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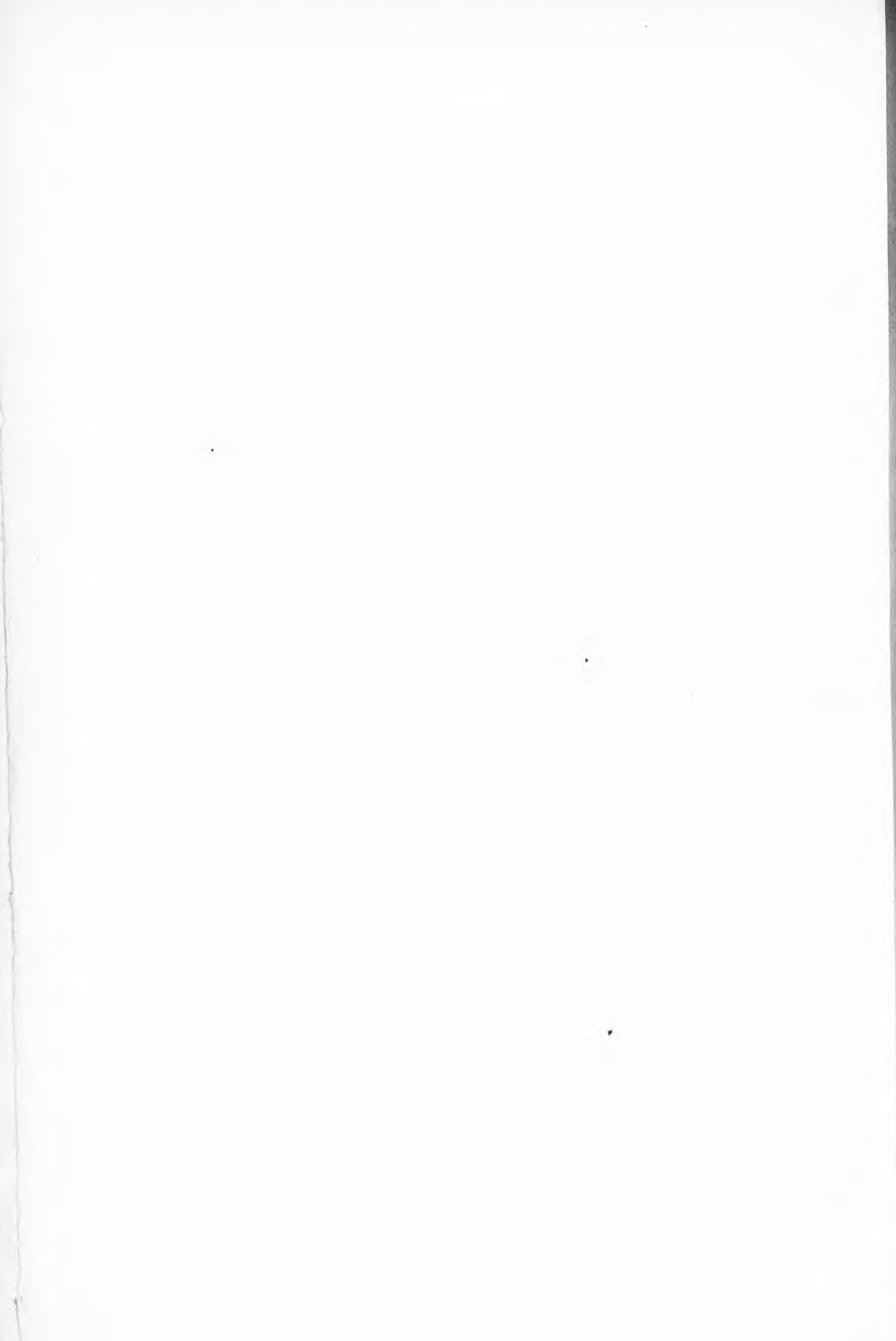
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NOTE.

My acknowledgments are due to Mrs. Ball, of Roscarrach, Falmouth, for permission to make use, in illustrating this work, of four pictures in her possession, namely, two of the action of the "Duke of Marlborough" with the "Primrose," one of the "Windsor Castle," and one of the "Hinchinbrooke." To Mr. Burton, of the Old Curiosity Shop, Falmouth, I am indebted for an illustration of Russell's Wagons; and to many other friends, in Cornwall and elsewhere, for very kind assistance and advice.



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CHAPTER I.

FALMOUTH IN THE OLDEN TIME.

NO nation can afford to forget its past history ; and England, of all others, whose power is so deeply rooted in sea-fights, should not be careless of her naval records. After many generations of almost ceaseless warfare, there has been a long breathing time of peace, an interval which could not be better spent than in collecting and recording the actions of those brave men whose struggles ensured our ease, and preserving them for our own benefit, as well as for that of posterity.

This task has been accomplished long ago as regards the great sea-battles ; and most of even the lesser fights in which the ships of the Royal Navy were engaged have been sufficiently described. But there remains a service distinguished over and over again, an ancient service, highly useful to the public, and associated with a great department of State, whose history has been left untold till all the officers connected with it have passed away, and the personal recollections which are the life-

blood of such a narrative are lost to us irretrievably—I refer to the Post-Office Packet Service.

The very name has grown unfamiliar to our ears. It brings nothing to our minds, recalls no train of recollections, stirs up no dim memories. For the whole world, with the exception of a few people in Cornwall and on the east coast of England, the Packet Service is dead, like all the men who made it, and fought in it, and laid their lives down for it. It was a fighting service, yet the naval histories scarcely mention it. It was for a century and a half the regular vehicle of travellers; yet among the multitude of books which treat of the journeys of our grandfathers, few indeed take note of the fact that they sometimes crossed the ocean. Its records, containing many a story which other nations would have set with pride in the forefront of their history, have lain neglected for eighty years. Some have perished through the carelessness of three generations; some were wantonly destroyed as possessing neither use nor interest. Even in Falmouth itself, so long the head-quarters of the Service, the actions which distinguished it are forgotten; and you may search for half a day before finding some old sailor, mending his nets in the stern of a boat, in whose memories those stories linger which have never been collected, and which few indeed of his fellow-townsmen have cared to remember.

Seeing, therefore, that this oblivion has descended on the Service, it will be necessary at the outset to

give some description of its nature and functions, of the men who constituted it, the voyages they performed, the profits they made, and so forth. This will best be done by describing the life of a single station ; and, as it was at Falmouth that the largest number of Packets was stationed, and the most important business transacted, there is no other station so suitable for the purpose.

The town of Falmouth was associated most intimately with the Post-Office for more than a century and a half. Indeed, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the town was made by its connection with the Mail Service. Certain it is that when the Post-Office selected Falmouth in 1688 as the point of embarkation and departure for the newly established Spanish mail boats, the Department found not an old established town and port, but a place as yet of the smallest consequence, only recently incorporated, possessing hardly any trade in spite of its advantages of situation, and hampered in its growth by the jealousy of neighbouring towns. In all those traditions of the past which made the glory of Fowey, Looe, Penryn, and a dozen other ports along the coast, the Falmouth men had no share whatever. Their town was a bare hillside when the Fowey men vindicated their claim to rank among the Cinque Ports. It was nothing but a cluster of cottages when the Armada sailed up the Channel.

This very absence of traditions and of vigorous commercial life made the place more suitable for a

Post-Office station, and may have largely influenced its choice. It would not have served the Department nearly so well to send its officers to a port where their affairs must have taken rank among other transactions, and the despatch of mails might have been delayed by the pressure of urgent commercial business. At Falmouth My Lords the Postmaster General¹ took what was practically a clear board, and could write on it what they pleased.

Throughout the eighteenth century the links which bound the Post-Office Service to the town grew steadily stronger. As the numbers of the Packets increased the local tradesmen prospered; the demand for naval stores was incessant; and in those days of difficult and slow communication it was necessary to obtain almost all supplies locally. Shipbuilding yards sprang up, rope walks were laid out, inns were built for the accommodation of the travellers who came from all parts of England to take passage for Spain or the West Indies. A considerable number of merchants found their chief occupation in supplying the officers of the Packets with goods to be sold on commission in foreign ports, for the statute which prohibited such trade was not enforced, and many more were engaged in disposing of wines and lace, tobacco and brandy, which were smuggled home on board the Post-Office vessels under cover of the opportunities created by this irregular traffic. The

¹ The office of Postmaster General was until the year 1823 always held jointly by two Ministers of the Crown.

sons of the sailors, as they grew up, sailed with their fathers. The sons of the commanders took up their fathers' appointments, while the old men retired on their pensions and their savings to comfortable houses in the pleasant neighbourhood of Falmouth, creating with their wives and families a society among themselves, and so binding closer with each successive generation the ties between the town and the Service in which their lives were spent.

And so as the town of Falmouth grew and developed it continued to be what it had been at the outset, a Packet town, every trade and interest which its inhabitants professed being drawn irresistibly towards the important State Department which had settled itself down in their midst. Merchants and tradesmen were to be found of course, who conducted prosperous businesses upon independent lines; but it is probably safe to say that at the end of the last century there was hardly one person in the place who did not feel that he would have been injured in his profession, and yet more in his sympathies and his pride, by any step which impaired the permanence of the relation between Falmouth and the Post-Office Service.

The life of a seaport can never be dull with the hopeless insipidity of an inland town, and Falmouth especially, possessing a harbour which formed an unequalled station for watching the French coast, had its share of excitement in the coming and going of the warships. But in the vessels belonging to the

port, the Falmouth Packets, there was an even greater and more enduring interest. For the Packets were the regular vehicles of news. Their commanders were under orders to inform themselves of the situation of affairs in every country at which they touched; and wherever military or naval operations were being conducted, it was to them that everybody looked for a full and accurate plan of the campaign.

Thus the news for which all England was waiting reached Falmouth first, and was ventilated and discussed in every tavern in the town a full day at least before it was in the hands even of Ministers in London. A look-out man was constantly stationed on the Beacon Hill above Falmouth, whence the returning Packets could be seen for a great distance coming up the coast. As soon as one was sighted the watchman hastened down and spread the news about the town, receiving in accord with regular custom a shilling from every woman whose husband was on board; and then the people crowded out towards Pendennis to see the Packet sailing in, speculating and guessing as to whether she had spoken with the fleet, whether a battle had occurred, watching anxiously to see whether the sides or rigging of the vessel bore any marks of shot—for it was a common thing for them to fight their way across the ocean. Then the gigs from the hotels, well manned with sturdy rowers, would shoot out from the inner harbour, racing as eagerly as in a regatta

to catch the first of the passengers; and in a little while the Market Strand, which was the usual landing-place, would be packed with people pushing and struggling to congratulate the home-comers, to hear how stoutly the Packet had beaten off a Privateer, to understand exactly where the great battle of our fleet was fought, and how many French ships had been taken. On such occasions the town seethed with excitement, and it was a frequent thing to close the day's proceedings by a dance on the deck of the Packet as she lay at anchor in the harbour.

A Spanish traveller, Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, who visited England in 1808, has left in his published letters an amusing account of the noise and racket which went on in Falmouth immediately after the arrival of the Packet from which he landed.

"The perpetual stir and bustle in this inn," he plaintively observes, "is as surprising as it is wearisome. Doors opening and shutting, bells ringing, voices calling to the waiter from every quarter, while he cries 'coming' to one room, and hurries away to another. Everybody is in a hurry here; either they are going off in the Packets and are hastening their preparations to embark, or they have just arrived and are impatient to be on the road homeward. Every now and then a carriage rattles up to the door with a rapidity which makes the very house shake. The man who cleans the boots is running in one direction, the barber with his powder bag in another. Here goes the barber's boy with his hot

water and razors; there comes the clean linen from the washerwoman, and the hall is full of porters and sailors bringing up luggage, or bearing it away. Now you hear a horn blow because the post is coming in, and in the middle of the night you are awakened by another because it is going out. Nothing is done in England without a noise, and yet noise is the only thing they forget in the bill."

So vivaciously writes Don Manuel of what he saw and heard on his landing in Falmouth, and while it would be futile to deny that his amiable sarcasm about our national propensity for noise contains a grain of truth, yet it may be fairly claimed that the affairs of an establishment so large as that which the Post-Office maintained at Falmouth could not have been conducted with the leisurely and well-bred movements to which Spanish life had accustomed him.

There were, when the Don landed at the Market Strand, thirty-nine Packets at Falmouth, of which one sailed every week for Lisbon, one for San Sebastian, or some other port on the north coast of Spain, whence communication with our army in the Peninsula could be maintained, one for the West Indies, sailing alternately by a different route among the islands, and others at somewhat longer intervals for the Mediterranean, Brazil, Surinam, Halifax, and New York. The officers and crews of these Packets formed a body of no less than twelve hundred men, all permanently employed by the Post-Office, while

the passengers numbered between two and three thousand in the course of a year.

The mere coming and going, and the natural demands of so large a number of people, created a great prosperity in Falmouth. There was plenty of money in the town, and it was spent as freely as it had been gained. The commanders were all making large incomes. The passage money was the chief source of profit, and from this alone each one of them drew a net income of approximately £1000 per annum. Their fees on the carriage of bullion were more variable, but at times very considerable; while, as long as the privilege of private trading existed, there were few commanders who did not turn over as much by the sale of goods on commission as he drew from the passenger fares. These, with the regular official pay of £8 a month in war, and £5 in peace, formed the commander's legitimate receipts. Some people said that his financial transactions did not end there; but that is as it may be. And, after all, smuggling was not condemned by public opinion in the West of England; though probably in the early years of this century much less was done in this way at Falmouth than in the previous generation.

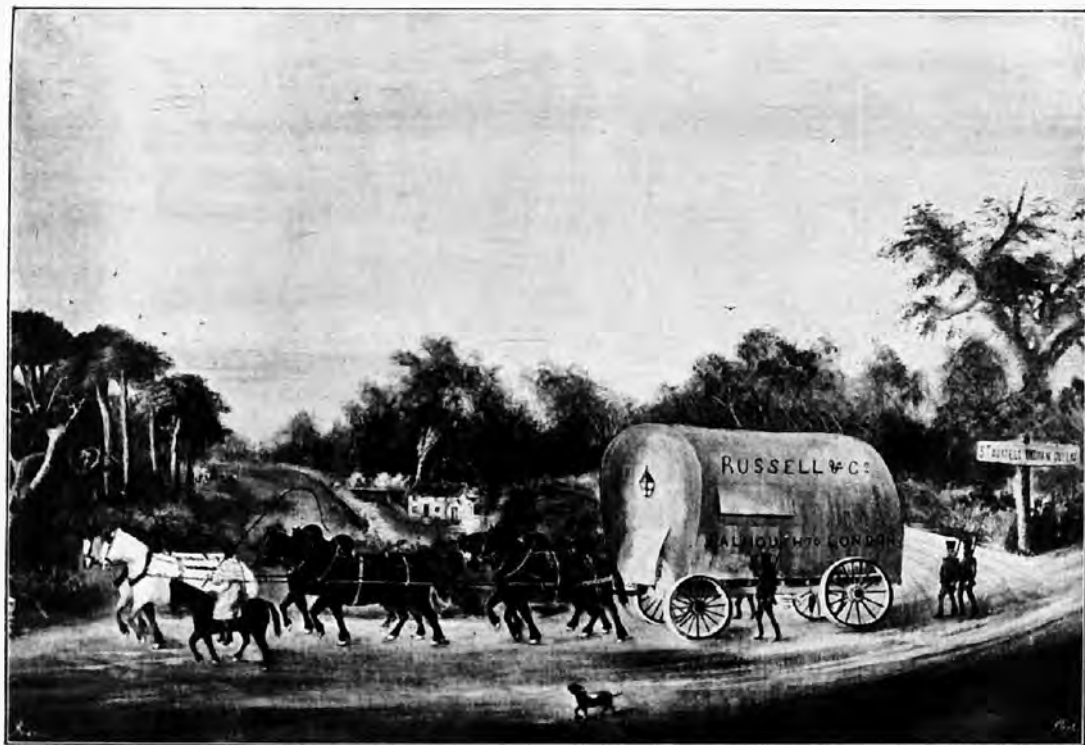
It may be interesting to record the sums paid by passengers on a few of the voyages most frequently made in those days. The rates here given are those current in 1807, and were somewhat higher than were in force ten years earlier.

From Falmouth to Gibraltar the fare was thirty-five guineas, and to Malta fifty-five guineas. The cost of the necessary provisions in the Mediterranean ports was so much greater than at Falmouth, that the homeward fares were higher still, viz., sixty guineas from Malta, and forty-five guineas from Gibraltar. Passengers for Jamaica paid fifty-four guineas, and were provided with everything except bedding; but when they returned they were by old custom to provide themselves with food in addition, and yet were mulcted of fifty guineas.

As for the bullion brought home in the Packets, there were landed at Falmouth in a single year the following sums:

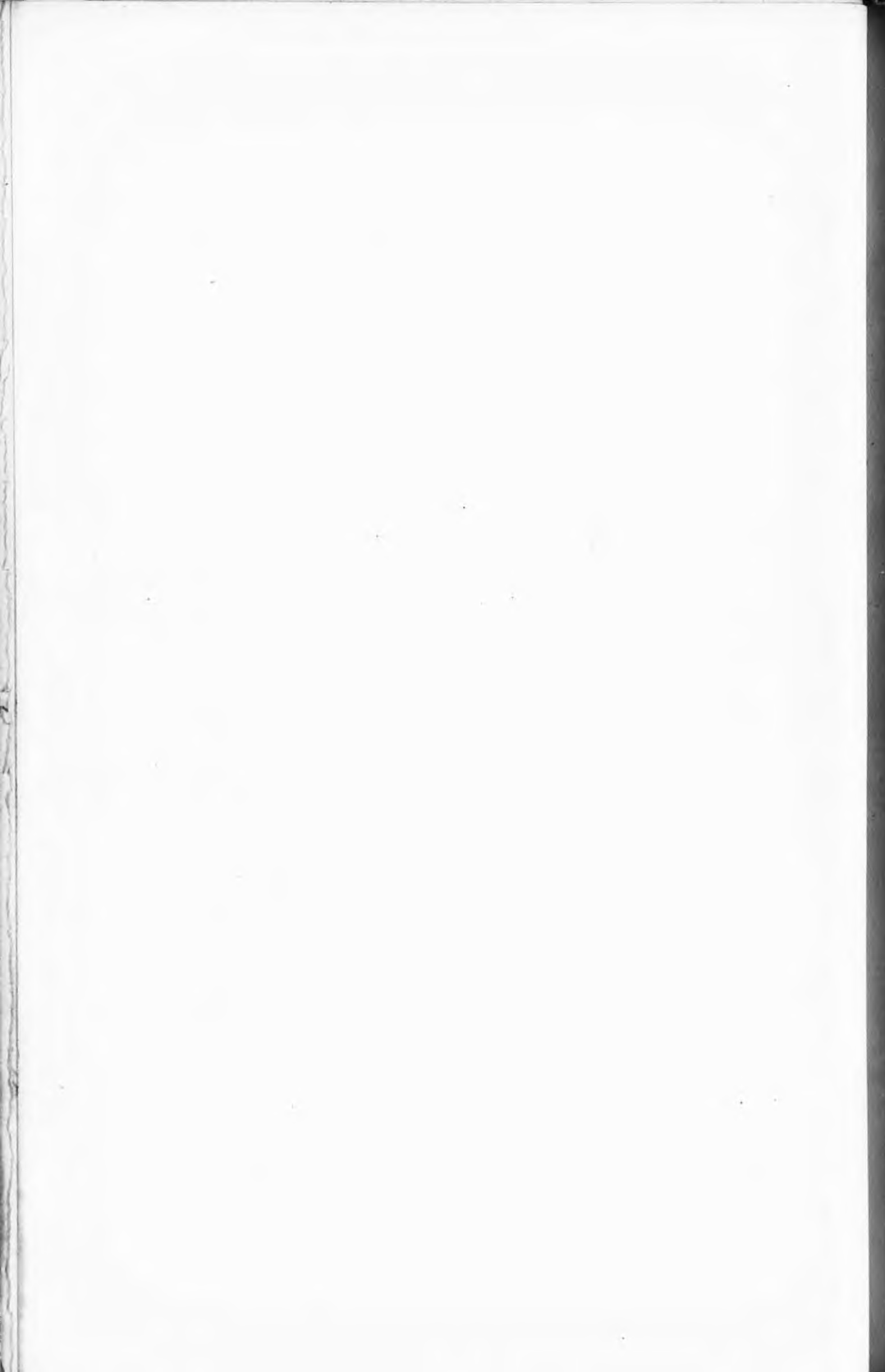
Dollars, - - - - -	1,126,861
Doubloons, - - - - -	17,829
Sterling Coin, - - - - -	£20,707
Gold (in ounces), - - - - -	745
Silver (in ounces), - - - - -	2,984
Milreas, - - - - -	8,548
Half Joes, - - - - -	317
Platina (in pounds), - - - - -	50
Louis d'Ors, - - - - -	10

A treasure of such value demanded special precautions for its safe keeping. It was stored in a chamber cut in the solid rock which forms the hill-side on which the town of Falmouth lies. This chamber was lined with sheet iron, and its doors were of oak strongly bound with iron bars. Here the treasure lay in absolute safety until arrangements could be made for conveying it to London.



To face p. 10.

RUSSELL'S WAGONS.



It travelled by vehicles which are yet well remembered in Cornwall, and which, in their day, constituted one of the chief modes of communication between London and the West of England. Russell's wagons were indeed travelling upon the Great West Road before the first mail coach bowled out of London; and as the passenger fares by the "High-flyer" or the "Rocket" were beyond the means of poor people, there were always some, even until the days of railways, who preferred to journey with the wagons, sleeping by night beneath the tilt, and trudging all day beside the wagoner's pony. There was no difficulty in keeping pace; for the rate did not exceed two, or at most three, miles an hour. The horses never trotted; the progress was a sort of stroll. Inside the wagon rode a man armed with pistol and blunderbuss. The drivers were provided with horse pistols, and, when treasure was in the wagons, a guard of soldiers marched up to London with them, one on either side, two in the rear, to guard against surprise.

The roads were unsafe enough in old days, but there is no memory of any attack upon Russell's wagons; though a tradition lingers that such a venture was once planned, but frustrated by a dream which revealed the robbers' plot. Hardly fifty years have passed since these old wagons might still have been met, toiling at their leisurely pace along the western road. But the new railway was fast devouring the country; the busy inns were closing one

by one; that great silence was falling over the country roads which has lasted until now. The passengers went by train; the specie no longer came to Falmouth. The old wagons had had a long day, but it was past; and they went the way of other anachronisms. The illustration which faces this page shows perhaps more clearly than any description, the picturesqueness of this phase of by-gone life.

It was not with the wagons that the change in progress either began or ended. The construction of railways was changing the face of England, robbing certain districts of their old importance, and raising others to a consequence which they had never before enjoyed. The picturesque and busy life of Falmouth was doomed. The same silence was fast stealing over the port and town as had settled on the country roads. The townsmen fought hard and long to retain their ancient Service, but the spirit of the age was too strong for them. Bit by bit the Packets were removed to other ports, and an old and memorable chapter of our history was brought to a close.

CHAPTER II.

LAX ADMINISTRATION.

IT may be that from the bird's-eye view given in the previous chapter, the reader has gathered some impression of the magnitude of the Post-Office establishment at Falmouth, and of the strength and number of the ties which united it with the prosperity of that town.

To describe in similar detail the life of other Packet Stations would be tedious and useless; for no one of them could vie with the great Cornish seaport in any circumstance of interest. The Dover Station, whence the Calais Packets sailed, was closed during every French war. The Harwich, or Yarmouth boats, for they sailed during several years from the latter port, stood next to Falmouth in importance. They maintained the Postal Service for Holland and Northern Europe generally, sailing chiefly to the Brill and to Hamburg. Their voyages on the stormy North Sea were often dangerous; and were performed with great skill and hardihood, but with little variety of incident. It was not until the

Continental System established by Napoleon began to force the exclusion of English vessels from every seaport which his hand could reach, and like a creeping paralysis, the hostile influence mounted steadily up the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic,—it was only then that the Harwich Packets began to serve as counters in a game of exceptional difficulty. The Holyhead Station confronted no dangers worth speaking of. The Milford Packets ran to Waterford, often making rough and troublesome passages, but offering very little detail worth recording. The boats between Portpatrick and Donaghadee were still less interesting.

In every sense Falmouth was the chief station. Nearly every vestige of interest connected with the ancient Mail Service centres there, and the Falmouth Packets may be regarded as the most perfect type of the Post-Office Establishment.

No account appears to be extant of the circumstances attending the institution in the year 1688 of a Service of Packets from Falmouth Harbour, but they may be easily surmised. For fourteen years the communications were with Corunna alone. It could scarcely have been for the convenience of passengers that in those days of difficult roads, the most westerly port in England was chosen as the place of embarkation. The selection suggests that the Government were guided in their choice by the paramount necessity of quick passages, and the swift transmission of news; and this anxiety for

haste is amply accounted for by the growing importance of Spanish politics at the time. Questions were indeed arising in that quarter of the world which were of vital consequence to England; and the Ministry in providing a means of forwarding and receiving despatches with regularity, were impelled by something like necessity.

The idea of a Regular Service of Packet boats, supported by the Government, was not a novel one. Such a Service had existed on the eastern coast of England from very early times; and in the Packets of Harwich or Dover a model for the new establishment was ready to hand. A somewhat different type of vessel was required for the Corunna voyage. The new Packets were considerably larger, nearly two hundred tons, while those serving in the North Sea did not usually exceed sixty tons. They were also more heavily armed, as became vessels which ventured further from the protection of English cruisers in the home waters, and carried a larger complement of men. They were hired under contract, and were not the property of the Post-Office, which, indeed, at no period of its administration, became the owner of the Packets, though the officers and men serving on them were from very early days the servants of the Postmaster General, not of the contractors.

It might have seemed more natural that the new Packets should sail from the same ports as the old ones, and be located on the east coast, where all

the machinery needed for their administration was at work already. But it seems to have been recognized from the outset that for the Spanish Service that port was the most suitable which lay furthest to the west. Falmouth was chosen from the first, and though in the early years of the last century the contractors were occasionally allowed to despatch their boats from Plymouth, and even once or twice (under a strong representation of the danger of Privateers watching a known point of departure) from Bideford, the Postmaster General, as time went on, became less ready to fall in with the whims of these gentlemen, and the Service settled down regularly at Falmouth.

That the right port was chosen there cannot be a doubt. The extreme westerly position of Falmouth Harbour gives it an advantage which is rendered evident by a single glance at the map. From no other harbour in this country can an outward-bound vessel clear the land so soon. No other is so quickly reached by one homeward bound running for shelter. On the darkest nights and in dense fog, ships unacquainted with the harbour enter it in safety, so easy is it of access; and sailing vessels can leave it in any wind, save one blowing strongly from the east or south-east. The prevalent gales in the English Channel are from the west. These are head winds for a ship leaving Plymouth, the port with which Falmouth is most naturally compared; but they are favourable for Falmouth.

In fact, it happened only on very rare occasions that the despatch of the mails was delayed by stress of weather;¹ and the Post Office agent, when giving evidence on the subject in 1840, could not remember one instance of such delay throughout his whole service, extending over forty-five years.

If, however, Falmouth excelled in ease of access, the natural advantages of the harbour were still more evident when the ships had reached it. It is, in fact, the safest anchorage in the country, protected from the full strength of the Atlantic rollers by the great promontory of Meneage, and abounding in sheltered creeks where vessels might lie in practical immunity from the worst of storms.

On one of these creeks the town of Falmouth stands; and this inlet, the King's or Inner Harbour, was assigned to the Packets as their special anchorage. It lies in such a situation that the swell entering the harbour is diverted from it by the high land of Pendennis, at the entrance of the port; and the advantage of this aspect is so great, that vessels may be seen lying in the Inner Harbour without perceptible motion, while just outside others are rolling gunwale under.

¹The standing rule was that the Packets must put to sea immediately on receiving the mails, *whatever the wind was*, provided only that they could carry a double-reefed top-sail—a striking proof of the certainty with which a good and well-found sailing vessel can clear the Channel from Falmouth.

There is seldom any difficulty in leaving this sheltered anchorage. With a fair wind a vessel may be in the open sea in a quarter of an hour after slipping her moorings off Green Bank, opposite the town of Falmouth ; and here the Packets used to lie until the day before sailing, when they warped out into Carrach Roads, and lay there to receive the mails, in order that not the slightest loss of time might occur in proceeding to sea when the bags were once on board.

At Falmouth then the Post-Office located itself in the year 1688, with two Packet boats hired from a contractor, one Daniel Gwin, who appears to have received a salary of £70 per annum, in addition, doubtless, to whatever he could make indirectly out of his contract. Probably his gains were considerable. At any rate the Government made none, for the accounts show from year to year a loss of several thousand pounds upon the maintenance of these two boats, from which, indeed, the revenue seems seldom to have received more than £450. Expensive as the Corunna Packets proved to be, it may be presumed that the promoters of the Service were not dissatisfied with it ; for early in the new century they proceeded to develop it. The West Indian trade was becoming important enough to make its wishes felt. The merchants engaged in it may probably have represented that the regular communication now established with Corunna gave their colleagues in the Spanish trade more facilities

than they enjoyed. All Governments have found it difficult to resist such an argument; and accordingly, in 1702, Packets were established at Falmouth to ply to Barbados, Jamaica, and certain places in the Southern States of North America. Two years later a Service with Lisbon was set up; and the Post-Office Service at Falmouth began to assume the form which it preserved until within the memory of men now living.

It is no part of the present writer's purpose to trace in detail all the events which went to make up the history of the Packet Station at Falmouth during the last century. Such a task would doubtless throw much light on naval history, and some, perhaps, on other subjects not without their share of interest. The materials are scanty, however, and the record might be dreary reading. The personal recollections which would have lit the story up and made it real are lost beyond recall. What has come down to us is hardly more than the bald record of administrative changes—at such a time there were two West India Packets, at another four; under one regime they touched at Charlestown and Pensacola, while under its successor their voyages were restricted. There were such changes of rule in regard to victualling the sailors, such and such difficulties in controlling them; and so on. It is nothing but an arid waste of technicalities, almost devoid of interest save for the professed student of naval or commercial history.

One or two facts stand out from this mass of detail, and arrest attention as we pass it by. There is the occasional mention of a sea-fight, in which so many men (in proportion to the number of the crew) were killed and wounded, as to create a strong desire to know the details.

Thus, an order of the Postmaster General, dated May 16th, 1744, recounts that a petition has been received from one Hannah Christophers, widow of Joseph Christophers, who lost his life on June 24th, 1740, on board the "Townshend" Packet, Captain John Cooper, in an engagement against the Spaniards, wherein five men (whose names are given) received "several grievous wounds in defence of the Packet, and afterwards suffered a long and cruel imprisonment of sixteen months." By the rules and customs of His Majesty's service, the order goes on to observe, these poor men are entitled to "some bounty or allowance for their comfort and support"; and the Postmaster General, having in mind this laudable usage, and moreover, "having in part experienced it will be impossible to carry on the sea service of this office without great difficulty, danger, and interruption, unless some such encouragement be constantly given in the like cases," proceed to award bounties ranging from £4 to £10, and in one case even a pension of no less amount than £4 per annum!

We shall hear further of the "Townshend" Packet, for the mantle of Captain John Cooper descended

on the commander of another "Townshend," by whom some seventy years later a great action was fought against hopeless odds with such determined bravery as must be admitted to surpass any other recorded achievement of the Post-Office fleet.

Again, on July 25th, 1759, it is ordered that Captain John Jones be allowed £100 for his gallant defence of the "Fawkener" Packet, when attacked by a large French sloop of twelve carriage guns and upwards of one hundred men between Barbados and Antigua; and three years later the same sum was awarded to Captain Bonell, for bravery and good conduct in action with a French Privateer.

Many more such quickly jotted entries of the perils of brave men can be traced in the ancient records. The details of their conduct were allowed to perish. The question of account alone survives. Enough has been said however to show that from the outset the Falmouth Packets formed a fighting service, that is to say, a service which was frequently called upon to fight, and understood how to acquit itself when occasion arose.

It is true that the Packet officers were not allowed to seek engagements; and this rule, though obviously necessary, seeing that the safety of the mails was the sole object of the Service, proved most difficult to enforce. The difficulty was not caused by any especial unruliness on the part of the Falmouth officers. It grew from a much deeper root, and flourished in the natural tendency of all man-

kind to pick up any articles of value which can, even by a stretch of conscience, be regarded as fair prize.

A long succession of years of peace has so confirmed the sacredness of the principles of *meum* and *tuum* in the minds of most of us, that it is not easy to realize how far they were undermined in days of war, especially upon the high seas. The world has grown very punctilious, and looks askance on even honest privateering, while piracy is universally held to deserve no better fate than a post and chains in Execution Dock. In the last century these excellent sentiments were by no means generally entertained, at any rate in quarters where they were likely to be acted on. Among men of the sea, the ocean was regarded in the light of a great lucky bag, into which you thrust your hand and pulled out the best thing you could find. If the thing belonged to your neighbour, so much the worse for him. He should have kept his guns in better practice, and trained his men more carefully to the use of small arms.

Now there were sailing on the seas in those days a considerable number of ill-defended ships which were so very valuable as to make a poor sailor's mouth water and his fingers tingle. Of the wealth of the Spanish treasure ships every one has heard. The sums they are reported to have carried in their clumsy holds sound fabulous even to us as we read of them in the sober light of history; and ex-

aggerated as they doubtless were in the heated atmosphere of a Falmouth tavern, where every sailor strove to surpass his neighbour in marvellous tales of the sea, these reports must have seemed to many a poor Packet captain to open a road to untold wealth. Such galleons were captured very easily sometimes. A little disguise to make the Packet look like a sloop of war, a bold onset, a desperate boarding assault, and the prize would be won. Many a well armed vessel had been taken by a handful of men! England was at war with Spain during a great part of the last century; and did not that fact make the Spanish argosies the fair prize of any Englishman who could seize them?

Whether, under the influence of such considerations, a treasure ship was ever taken by a Packet, is not mentioned in the scanty records. But it is certain that a good deal of piracy in a quiet way was done by the Falmouth commanders, especially early in the century, when the control from headquarters was lax, and the necessity of watching the use made of the armaments supplied by the Government was not clearly seen. The officers showed a disposition to call the irregularity "privateering"; but a vessel which takes prizes without a license from the Crown is a Pirate, not a Privateer, and the Packets never held such licenses.

Of course without a license there was a difficulty in disposing of a captured vessel. The intervention

of the Admiralty Court could not be sought, unless indeed it was possible to represent the Packet as having been attacked, and as having captured her prize in self-defence. The Admiralty Courts were not models of incorruptibility, as all who recollect Lord Cochrane's descriptions of them will allow, and doubtless did not inquire too closely into any plausible story. But if the matter would not bear even their examination, there were a dozen ports known to all sailors where a vessel and her cargo could be sold without any questions asked.

Of course these practices, however full of charm for the officers who profited by them, were very strongly condemned by the Postmaster General, who had to consider only the safety of the mails, and to guard against the chance of heavy claims being made upon the Government for the value of captured Packets. As far as was possible, therefore, they forbade piracy and punished the offenders; and yet the frequency of the offence is pretty clearly shown by the fact that it was constantly being adduced as the best of all reasons for not arming the Packets heavily. About the year 1780, as was detailed before a committee of the House of Commons, a sailor called at the General Post-Office, to announce the capture of the Packet in which he sailed. He described the gallant stand which his officers and his fellow seamen had made against hopeless odds, spoke feelingly of the cruel captivity they had undergone, in which some of them were still languishing,

exhibited the scar of the wound he had received, and confidently claimed the "smart money" which he had earned so well.

The story was imposing, but it did not survive cross-examination. Something suggested suspicion; and by degrees the true facts were wormed out of the brave fellow. It was quite true that his Packet had been captured. In the early dawn of a certain summer morning, as the Packet was running towards New Orleans, she descried two innocent-looking vessels lying-to off the shore. They were remarkably like sugar ships, such as would fetch a substantial sum, if sold judiciously; and being traders, were doubtless well within the power of the Falmouth vessel, which accordingly ran down, and sent a shot across their bows, only to find the strangers were a French frigate and her consort, which quickly turned the tables on their presumptuous adversary.

Of course in such a case as this the Government would admit no claim for the value of the Packet lost by gross misconduct, and it may probably be assumed that the money loss thus thrown upon the owners was not the only punishment imposed. There were cases, however, in which conduct equally irregular, but which happened to succeed, was entirely condoned; and a striking instance of this leniency shown towards success occurred in the year 1808, at a time when several years of strong administration had purified the Packet Service of many of its blemishes. It may be safely concluded

that for every such case occurring in the present century, there were half a dozen in the last.

It was a Harwich Packet which was concerned in this curious case ; and it may be that the Postmaster General thought it unnecessary to apply a strict rule to a station on which the Packets came but rarely into conflict with the enemy. The circumstances were as follows :—

On June 16th, 1808, the "Earl of Leicester," Captain Anthony Hammond, homeward bound from Gothenburg with mails and passengers, was met about ten leagues to the westward of the Scaw by a gale of wind which obliged her to bear away for Marstrand. On the way thither she encountered two Danish vessels laden with corn from Jutland for their army in Norway. Now, under his instructions Captain Hammond had nothing to do with these vessels, but to leave them alone. It is true this country was at war with Denmark at the time ; but the "Earl of Leicester" was neither one of H.M. cruisers, nor a letter of marque, and had no business to involve herself in the matter. Captain Hammond never asserted that the Danish vessels attacked him. Indeed both he and they had quite enough to do at the moment with their own affairs, for a full gale of wind was blowing, and all the ships were labouring heavily. Nevertheless Captain Hammond, it being as he said "too rough to board them," ordered them to regard themselves as prizes, and to follow him.

The two Danish ships being unarmed had no choice but to obey these orders, and Captain Hammond made joyfully for Marstrand with his prizes. He had not proceeded very far when one of them flew signals of distress, and made known that she was in danger of sinking. Captain Hammond lowered a boat and at great risk took the crew out of the foundering vessel, which went down as soon as the boat had got clear of her. The remaining prize duly reached Marstrand, and was handed over to the British Consul at that port, to await the decision of the Admiralty Court. The crews of both vessels were liberated, on giving a promise to do their utmost to secure the release of the crew of the "Unity" Packet, captured in the previous November.

On board the "Earl of Leicester" were three Swedish passengers, who were so far from feeling satisfied with Captain Hammond's conduct on this occasion that they addressed a special letter of complaint to the Postmaster General. In this letter they by no means admit that the prizes were picked up by Captain Hammond as he went along, in the casual way detailed by him, without delay or interruption to his voyage. On the contrary, they assert roundly, that he chased the two little vessels during a whole night, keeping up a continual fire both of cannon and musketry; that the "Earl of Leicester" was far past Schagen when the prizes were first seen, which of itself proved that Captain Hammond put

in to Marstrand with no other motive than that of realizing them secure ; and they add : " On account of this chase and capture, in which, in our opinion, Packets have no right to engage, our voyage to England was entirely broken off, because, during the above hostile operations, we were in continual anxiety and fear, loaded guns being carried about in the cabin where we lay, and several shots fired from them ; and we had reason to fear that the war-like scene might soon be acted again, wherefore we did not venture to pursue our voyage on board the said Packet, but returned to Gothenburg."

Captain Hammond, in reply to these charges, maintained that three gentlemen who, by their own admission, were extremely frightened, and to his knowledge were also lamentably sea sick, were not the most trustworthy witnesses of what occurred, and with this argument, together with some evidence that the return to Marstrand was really made necessary by the weather, the Postmaster General remained content. The matter was dropped ; and Captain Hammond, after waiting some five years, during which time the Admiralty Courts considered his case in their pleasant, leisurely way, received the value of the prize.

Smuggling was a practice very frequently charged against the Packet Service by its critics who, towards the end of the last century, raised an outcry loud enough to become heard in Parliament. It may be feared that the charge was by no means groundless.

Indeed it would be strange if it were, seeing that throughout the west of England, if not elsewhere, the game of eluding the revenue laws was played with infinite zest and enjoyment by all classes of society. Falmouth itself was a nest of smugglers. The old town was full of hiding places. The women entered into the sport with audacious ingenuity; and probably there was neither man, woman, nor child in the town, with the possible exception of the revenue officers, who did not regard the success of a smuggler as a triumph for his kind against men who were scarcely to be distinguished from foreign enemies.

It is true there was a high officer of the Post-Office at Falmouth, whose duty it was to discover malpractices of every kind, and report them to the Postmaster General. The contractor, from whom the Packets were hired at their first institution, had long since disappeared.

The Packets were hired from the commanders; and over these officers was set an agent, to whom each one of them was responsible for his actions. This agent was not Postmaster. His duties did not extend beyond the foreign mails and the conduct of the Packet officers and seamen. He was the link which united the sea service with the internal system of the Post-Office. His duties were multifarious and of the greatest consequence to the welfare of the service.

It is perfectly clear that the duties of a controlling

officer cannot be properly performed unless he keeps his affairs and interests totally distinct from those of his subordinates. The misfortune was that the agents at Falmouth in the last century could not grasp this principle, but departed from it so far as to have trading relations with the commanders. The agent dealt in naval stores: the commanders supplied their Packets with spars and cordage from his stock.

This was not the only way in which the agent's affairs became entangled with those of the men he was placed at Falmouth to control. The Packets, though nominally owned by the commanders, with whom the Government contracted for their hire, were in most cases really the property of a syndicate, or of private individuals, who put forward the commander to represent them, on condition of receiving the larger part of the emoluments. This capitalist in the background was frequently no other than the agent himself.

Relations such as these of course rendered it very difficult for the agent to perform the duties of his position at all effectually, and, as a matter of fact, he did not so perform them. Abuses of every kind crept into the Falmouth service. The captains were subjected to gross extortions by the agent, who in turn relaxed discipline in any way they might desire. If, for instance, it occurred to any commander, that by sailing with a few men short of his complement, he could save their victualling allowances and so

increase his own profits; the agent, whose duty it was to muster the men immediately before sailing, would either neglect the muster altogether, or else make it, and be careful not to see the shore-boat which, immediately afterwards, took off three or four of the men who had answered to their names. If the captain wished to stay ashore, whilst his Packet went to sea, the agent would accept and forward to London a certificate that he was ill, without asking any questions either as to the nature of the illness or the qualifications of the person appointed to command the ship, who was not infrequently a common seaman. If the captain had received from some Bristol merchant a larger consignment of goods to be sold on commission at Lisbon or Barbados than his vessel ought to carry, the agent would still certify that she was in trim when she left Falmouth harbour, and had nothing on board which could impede her sailing. In fact, there were a hundred ways in which the agent could oblige those captains who dealt largely with him; and without attempting to go more deeply into the events of the last century, it may fairly be doubted, in the light of the scandals discovered in its closing years, whether misconduct far grosser than any here indicated was not practised by the commanders and tolerated by the agent.

This is a matter which will be dealt with more fully in succeeding chapters. Enough has been said to show that the state of affairs at Falmouth was

unsatisfactory to the last degree ; and while it may very probably be that a considerable number of individuals acted with scrupulous fidelity to their trust, there is no doubt whatever that very many betrayed it systematically.

Of course, a strong administration from headquarters would have changed all this. But the General Post-Office itself was by no means exempt from the taint which had fastened on Falmouth. There was scarcely a single official, from the secretary down to the door-keepers, who did not own shares in the Packets, and each one of them was for ever trying to secure advantages for the particular vessel in which he was interested. The ancient system of paying the clerks merely nominal salaries, and leaving in their hands privileges and perquisites out of which they were expected to make their chief, if not their sole, remuneration, produced its natural effect in causing every officer to judge upon departmental matters in the light of his own pecuniary advantage ; and, in short, it can only be said that when the outcry in Parliament, which has been mentioned already, made itself heard, it was high time for some change to occur.

In truth, the end of an age of corruption was approaching. In all departments of Government a purer atmosphere was spreading. The Post-Office was no worse than other public offices. It was what the spirit of the times had made it, and it did but partake of the vices which were characteristic of the

age. The old, bad system was everywhere breaking down, crushing individuals beneath it, as such rotten growths will when they fall at length. At Falmouth, a certain agent went too far. The unsavoury story need not be probed. Even at the time, as would appear, the facts were not fully disclosed; for it no sooner became plain that a searching inquiry into the agent's conduct would be made, than the miserable man shut himself up in his office and blew his brains out.

That tragic occurrence marked, or coincided with, a turning point in the history of the Packet Service. On one side lies corrupt and slovenly administration, with its natural sequel of scandals and disorder. On the other can be traced the commencement of earnest endeavours for reform, the springing up of patient and honest striving after an ideal; and as the course of events in the Packet Service is followed from this moment through the forty years or so which intervened before the control passed from the hands of the Post-Office, the effect of these endeavours becomes continually more manifest, till they culminate at last in something resembling absolute success.

This is the story told in the ensuing pages. It is taken up from the year 1793, because that year, the first of the great struggle for mastery on which no Englishman can look back without pride, serves well to mark the commencement of the new order of things. Moreover, much more is to be known about

the Packet Service from 1793 onwards than can be gleaned concerning the earlier period. The departmental records are fairly complete thenceforward; some account, at least, of every sea fight is preserved; and among piles of brown and dusty papers, from some of which the ink is fading fast, there has lain untouched for ninety years, not only the story of a piece of administrative work, as difficult and as useful to this country as any that has ever been carried through by patient effort, but also a whole series of naval actions, of which the Post-Office was once proud, and of which Cornishmen are proud still, though they have forgotten the details of most.

CHAPTER III.

A FIRMER RULE.

AT the beginning of the year 1793, then, while the relations of this country with France were quickly growing desperate, the two statesmen who, according to the custom of the time, jointly filled the office of Postmaster General, were engaged in endeavouring to set their Department in order, and to reduce the expenses of administration, as the House of Commons Committee had directed.

The difficulty of any interference in a system which had grown up through a whole century was obviously very great. Malpractices which four generations of officers at Falmouth had learned to regard as their natural privileges would not be given up at the first word of rebuke from headquarters. The profits of smuggling would not be dropped without a struggle. Laxity of discipline, remissness, carelessness of the credit of the Department—these were faults which, where they existed, could be cured only by a firm rule and in course of years. One decision had, however, been taken, and was already

being carried out, from which important results proceeded, and which upon the whole effected much good.

Throughout the whole existence of the Falmouth Packets up to this time it had scarcely been questioned that on the long Atlantic voyages the safety of the mails was directly proportionate to the heaviness of the armament. The West India merchants were perpetually forcing this point on the Postmaster General, and whenever a mail for Barbados or Jamaica was lost, the General Post-Office was beset with an indignant throng of merchants, loudly demanding that more and more guns should be assigned to every Packet which had to run the gauntlet of the West India Islands.

The influence of wealthy merchants upon the Post-Office is perhaps in our own day as great as is convenient. But a hundred years ago it was infinitely greater. For the General Post-Office, which has now grown into something resembling a populous town, was then itself scarcely larger than the office of any considerable merchant. Between St. Martin's le Grand, as we know it, and the office of whatever city firm, there may be interchange of views, but there can be no intimate association; and it is exactly this which existed between the Post-Office in Lombard Street, in 1793, and the neighbouring offices, which were as large, if not as important, as itself.

The Post-Office Packets in those days were carriers

of news as well as of the mails. The officers had instructions to record most carefully in their journals full details of any events of public importance occurring in the countries which they visited. These journals, which frequently contained news later and more authentic than any which had yet reached London, were sent up from Falmouth immediately after the arrival of the Packets, and lay at the Post-Office open to the inspection of the merchants, who were thus continually in the office, inquiring and commenting on every detail connected with the administration of the Packets, proffering suggestions, and criticizing in season and out of season.

This constant association with the clerks of the Post-Office placed in the hands of the West India merchants very great opportunities of pressing their views about the armament of the Packets, and they did press them with such pertinacity and vehemence that it must have required courage on the part of Lords Chesterfield and Carteret to announce the resolution not to increase those armaments, but to cut them down, and to send the Packets to sea in future totally unfit to resist Privateers of their own size.

Such was the new policy, arranged in concert with the Navy Board. It was not lacking in audacity. The Packets stationed at Falmouth were of different sizes and varying rig. In future, all new vessels were to be of a certain fixed design, of 179 tons burden, carrying a crew of twenty-eight men

and boys, with four 4-pounders, two 6-pounders, for use as chasers, and a proportionate quantity of small arms.

A vessel armed and manned in this way was clearly not a fair match for any but the smallest class of French or Spanish Privateer. My Lords the Postmaster General admitted this, and stated that their reliance was on the capacity of the new Packets to out-sail their enemies. The most patient thought had been given to the selection of the model. It was believed that vessels built on the new design would out-sail most things afloat, and in order to give them a fair chance of doing so they were to carry as little weight of metal as possible. If they could keep off row boats on entering or leaving the channel, more was scarcely expected of them save in the last resort. The commander's duties were summed up in this formula, "You must run where you can. You must fight when you can no longer run, and when you can fight no more you must sink the mails before you strike."

Here at one blow perished the system of Privateering in the Packet Service. A ship armed so lightly could not afford to cruise after prizes, but was sufficiently concerned with her own safety.

The West India merchants prophesied disaster, and indeed it seems that the Postmaster General in framing their plans were not untainted by the proverbially excessive zeal of the convert. The events of the next few years certainly suggest that the

point of safety had been passed in reducing the armaments; and all the changes effected by further experience throughout the war were in the direction of increase.

Such as the system was, however, it was established, and My Lords had no time to discuss its merits or defects. The declaration of war burst upon them before their plans were executed, and forthwith the General Post-Office was beset with armourers and powder merchants, while the clerks were called off from handling letters and newspapers to discuss the pattern of a boarding pike, or to consult with Mr. Nock about the quality of the pistols which he had supplied.

Not one of the Packets had received its armament when the war broke out. It had not lasted three weeks when an incident occurred which showed how little time there was to waste.

The declaration of war had been immediately followed by a general embargo on shipping, but, in pursuance of an agreement between the French and English Governments, an order in Council exempted from this embargo Packets, and bye boats (vessels hired temporarily for the Postal Service), and announced that they were to continue to run for some time longer.

Under this agreement the "Despatch," a Dover Packet, commanded by Captain John Osborn, set sail as usual; but on February 20th, while lying in Ostend Roads, she was summoned to surrender by

a French Privateer. Captain Osborn had no means of resistance. His protests were disregarded, his ship was seized, and he with his crew were made prisoners of war.

The "Despatch" was carried into Dunkirk, and, despite the remonstrances of the British Government, was condemned as a prize. Captain Osborn was exchanged within a few weeks of his capture, but his crew were less fortunate. One of his sailors, after remaining in prison for nearly three years, during the whole of which period, if his statement may be trusted, he supported life on a handful of horse beans, served out every twenty-four hours, and a small allowance of dirty water, came over to England in a cartel in December, 1795. The rest of the crew were then still in prison, and probably remained there until peace was declared in 1802.

Under the stimulus of this unfortunate event the work of arming the Packets proceeded briskly. The guns and small arms for the Falmouth boats were shipped on board a vessel lying in the Thames, and after a series of irritating delays, caused chiefly by the necessity of waiting for convoy, reached their destination towards the end of March. The few guns needed for the Harwich Packets were soon provided. It had been intended to give them 4-pounders, but the commanders objected, declaring that four 2-pounders each were as much as their ships could carry. This was probably true enough, for the North Sea Packets ranged only from fifty

to eighty tons burden. And indeed they had small need for heavy armaments, for though they doubtless had occasionally to skirmish with row boats it does not appear that throughout the war any one of these Packets was attacked, or at least seriously engaged on the high seas—a somewhat remarkable immunity, which is perhaps to be accounted for partly by their own excellence of sailing, and partly by the thoroughness with which the important trade route over which their various voyages were made was patrolled by British cruisers.

It had not been customary in former wars to arm the Holyhead and Dublin boats, but a few light guns were now allowed to them, as well as to those from Port Patrick to Donaghadee. The Packets running between Milford Haven and Waterford were somewhat more exposed to the attacks of Privateers, which might be expected to hang about the entrance to St. George's Channel in the hope of intercepting the shipping out of Bristol, but here a curious difficulty was raised by the proprietors, a body of merchants, nineteen in number. All but six of these gentlemen were members of the Society of Friends, and, being sincerely convinced of the sinfulness of war, they put in a decided objection against the proposal to provide their vessels with implements of strife and destruction.

The Postmaster General proceeded to reason with these ardent theorists, and pointed out that as, by the existing rule, the Department was bound to pay

the value of captured Packets it was but reasonable that it should be allowed, at its own cost, to protect them. The men of peace, touched by the financial argument, admitted this, but retorted that if only the Government would refrain from the wickedness of placing guns and cutlasses in the hands of their sailors, they, that is to say the thirteen Quaker proprietors, would waive all claim to compensation in the event of capture. It was true, they admitted, that the six proprietors who were not Quakers were by no means ready to make this sacrifice, but the Government, they urged, might fairly be expected to risk the liability for six-nineteenths of the loss when a principle was at stake.

By this time, however, the Postmaster General had become tired of the discussion, and closed it with a brief intimation that if the Packets were not armed the contract would be withdrawn, and in view of this unsympathetic attitude the Quakers sold their shares and retired from the concern.

That the unwarlike attitude of the Quakers was by no means always accompanied by any want of natural courage was demonstrated not long after this period by a certain inhabitant of Falmouth, an old and greatly respected member of the Society of Friends. This gentleman held the appointment of surgeon to the Post-Office establishment, and was one day cruising on board a Packet when a French Privateer hove in sight. It was obvious that there was going to be a fight; and the commander, know-

ing his passenger's principles, suggested that he had better go below. The doctor, a fine tall man, declined to budge from the deck; and the captain thereupon offered him a cutlass and pistol, observing that as he intended to remain in the way of danger, he might at least use weapons in self-defence. But this suggestion also the doctor refused to entertain; and, standing quite unarmed on the quarter-deck, he remained an interested and placid spectator of the action. After a sharp cannonade, the French vessel hurled her boarders into the Packet. The doctor showed no sign of excitement as he saw the fierce St. Malo men swarming up the sides, cutlass in hand; but when, a moment later, a swarthy giant came clambering up unperceived, at a point where there was no one to resist him, the doctor calmly stepped forward, threw his arms round the astonished Frenchman with a grip few men could have resisted, and saying, gently, "Friend, thee makes a mistake, this is not thy ship," tossed him into the sea.

The work of armament was complete at last. The Packets, armed on the new system, sailed on their distant journeys; and at the General Post-Office there was no more to do than to await the reports how they fared.

The interval of waiting must have been full of anxiety. It was generally known that the number of French Privateers which were being sent out from St. Malo, Bordeaux, Nantes, and a dozen other

ports, to prey on British commerce was beyond all precedent. Many of these Privateers cruised with the express intention of intercepting the Packets, attracted not only by the bullion which the Falmouth vessels frequently had on board, but even more by the hope of intercepting the Government despatches, and of striking blows at British trade by sending mercantile correspondence to the bottom of the sea.

How seriously such disasters were felt in the City of London the Postmaster General knew well; and they knew too that the West India merchants, those unfriendly critics who were constantly at their side, would pounce unmercifully on the first misfortune, and declare that the new system had broken down. Month after month went by, however, and no bad news reached Lombard Street. Packet after Packet came into port, and recorded uneventful voyages. Some had been chased, a few had exchanged shots with an enemy; but not one had been seriously engaged, or had experienced the least difficulty in escaping an antagonist; and the end of the year came before any Packet crept in beneath Pendennis Castle with battered sides, and sails torn by shot.

The "Antelope" Packet was commanded by Captain Kempthorne, a member of an old Cornish family which for many generations gave the navy some of its best officers. Captain Kempthorne, by some accident which he regretted during the short remainder of his life, had remained at home, and

given over the command of his ship to Mr. Edward Curtis, the master, an officer of courage and discretion.

Under the charge of her acting-commander, the "Antelope" was off Cumberland Harbour, in Jamaica, homeward bound, when she fell in with two schooners which at once gave chase. This was on the 1st December. Mr. Curtis put the ship to her best point of sailing, and she behaved so well that throughout the day the Cornishmen felt no doubt of being able to shake off their enemies. On the following morning one of the schooners was out of sight, but the other held on, and about four P.M. opened fire with her bow chasers. The "Antelope" replied smartly with all the guns she could bring to bear; and the Privateer, finding there was to be no bloodless victory, dropped astern, with the evident design of waiting for daylight before she commenced the action. Fearing a surprise, Mr. Curtis kept his men at their quarters throughout the night. The hours of waiting must have been trying to the nerve of the Falmouth men; but all was quiet until five A.M. At that hour the Privateer (her name was the "Atalanta") suddenly ran down, aided by her sweeps, for the wind had dropped, and, laying herself alongside the "Antelope" to starboard, she poured in a broadside, which was promptly returned, and immediately a furious discharge of cannon and small arms set in on both sides. Under cover of the smoke the

"Atalanta" cast out grappling irons and locked herself to the Packet, and at the same moment, by a shrill signal, her boarders were called to their stations.

Mr. Curtis was perfectly alive to the danger of his position. Some of his hands having been disabled by fever, he had but twenty-two men fit for service, counting the surgeon as a combatant; and a single glance was sufficient to show that the French were in much greater numbers. There was no chance of avoiding the assault, now that the grappling irons were securely fixed: yet, if the Privateersmen made good their footing on the deck of the Packet, the Cornishmen were tolerably certain to be overwhelmed by numbers.

At the moment when Mr. Curtis was watching the boarders congregating on the quarter, it was reported to him that a second party was forming at the bow. The Packetsmen were all too few to resist a single attack, and the design of the enemy clearly was to keep the whole force occupied at the stern, while a second party clambered over the bow nettings unresisted, and took the Cornishmen in the rear. Mr. Curtis hurried forward. There was not an instant to lose. The boarders were already mounting the bulwarks of their own ship. Some fifteen in number, they crowded together in a dense body, and in another instant would have leapt at the "Antelope," when Mr. Curtis brought his two bow guns to bear upon them, double-shotted with

round and grape. At that short range the discharge of these guns created terrible havoc, and killed or disabled the whole of the opposing party.

One peril had been successfully overcome, and the pressing danger was now on the starboard quarter, against which the attack had been delivered before Mr. Curtis could regain his quarter-deck. There was no gun which could be brought to bear, and the boarders consequently met with no obstacle in climbing up the side. Here, however, in the breezy language of the boatswain, John Pasco, "they were deceived by our boarding-nettings and handspikes," and after a desperate scuffle half of them were shot or thrust into the sea, while the remainder were glad enough to regain their own ship.

So far, fortune had favoured the Cornishmen; but success had been bought at a heavy price. Mr. Curtis lay dead on the deck—shot while encouraging his men without regard for his personal danger. The steward and a passenger were also killed; while the mate was so severely wounded as to be incapable of taking command of the ship, or indeed of giving any orders at all. The command thus developed upon Pasco, the boatswain, an illiterate fellow, who could not write his name, but who in this emergency displayed the qualities of a brave sailor, and a born leader of men. He assumed the responsibility thus suddenly thrust on him without hesitation, and gave orders for a con-

tinuous fire of musketry to be maintained upon anything which showed itself on the French vessel's decks. The "Antelope" was considerably higher than her antagonist, and the Cornish marksmen were thus under cover, while the decks of the "Atalanta" were swept by their bullets. At the same time a sharp cannonade was maintained, and by an unfortunate shot one of the "Antelope's" guns was dismounted, whereupon Henry Bond, a seaman, believed to be one of the strongest men in England, coolly took up the gun in his arms, remounted it under a heavy fire, and returned to his post unharmed.

The effect of the musketry fire maintained by the Cornishmen was now beginning to show. The French were growing restless under it; and their officers, seeing that they were losing heavily, ordered the boarders forward once more. Pasco and his little crew were ready for them when they came, pleased to return to the occupation of "deceiving" the French with a handspike; and the end of it was that the boarders were driven back with great loss, but once more at a heavy cost, for three of the brave Packetsmen were disabled in the fight.

By this time the spirit of the French was daunted. They had lost all hope of capturing the "Antelope," and, casting loose the grapplings, endeavoured to sheer off. Now was the time for Pasco to bear in mind the new official maxim, that commanders of Packets were not expected to resist an enemy of

equal force. He had suffered heavy losses, he had but a handful of men fit for service, he had earned distinction by his brave defence, and if he let the French vessel go, he had nothing but credit to expect. But the man's blood was up, and he meant to carry the affair through. The moment he saw the vessels separating, he sprang into the rigging, ran up aloft, and lashed the "Atalanta's" square-sail yard to the "Antelope's" fore shrouds.

"Thereupon," to quote his own words once more, "we found the fire slacken, which greatly encouraged us. We kept up a constant fire for half an hour more, when we had the pleasure of hearing them cry for mercy. But to all appearance they deserved none, nor expected any, as some of them jumped overboard and drowned themselves, for their bloody flag was nailed to the masthead. They were ordered to tear it down, and we took possession, which it was lucky was so soon; for our mainsail, nettings, quarter cloths, and hammocks were on fire, which in the midst of the fire and smoke was not seen. To save the ship we were obliged to cut all away."

Thus ended this gallant action. When Pasco and his men had leisure to examine their prize, they found that out of her crew of sixty-five men only sixteen remained unhurt, while no less than thirty-two lay dead upon the deck. Of the "Antelope's" crew only two were slain, namely, Mr. Curtis and the steward; though Mr. Walpole, the surgeon, afterwards died, exhausted, as would appear, by the fatigue of attending on so many wounded men.

In James' *Naval History* (vol. i., p. III), where this action is briefly described, it is stated that the

"Atalanta" carried eight 3-pounders, and the "Antelope" six. If this is correct, the "Antelope" had not yet been armed on the new principle described in the preceding pages. She was an old vessel, and it may have been thought wiser to leave her armaments unaltered.

When the circumstances of the action became known, the public enthusiasm rose to a height which seems in the retrospect a little overstrained, but which may certainly be accepted as a proof of the high degree of importance attached to the preservation of the mails. The news, moreover, reached England at a time when no great naval engagement had taken place, and when the success of several single ship actions had whetted the public appetite for glory without satisfying it. There was, too, something in the circumstances which touched the imagination; for it was not every day, even in the years of our greatest sea-fights, that a ship was brought out of action by her boatswain. It was seriously proposed to strike a medal in Pasco's honour. The Jamaica House of Representatives voted five hundred guineas to be distributed among the crew. The Society for Encouraging the Capture of French Privateers—it was a Committee of Lloyds—granted a substantial sum for the same purpose, in addition to a gold boatswain's call which they presented to Pasco, who was also rewarded by the Postmaster General with another similar call; while "smart money" and pensions

were granted on the highest scale consistent with the regulations.

Even in distributing these rewards the Postmaster General found an opportunity for asserting their new principle. The Secretary's letter to the agent at Falmouth ran as follows: "But Mr. Pender must let it be thoroughly understood amongst the officers and crews that these rewards are given only in consequence of the particular circumstances attending this glorious action, in which the "Antelope" was first chased from nine o'clock A.M. December 1st to December 2nd, when she was obliged to defend herself against an attack, but did not first attack an enemy. For the Postmaster General by no means intend to depart from the principle which they have been ordered to adopt, of considering it to be the duty of the Packets to outsail the enemy whenever they can, and by no means to fight when it can possibly be avoided." In such terms the Secretary pointed his moral, perhaps a little incautiously. How his instructions were interpreted will appear hereafter.

Before leaving the subject of the "Antelope's" action, it must be observed that the newspapers of the time were full of praise of the extraordinary bravery of a certain M. Nodin, a passenger, formerly a midshipman in the French navy. The circumstances, if true, are remarkable enough; but there is still in existence an official copy of a declaration signed by Pasco himself and by the

gunner of the "Antelope," in which the whole story is denied. M. Nodin resented this disparaging deposition, and threatened proceedings against the two petty officers for defaming his character, a suit which the Postmaster General described as "absurd," and which does not seem to have been proceeded with. It is quite clear that the Post-Office authorities did not believe the story of M. Nodin's prowess. The matter might not have been worth mentioning had not the tale acquired authority by being set forth by James (*Naval History*, vol. i., p. 112). The authors and upholders of the new system were, doubtless, cheered and encouraged by this action, which seemed to show that great results might be achieved with even smaller armaments than those recommended for the new Packets. The fact that one of the oldest and worst equipped ships had won this striking success was hailed as a happy augury; and so the old year went out among mutual congratulations and good hope for the future.

The sunshine was of short duration. The storm was rising already. In the first days of January the loss of the "Arab" was reported at the Post-Office. The "Arab" was one of the new Packets, and her capture was a serious misfortune. It appeared that she had been taken by a French frigate, "L'Insurgente," while on her homeward passage from Corunna on Christmas Eve; and while it was evident that resistance would have been a useless sacrifice of life, there was some disappoint-

ment on finding that the "Arab's" fine sailing qualities had not saved her.

Another disaster was quickly announced, though belonging this time more plainly to the category of accident. The "Princess Augusta," again one of the new ships, caught fire while lying in the Tagus, and was completely burned. This was a mere piece of bad luck; but so much could not be said of the loss of the "Expedition," which was carried into Brest, in April, by a French frigate, which she had failed to outsail. The matter was the more serious since not only one mail was lost, but three, the scarcity of Packets having compelled the Post-Office agent at Lisbon to despatch the mails of three successive weeks by a single ship. The precaution commonly taken in those days of sending duplicates of all despatches and important letters by the next mail following that which had carried the originals was thus completely frustrated on this occasion, and the inconvenience to the Government and the mercantile community must have been immense.

To losses of this nature, however, of which, in these days, people rarely think, the merchants of a hundred years ago were well accustomed; and on the whole they endured them with exemplary patience. The prevalent ideas of the risks of business were formed on the experience of a century of almost constant war. So far, the losses of Packets had been less numerous than in the last war; and there was, therefore, no great degree of discontent.

In July, the "King George," a Lisbon Packet commanded by Captain Yescombe, was captured. She was about thirty leagues off Ushant, on her homeward voyage from Lisbon, when she fell in with four large French ships standing on the same tack. Captain Yescombe wore ship, and ran to the southwest until he had lost sight of the enemy for an hour or more; but had scarcely resumed his proper course when the four ships came in sight again, followed by four more in the same quarter; and in trying to avoid these squadrons, Captain Yescombe manœuvred himself into the jaws of the French 40-gun ship "Unité"; whereupon he sank the mails and despatches and struck his colours.

His experiences as a prisoner in France were rather curious. The "King George" was carried into Brest, and after remaining some time at that port, Captain Yescombe and his crew were sent to Quimper. It would appear from his letters that the English sailors confined in the naval prison of that town suffered great hardships, and that within nine weeks of his arrival no less than three hundred out of the whole number died miserably for want of proper food. From the risk of sharing their fate Captain Yescombe was delivered by a singular piece of good fortune. A lady residing near the prison, who happened to be related to the Commissary in charge of the prisoners, became aware of his forlorn condition, and obtained permission for him to lodge at her house. This arrangement continued for

several months, when Captain Yescombe managed to escape, being, as he always maintained, not on parole at the time. He made his way to Brest, where he remained concealed for several weeks; and during this time he witnessed the sailing of the great fleet, which got out of Brest on the 31st December, 1794, under the command of Villaret Joyeuse; and gathered details concerning its composition and equipment which afterwards proved of service to the British Government. Towards the end of January he managed to obtain a passage across the Channel, and landed at Plymouth, greatly broken in health by the hardships he had undergone.

The romantic circumstances of this escape attracted attention both in England and in France. In the newspapers of the latter country it was indeed freely asserted that Captain Yescombe had broken his parole; and though the Postmaster General accepted their officer's assurances on this point, yet the charge was so strongly asserted in France, and threats were so publicly made of meting out rigorous treatment to Captain Yescombe if he should again become a prisoner of war, that it was thought more prudent to allow his duties to be discharged by deputy for a time, and the "King George" accordingly sailed under command of her master until peace was declared in 1802.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEST INDIA MERCHANTS.

THE period on which the Post-Office now entered was, as far as its Foreign Mail Service was concerned, one of struggle and disaster. A long series of calamities was at hand, sufficient to shake the faith of those who trusted most firmly in the new system, and furnishing to those who from the first disliked and feared it, a well-nigh inexhaustible supply of arguments.

Before entering on this category of misfortunes it is necessary to remark again that throughout the war terminated by the peace of Amiens in 1802, the officers of the Falmouth station held a low standard of duty. There were doubtless many individuals among them who, in the midst of the prevailing laxity, maintained a more honourable course, and discharged their duties with perfect fidelity and vigour; but the fact that there was much ground for criticism in the conduct of the general body is proved by the frequent recurrence of minutes such as the following, inscribed in August, 1793, by com-

mand of the Postmaster General :—"The Postmaster General cannot but lament when they look at the absentee list of their captains in time of war, to see how many reasons they are constantly urging to stay at home, and of how little use they must consider their own presence at sea. There are now twelve Packets at sea, and no less than ten of the captains of them ashore." The excuses urged were plausible enough; and it was only by considering them in the aggregate that the Postmaster General could make plain their shifty character. Remonstrances were frequent, but unavailing, and the Postmaster General proceeded to use such modes of compulsion as occurred to them.

Their first proceeding was to stop absolutely the comfortable old system whereby all the superior officers of a Packet stayed at home at ease, while the mails entrusted to them made their distant journey to Barbados or Jamaica under the charge of a common seaman, who felt his way across the Atlantic by rule of thumb. None of the officers lost a penny by this arrangement. The captain, or the owners whom he represented, whose profits were made largely out of the passengers and in a less degree out of the sum paid for the hire of the Packet, with a small annual salary, received every item of these amounts without deduction whether he made the voyage or not; and in these circumstances the natural inclination of mankind to turn their employments into sinecures was constantly asserting itself

at Falmouth. In fact, the idea that so long as the commander, whether on board or not, was nominally responsible for the safety of his ship, no further questions ought to be asked, seems to have been elevated to the rank of an accepted principle of conduct at Falmouth, recognized by agent and commanders alike.

There was therefore a good deal of indignation when, in 1793, the agent, Mr. Pender, began to upset established practice, and went so far as to lay down the rule that, in the absence of the commander, no officer of lower rank than the master was to assume charge of a Packet. Mr. Pender explained that he was acting under instructions from headquarters; but the commanders could not believe that headquarters would be so unreasonable; and it needed a sharp, peremptory minute from the Postmaster General to convince them of the fact.

Of course this new arrangement was more costly to the commanders than the old one, for the master would not act as the captain's deputy without receiving considerably more money than would have contented a common sailor. At the same time the Postmaster General reached the pockets of the absentee captains in another way, for they laid down that any commander who, by shirking voyages in time of war, abrogated his functions as a fighting officer, should receive only the salary paid in times of peace, which was two pounds a month lower than the pay of the war establishment.

These penalties bore too small a proportion to the whole income of the Falmouth commanders to influence their conduct greatly, and matters, therefore, went on very much as before. "The Postmaster General," says a minute of the latter part of 1793, "cannot help thinking there must be some mistake about Captain D.'s application for leave, for, if they are right, he has been ashore on private business since September 11th, 1792, and yet has asked leave to be ashore this voyage. If that is so, they decidedly refuse him the leave he now asks for." Captain D. probably thought it wiser to accept this decision without protest, but, whether by passive resistance or active subtlety, he certainly escaped going to sea; and five years later another Postmaster General commented on his proceedings in the following terms: ". . . We cannot forget that Captain D. has been absent from his duty during many years, assigning no other cause than the death of his mother *in 1792*. We shall be sorry for new occasions to revert to this consideration. Such occasions may lead to a decision that Captain Deake has not that due zeal for the service which we are obliged to expect from those who remain in it." This incisive minute was penned by Lord Auckland, and its subtly-worded reference to some "two-handed engine" which might yet operate on Captain D. had the useful effect of frightening him back to his ship.

Such being the temper prevalent at Falmouth, good results were not to be expected. It will be

necessary to return to this subject in a later chapter. It is now time to resume the catalogue of the various disasters which befell the sea service of the Post-Office in the latter years of the last century.

When the authorities at Lombard Street reviewed the events of the year 1794, they may have been, on the whole, fairly well satisfied with what had occurred. It was true that since the loss of Captain Yescombe in the "King George," two other Packets had been captured, and one of these misfortunes was especially regretted since it was no other than the "Antelope," the vessel fought so bravely in the previous year, which had fallen into the hands of the enemy. The "Antelope" ended her career without dishonour indeed, but yet ingloriously. She was on a voyage to Halifax, under the personal command of her captain, William Kempthorne, and on the 19th September became involved in a dense fog which lasted many hours; when the fog cleared off Captain Kempthorne found himself completely surrounded by a squadron of French frigates, against which it would have been folly to resist. Accordingly he sank his mails, struck his colours, and he with his brave crew became prisoners of war.

The Falmouth Service could ill have spared an officer of Captain Kempthorne's qualities, even for the limited period which might be expected to elapse before he could be exchanged. But a worse misfortune was at hand, for Captain Kempthorne had been no more than a few days in the hands of

the French when he fell ill of a putrid fever, and died after a very short illness. No officer could have been more regretted, for Captain Kempthorne, who had served in the navy as midshipman and lieutenant, had in the last war fought one of the most notable actions of which the Post-Office could boast, having sustained for some hours and at last repulsed the joint attack of three American Privateers, of which the smallest was of greater force than his own ship.

The same French squadron captured the "Thynne" Packet four days after the "Antelope," but the last four months of 1794 went by without further mishap, and when the New Year arrived the retrospect must have been fairly encouraging. Though four Packets had been captured no one of them had fallen to a Privateer. Three had indeed been captured by squadrons against which any armament conceivable would have proved useless, and, on the whole, it might fairly be argued therefore that the new system held its ground.

The time was at hand, however, in which this immunity from the ravages of Privateers was to be broken. In the year 1795 the French turned their chief attention to the task of destroying commerce, and their change of policy makes itself felt at once in the records of the Post-Office, for though the Packets captured in 1795 were again only four in number, every one of them was taken by a Privateer, and in each case without a fight.

This was certainly not very satisfactory, for if the qualities of the new Packets, their sailing powers and their capacity for fighting in the last resort, could not protect them against Privateers the model must stand condemned. Questions doubtless arose in Lombard Street about the bloodless nature of every one of these conquests, but no trace of such discussions appears in the records. My Lords the Postmaster General had certainly impressed on their commanders that their safety was in flight, but they had not intended to convey that all the qualities of timid animals were to be copied, and that the commanders were to give themselves up for lost when overtaken.

In the following year (1796) the record is more pleasant to read. Three Packets were captured, apparently without effective resistance, by French Privateers, and one was seized by the Spaniards in Corunna harbour upon the declaration of war with England; but there were three gallant fights, which were the more welcome by reason of the fact that during two years the commanders seemed to have forgotten that guns were made to be fired.

Of the first of these encounters it happens unfortunately that no details are preserved. It was fought by the "King George," the Packet nominally commanded by that Captain Yescombe whose romantic escape from prison was mentioned in the last chapter, and a letter from him is still in existence in which he speaks in the highest terms of

the gallantry displayed by Mr. Bett, the master, who was in command of the Packet, as well as of the firmness with which he was supported by Mr. Jinkin, the mate, and by all the ship's crew. That these were not empty words is proved by the return of casualties, which shows that though none of the Packet's men were killed, six were wounded, some dangerously. The action was completely successful, and, even in the imperfect state of our information regarding it, may be set down as deserving credit.

The other two actions were fought by the same Packet, and within three weeks of each other. Both occurred, moreover, in those narrow seas of the West Indian archipelago which, since the British were driven out of Guadeloupe in December, 1794, had become doubly and trebly dangerous to our commerce. The vessel engaged was the "Portland," sailing under command of her master, Mr. Nathaniel Taylor.

A young man, untried in the responsibilities of command, Mr. Taylor was making his first voyage in charge of the "Portland"; and being, as the scanty record tells us, engaged to be married on his return to Falmouth, he was doubtless eagerly looking out for opportunities of distinction—an aspiration which was destined to be amply gratified.

The "Portland" was somewhat more than a month out from Falmouth when, on October 1st, 1796, she was attacked in the neighbourhood of

Barbados by a French Privateer which, after a close action of some duration, she succeeded in repulsing, with the loss apparently of only one man. Neither the name and force of the attacking vessel, nor any other details of the fight, have been preserved; but if the "Portland" was not outmatched in force, it can only be said that her antagonist was a much smaller vessel than any other Privateer, French, Spanish, or American, which came into conflict with a Packet throughout the war.

There were in fact few Privateers afloat which were not armed more heavily than the Post-Office Packets. It could not be otherwise, for the highwayman, whose arms were not superior to those of the peaceful traveller, could expect neither a long nor a merry life, and would see Tyburn earlier than he need.

It is certain, therefore, that the enemy repulsed by the "Portland" in this earlier action was a vessel stronger than herself; and Mr. Taylor, who had found his opportunity and grasped it, may have congratulated himself with the thought, that by the law of chances the perils of his voyage were over, and may thus have counted on carrying his laurels back to Falmouth.

But it was decided otherwise. On October 17th the "Portland" was lying becalmed off Guadeloupe—that hot-bed of privateering, a fatal monument of the shortsightedness of our naval administration—when an armed schooner, full of men, came out

of a creek at no great distance, and using her sweeps, bore down on the "Portland."

A very light breeze enabled Mr. Taylor to get his ship's head off shore, and to make way under easy sail towards Martinique, at which island he was to touch. All night the strange schooner hung upon the "Portland's" wake, and at daylight, on the 18th, the distance between the vessels was the same as at dusk on the previous evening.

Shortly after the first light the schooner bore down towards the Packet, and Mr. Taylor, thinking it time to bring the matter to an issue, hoisted his colours and fired a shot at the approaching vessel. The shot was instantly returned, and the next moment the colours of the French Republic were flying at the peak of the schooner, surmounted—in strange companionship with the ensign of a great and honourable nation—by the bloody flag, which signified that she would give no quarter in the coming fight.

There were on board the "Portland" four officers, Captain G. A. Tonym, 48th Regiment; Captain J. Johnston of the Buffs; Captain G. Rainy of the 45th Regiment; and Captain W. Maxwell, 93rd Highlanders; together, with Dr. Green, surgeon to the Forces at Antigua, and five merchants resident on that island, St. Vincent, or Martinique. All these gentlemen appear to have taken part in the action, so that Mr. Taylor's available force, allowing for the loss of one man in the former action,

was increased to forty-one men and boys, some of whom, however, had probably been wounded when their sea-mate was killed. On board the French vessel there were, as was afterwards discovered, sixty-one fighting men; and relying on this superiority of force, which they quickly discerned, the French, after a short cannonade, ran down to close quarters, intending to finish the affair by an impetuous assault.

Mr. Taylor seems to have desired nothing more, and resolving to hold his enemies to the ground which they had selected, he seized the Privateer's jib-boom as it ran aboard, lashed it securely, and then called his men forward, requesting the passengers at the same time to maintain a close fire of musketry on anything which showed itself on the deck of the enemy.

Then began a series of hand to hand combats, fought out desperately with cutlasses and boarding pikes. No details of these fights are left us; but we are told that out of the Privateer's crew no less than forty-one were killed or wounded, and that the remnant were at last driven to haul down their colours, finding the Falmouth men had gained secure possession of their deck.

Some of the French had taken refuge below, and a few of these, not knowing, it may be hoped, that the colours had been struck, fired a volley in the very moment when Mr. Taylor was restraining the fury of his men; and the brave young captain

fell, shot through the heart in the moment of victory.

Whether this unhappy occurrence was, as the passengers decided at the time, an act of premeditated treachery, or whether it may not more probably have found some justification in the confused circumstances of the moment, is a question which can never be determined. It is clear, however, that at the instant when he fell, though the colours were then certainly struck, Mr. Taylor found his authority needed to restrain further carnage; and if this were so, the responsibility for his death does not rest with the French. In any case, no charge of treachery should be made against honourable foes, save on evidence much clearer than is here forthcoming.

By the united testimony of the passengers, Mr. Taylor, throughout the action, was "perfectly calm, cool, and collected." He achieved part at least of his wish. He made his reputation, and though he did not live to wear it, yet it survived him many years, and forms one of the few bright spots in the history of the Falmouth Packets during the last decade of the eighteenth century.

At Lombard Street there was need of all the credit which his gallantry had earned; for troubles were gathering thickly round the administrators of the sea-service, and in the City the voice of discontent was loud and menacing. The war had now lasted four years. Within that period twelve Packets had been captured, having on board—for

there was not always a ship ready to embark the mail—no less than eighteen mails. On several occasions original letters and duplicates made for safety had both been lost. The inconvenience was immense, and the merchants grew restive under it.

It was easy enough to argue, as the Post-Office did, that in former wars the average of losses had been higher; and that to expect the Packets to carry every mail in safety was much the same as asking them to teach forbearance and morality to the enemy's Privateers. The West India merchants neither listened nor replied to these contentions. They did not want arguments. They wanted security for their correspondence, and they looked to the Post-Office to obtain it for them, whether in war or peace.

When the Postmaster General and the other high officials cast their eyes around to discover what prospects there were of satisfying this very natural desire, they could not fail to discern that in the near future they were likely to fare worse than in the past. The hopes of peace raised by Lord Malmesbury's negotiations in the autumn of 1796 had been disappointed. Even the Packet told off to convey despatches from the ambassador, having been driven ashore near Calais by a violent storm, was seized by the French and condemned as lawful prize, notwithstanding the full explanations which were rendered by her commander and by the British Government. The number of Privateers

which were reported week by week to be issuing from St. Malo, Nantes, Bordeaux, and a hundred other ports was absolutely without precedent. Between 20° and 30° W. long. there were, as the officers of a Nantes Privateer informed some Packetmen whom they had captured, no less than forty vessels like herself cruising with the sole object of preying on British commerce, and through this belt of enemies every West India Packet must pass. Many of these wolves of the ocean were hardly less powerful than frigates; and the smallest of them was an overmatch for any Packet in every point save that of individual courage and resource.

Moreover, when the war broke out it had been a duel between England and France alone, and the enmity of Holland on the north and Spain on the south somewhat limited the French powers of offence. Of whatever value this advantage might have been it was now lost; and the three powers henceforward presented a united front to England. The Privateers of any one could shelter, refit, or dispose of prizes in the ports of any other; and while this circumstance gave them an added strength in European waters, the case was even worse in the West Indies, where the French gained lurking places in every creek of the Spanish islands, and were enabled to lie in ambush for British commerce at numberless points where our ships were used to think themselves in safety.

It was easier by far to discern these facts of evil

augury than to discover any remedy. They were still being pondered in Lombard Street when the merchants opened their attack and lodged a memorial in Downing Street in which they complained in the strongest terms of the failure of the Post-Office to protect their correspondence. Scarcely had this memorial been received when the loss within one month of three West India Packets stamped it with an urgency which even its promoters had not foreseen, and raised the subject immediately from one chiefly affecting a single class to a grave matter of national concern.

The "Princess Elizabeth," homeward bound from Barbados and Jamaica, was taken on February 28th, by the "Actif," a Privateer carrying fourteen guns and a hundred and thirty men. The "Swallow" carried the outward mails of February 1st, for the same islands, while the "Sandwich" took out those of February 15th and March 1st. Three consecutive mails were thus on board these two Packets; and even the most anxious of merchants, sending important letters in triplicate by successive mails, might fairly have thought his precautions adequate to the risks. How great then was the anger and alarm when the news arrived that both Packets were captured and the three mails lost may be easily conceived.

Even more alarming than the present loss was the apprehension for the future raised by the great force of the Privateers concerned in these captures.

The "Du Gay" which captured the "Sandwich" carried no less than two hundred men and eighteen guns; while the captor of the "Swallow" was armed with sixteen guns (nines and sixes) and a hundred and twenty men. How, the Postmaster General demanded, could the Packets be expected to resist such force? And the merchants, echoing the question, declared that impossibility to be the basis of their whole argument; for the Packets, they asserted, had no more effective power of resisting Privateers than so many wherries from Blackfriars stairs.

The prayer of the merchants' memorial was that the Packets might be so equipped as to enable them to resist any enemy of equal size. This, as the Postmaster General pointed out, meant that each one of the Post-Office fleet should carry at least fourteen guns and one hundred men—a proposition which would involve rebuilding every Packet afloat, since no one of them was constructed to carry such an armament; and besides, that great capital expenditure would more than treble the charges of the Service, which already resulted in a yearly loss of over £12,000, exclusive of the liabilities for captured Packets, amounting at this time to more than £34,000.

It was natural enough that the Government, involved in a dangerous and costly war, should decline to entertain such a costly proposal. The Post-Office, however, willing to strengthen its hands

against the merchants, put forward a modified scheme for arming each Packet with ten four-pounders and forty men, at an extra cost of £8,000 yearly; and if more losses had been reported while that scheme was before the Treasury, it may have been that the Government would have accepted it. But unfortunately for the merchants, there was at this particular period a lull in the storm. Four months passed without disaster. Then came the report that the "Grantham" had been captured, but after a stout fight; and following the receipt of that news another equal period of good fortune. The disasters of February seemed to be exceptional. A House of Commons Committee was urging that by every means Post-Office expenditure should be reduced; the Treasury yielded to the greater pressure, and declined the Postmaster General's proposals.

The "Grantham" was commanded by Captain James Bull, an officer of long experience and proved ability, whose son, Captain John Bull, afterwards made a considerable reputation as commander of "Duke of Marlborough," of which much will be heard in subsequent chapters of this work. The "Grantham" was attacked near Barbados by a French Privateer of "fourteen double fortified four-pounders and one hundred and eleven men." She was much shattered in the action which preceded her capture; but no details of the fight have been preserved. Not long after it was decided, the "Tamar" frigate happily chanced to pass that way,

and delivered Captain Bull and his men from the prospect of a French prison.

Those optimists who held the comfortable faith that the disasters of February, 1797, were not likely to be repeated received an uncomfortable shock in the last month of that year and the first of the new one.

The "Countess of Leicester," which sailed from Falmouth on November 21st with mails for New York, should, under normal circumstances, have carried only those of the previous week. But it was at this time a practical impossibility to despatch every mail as soon as it reached Falmouth; and—strange as it seems to us to hear of such delays—the "Countess of Leicester" had on board not only the bags made up for her regular turn, but also those which should have been despatched from Falmouth on November 1st, but which had lain there three weeks, waiting for a Packet. It is difficult in these days even to imagine the outcry which would be caused by the delay of a mail for three weeks at the port of embarkation. But in 1797 such inconveniences were the trifles at which reasonable men did not cavil. The grievance lay in the fact that both mails were ultimately lost altogether.

The scarcity of Packets was already so great that it may be presumed that the "Prince Edward," which left Falmouth in the middle of December, and was captured off Barbados, was carrying out more mails than one; while this blow was instantly followed by

the loss of two successive homeward mails, carried by the "Prince Ernest" and the "Portland." It can scarcely be conceived that the brave crew of the latter vessel surrendered without struggle; but still, fight or no fight, the mails were gone.

This was more than the patience of the merchants could bear. To lose in one month at least two outward and two homeward mails—and it is quite possible that on board the three Packets even more mails had been stowed—was almost sufficient to bring their business to a standstill. The inconvenience was mounting to an intolerable pitch. They applied for a conference with the Postmaster General; and had scarcely done so when the news arrived that the "Roebuck," homeward bound from the Leeward Islands, and the "Swallow," outward bound on the same voyage, had both been captured by a single Privateer.

There was the same story of overwhelming force against which the Packets could not contend. The captor of the "Roebuck" was a Nantes Privateer, "La Liberale," carrying over two hundred men, and armed with eighteen 18-pounder guns, and it may be stated by the way that the captured officers told a remarkable story of the elfish mischievousness of the victors, who seemed to have behaved more like riotous schoolboys than like seamen. "On the enemy taking possession of the Packet," says Captain Servante, "they plundered her of every cabin and ship-store; and what they did take with them, they

wilfully destroyed or threw overboard. Several new sails they cut to pieces and divided among them ; and a suit of sails that were bent to the yards, little the worse for wear, they suffered to blow to pieces, there not being a seaman among them who would venture aloft to take them in."

The conference between the merchants and the Postmaster General was grave and weighty, according to the dignified manners of those days. The merchants, after remarking that no arrangement of the Packet Service could be adequate for the purposes of their trade, which did not render it highly improbable that even one homeward bound Packet would be lost, proceeded to ask whether it really was the case that the new Packets had attained that swiftness of sailing to which all their qualities of defence had been sacrificed. The average duration of the outward passage to Jamaica (touching at Barbados and other islands) is, they said, 45 days, and from Jamaica to Falmouth (touching only at Cape Nicola), 35 days. Now, these are very ordinary passages, remarkable in no way for speed. And the merchants emphasized their point by repeating that Packets designed expressly for speed ought to have been able to outsail Privateers. Why, then, had they not done so? Because, they concluded, some abuses exist in the mode of loading or navigating the Packets.

They were right ; abuses did exist, of which the nature must be more fully explained in the next

chapter. But before entering upon that subject, it will be well to complete the record of disasters, so that it may be understood more fully of what the merchants had to complain.

One of the practical suggestions made at the conference was that the Admiralty might be asked to lend a cutter which could be sent out with mails for the Leeward Islands and Jamaica. The request was made and granted by the Admiralty; but the cutter fared no better than the Packets, for on her homeward voyage she, too, was captured.

Great as was the number of Privateers which issued from the French and Spanish islands in the West Indies throughout this war, it was never so great as in the year 1798. How many were actually afloat will never be known; but, doubtless, the number captured by our cruisers in any one year bore some kind of rough fixed proportion to the whole body. Now, in 1796—if the figures given by Southey (*Chronological History of the West Indies*, Vol. III., p. 149) are correct—only sixteen were captured; but in 1797 the number had risen to sixty-seven; and in 1798 no less than ninety-nine of these sharks were brought in by our sloops and frigates.

It may be that for every one so captured there were five still lurking in the creeks and shallow waters round Guadeloupe or Cuba; and numbers such as these might suggest that it was well nigh impossible for our Packets to sail among the islands without encountering an enemy. But the ocean is

wide, and it is marvellously easy for vessels to miss each other, even when both have the desire for an encounter.

The conference was held in March. In April no Packets were lost, but at the end of May the "Princess of Wales," outward bound for Jamaica, was taken by a Privateer; and a week or two later the "Prince Adolphus," which was carrying a mail to Lisbon, met with a similar fate. About the latter vessel there hangs a curious story, which is worth relating.

It appears that when the French took possession of the "Prince Adolphus," they sent Captain Boulderson, her commander, with the greater part of his crew, on board the Privateer. Five men remained on the Packet, among whom the surgeon was the only officer; and a prize crew was instructed to navigate the prize into whatever French port could first be made.

Mr. Bullock, the surgeon, was by no means anxious to go to prison; and when the Packet had separated from her captor, he began to work on the cupidity of the prize master, and ultimately persuaded him to give up the ship, and restore all his prisoners to liberty in consideration of receiving a sum equivalent to about £4000, to be paid on the arrival of the vessel at Lisbon, where Mr. Bullock felt confident that the money would be forthcoming.

Accordingly, the "Prince Adolphus" was navigated into the Tagus, and Mr. Bullock, persuaded

that he had made a good bargain—for, while the Packet itself was not worth less than the stipulated ransom, the goods on board were worth as much again—repaired to the office of the Post-Office agent at Lisbon, Mr. Gonne, and demanded help in carrying out the transaction to which he had pledged the credit of the Government. But here an unexpected check occurred; for Mr. Gonne, asking grimly whether the doctor wished both of them to be drawn and quartered on a scaffold at Tyburn, produced an Act of Parliament, recently passed, which declared it treason for any British subject to remit money to persons owing obedience to the French Government.

Mr. Bullock and his companions were thus left to take their choice of three painful alternatives. Firstly, they might break their pledge freely given to the prize master; secondly, they might execute that pledge and submit to the penalties of high treason; or lastly, they might once more go on board the "Prince Adolphus," and—if indeed the harbour authorities would have allowed a vessel under French command to leave the Tagus in safety—permit the prize master to put to sea, and conduct them whither he would.

The last alternative, distressing as it was for men who had once set foot in freedom, seemed the only practicable one. This was recognized by every one concerned, but before adopting it the case was referred to the Postmaster General, who, after con-

sultation with ministers, decided that the ransom should be paid, and that a clause should be inserted in a forthcoming Act of Parliament, indemnifying the persons concerned in the transaction.

The money was accordingly handed over to the Frenchmen, who departed full of praises of the honourable treatment they had received, and which they did their best to requite in kind, for they wrote to the French Minister of Marine, stating what had occurred, and begging that, if only to mark their high esteem of the conduct of the English Government, Captain Boulderson might at once be liberated. This request was complied with, and Captain Boulderson very shortly returned to Falmouth.

Such was the end of a difficult affair, and if in its conclusion the Postmaster General found some ground for satisfaction, it could only have been with a chastened pleasure that they read the story of how the best had been made of a serious misfortune, and how a Packet, designed to escape the French, had been got out of their hands without so very much loss after all. But a gleam of better fortune was at hand, and the valour of one officer did much to redeem the record of the Falmouth Station in the year 1798.

The "Princess Royal" was commanded by Captain John Skinner, an officer of long experience and proved courage. On June 22nd, the Packet being then in Mid-Atlantic, bound for Halifax, a brig was discovered at daybreak in chase of the Packet,

and Captain Skinner promptly caused the decks to be cleared for action, and barricaded the ship as far as possible with hammocks and spare sails.

The wind was unfortunately very light, and the sea calm, so that though the "Princess Royal" crowded all sail to get away, the Privateer, which was using sweeps, gained ground perceptibly. It was not until 7 P.M., however, that she came within gunshot. A few broadsides were then exchanged without much effect on either side, after which the Privateer, having satisfied herself that resistance was intended, laid in her sweeps and waited for the day.

At 3 A.M. she swept up somewhat suddenly. Captain Skinner was quite ready however, and as she drew near he began to play upon her with his two 6-pounder stern chasers. Unfortunately one of these guns was rendered useless after the first discharge by the snapping of its axle tree, but the other was served with vigour. The one gun, however, did not suffice to stop the advancing Privateer, for at 3.30 A.M. she was alongside, and the action was in full progress.

James, who in his *Naval History* mentions but three of the numerous actions fought by the Packets, states that at this point Captain Skinner succeeded in bringing his six guns to bear on the side on which he was attacked.¹ Captain Skinner does not mention this in his report to the Postmaster General;

¹ *Nav. Hist.*, Vol. II., p. 207.

and indeed, as has been seen, one of his six guns was already useless. Very probably some such arrangement of the remaining five was attempted, but if so, any advantage which might have resulted from it was quickly lost, for Captain Skinner tells us that very shortly after the loss of his 6-pounder the axle trees of two of his 4-pounders gave way, and that he fought practically throughout the whole action with three guns only.

That he succeeded under these unfortunate circumstances in holding his ground against a more powerful antagonist is a striking proof of courage and seamanship. The cannonade lasted two hours, and during the whole of that time the "Princess Royal" was so manœuvred by her captain that the French had no opportunity of boarding, and were thus in some measure deprived of the advantage of their superior numbers. Meantime the passengers, under the direction of General Murray, had formed themselves into a body of riflemen, and were keeping up a galling fire on their enemies with excellent effect, for at 5.30 P.M. the Privateer sheered off.

It would have been folly for Captain Skinner with half his guns dismantled to endeavour to renew the action, so with a few parting shots from the chaser, which appeared to create confusion on the Privateer, the vessels separated, and the "Princess Royal" pursued her voyage.

In this action two men were badly wounded, and Captain Skinner himself was hurt less seriously by

the explosion of a powder-horn. It happened that on board the Privateer there were thirty English and American prisoners; and from some of these men it was afterwards ascertained that the "Princess Royal" had engaged the "Aventurier" of Bordeaux, a Privateer carrying fourteen long 4-pounders, and two 12-pound cannonades, with eighty-five men, an armament which might have been expected to secure a quick and almost bloodless victory for its possessors. The event, however, was so far otherwise that while two of the "Aventurier's" crew were killed, and four wounded, the vessel herself was so much injured that with all her masts shot through and no less than nineteen round shot in her hull, she was obliged to break up her cruise and return to Bordeaux to refit.

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF THE ABUSES.

DISASTER came treading close on the heels of success, and while the reports of Captain Skinner's gallant defence were still being digested in Lombard Street, the news arrived that the "Duke of York," outward bound for Barbados and Jamaica, had been captured by a Privateer carrying twenty "long double-fortified four-pounders," and no less than one hundred and seventy men.

The remaining months of 1798, and the early ones of 1799 passed away without further misfortunes. If it had been otherwise, it is not easy to see how the service could have been maintained with any sort of regularity, for the recent captures had caused the very greatest embarrassment. Sixteen established Packets were commonly employed on the West India voyage, a supply which was certainly not more than barely adequate to keep up the usual fortnightly service, but of these sixteen only seven were available in December, 1798; and though by hiring temporary vessels the numbers were made

up to ten, the extra vessels were less efficient than the regular ones ; and the delay of mails and despatches, which were kept waiting at Falmouth for a Packet, grew very serious. The agent, who was immediately responsible, was bitter in his protestations against being blamed for what he could not help.

The commanders, he declared, were very much in fault. No less than nine of them had received permission to remain ashore to supervise the building of new Packets. It was doubtless most desirable that the commanders should supervise this work. The construction of the Packets was a matter of vital concern to the officers who had to sail and fight them ; and, besides, it was only reasonable to suppose that under the commander's eye the work would be done more quickly as well as better.

Such were the arguments put forward by the commanders, very plausible as all their reasonings were, but breaking down in some odd way in actual practice. Each one of the nine captains demonstrated quite clearly that he was bestirring himself with zeal. Yet, somehow or other, the new Packets did not advance ; and the Postmaster General, on calling for a return, could not but be struck by the astonishingly long time which it took to complete the brigs of one hundred and eighty tons, or thereabouts, which were required for the service. Captain Servante, for instance, with his utmost exertions, as he himself testified on repeated occasions,

could not get one built in less than two years and five months, during the whole of which time his personal supervision was given to the work.

At this period the Post-Office administration had passed into the hands of men whose habit it was to draw direct and forcible inferences from facts such as these. Lord Auckland who, jointly with Lord Gower, now held the office of Postmaster General, possessed a dry and penetrating intellect, with an instinctive comprehension of the value of arguments used before him and of the worth of the persons using them. In writing, his style was direct and pungent; he knew how to state a principle and give it force without appearing to drive it down the throats of unwilling subordinates. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with the condition of the Packet Service, and determined to improve it as opportunity served during his term of office.

The other man whose strong hand began to influence the Post-Office at this crisis was Mr. Francis Freeling, lately appointed Secretary, an administrator whose brilliant and courageous work throughout the whole period of the war is by no means yet forgotten.

Two rulers so clear sighted and sagacious, acting together and supporting each other as they did in every emergency, could scarcely fail to discover the roots of the mischief at Falmouth; but before entering on a description of the measures taken, and while the Postmaster General and the Secretary,

assuming office at much the same time, are making their preliminary survey, taking note now of some indefensible practice which must be stopped, now of some suspicious action which demands stringent inquiry, it will be well to complete the tale of disasters to the Packets, which furnished so much material to these dissatisfied watchers at headquarters.

The earlier months of 1799 passed away as uneventfully as the later ones of 1798; and it was not until April that bad news reached the Post-Office. The "Chesterfield" was captured on the 23rd of that month; and three months later the "Carteret" hauled down her colours to a Privateer. Then there was again a period of success; and, except for the loss of one of the small schooners employed among the West India islands, the Packets made their voyages in safety until November.

Comparatively speaking, the captures had been so few during the last sixteen months, that there was doubtless some exultation at Lombard Street, and a growing confidence that the great problem how to convey the mails in safety during war-time was approaching a solution. The agitation of West India merchants had died away; complaints from irascible Colonial Governors, whose despatches were adorning some coral reef, or washing about in mid-ocean, were few and far between. It seemed indeed as if a golden age had dawned at last; but in the last six weeks of the year these bright anticipations were rudely shaken.

Towards the end of November the same Privateer which had captured the "Chesterfield" in July took possession of another Packet, the "Lady Harriet," outward bound for Lisbon; and only a few days later the "Halifax," homeward bound from the Leeward Islands, was seized by the "Vengeance," of sixteen guns and one hundred and thirty men.

The next homeward Packet expected from the West Indies was the "Westmoreland." She was captured on December 7th by a Privateer of twenty-six guns and two hundred and fifty men. In her were lost the duplicates of the letters and despatches captured in the "Halifax"; while, as if resolved that no cautious Colonial Governor or merchant who might have forwarded his correspondence in triplicate should profit by the precaution, the French lay in wait for the next homeward Packet also. It was the "Adelphi," and on December 22nd she fell into the hands of the "Grand Buonaparte," a Privateer of twenty-two guns and two hundred men.

How great a loss was caused by these three captures, how serious the interference in the machinery of government, may be surmised, but can never now be calculated. Grievances sustained a hundred years ago did not become vocal in the public press until they had grown absolutely intolerable, if then. But though there was no newspaper outcry, there was an abundance of personal protests, both from ministers and from the merchants; while, if the attitude of Lord Auckland on this important subject

may be judged from his subsequent actions, he was doubtless well pleased at finding his hand strengthened at a moment which was big with reform for Falmouth.

So the year 1799 passed away, and the new year opened upon indignant clamour outside the Post-Office, and careful, anxious deliberation within its walls.

One circumstance which struck Lord Auckland as singular was that the number of mails lost on the homeward passage was larger than on the outward voyage. When first observed this fact was brushed aside as an accidental occurrence, with the expectation that the next series of captures would redress the balance, and show that the risks of the outward-bound Packets were no less great.

Time went on, and the balance was not redressed. Persons outside the Post-Office began to notice which way it inclined, and ugly rumours were already circulating when an unparalleled series of disasters riveted the attention of the authorities on this point which at first seemed so insignificant.

The "Princess Royal," whose officers and crew had fought so bravely in June, 1798, was the first Packet reported lost. Her gallant captain had been promoted to a command on the Holyhead station, which was both more lucrative and less arduous than the post in which he had won distinction. How far Captain Skinner might have succeeded in repulsing the "Courier" Privateer, to which the

"Princess Royal" struck her colours on February 27th, being then on her homeward voyage from the Leeward Islands, it would be profitless to inquire. Ten days later the "Carteret," homeward bound from Jamaica, hauled down her colours to the "Bellona," a powerful Privateer of thirty guns and two hundred and fifty men. The "Jane," the outward Packet of March 2nd for the West Indies, was captured, after a sharp engagement, on the 12th of that month; and though she was recaptured a few days later by an English cruiser, that event happened too late to save her mails. On May 4th the "Princess Charlotte" was captured; on May 6th the "Marquis of Kildare" succumbed; on May 11th the "Princess Amelia" was seized by a Bordeaux Privateer; and, after an interval of some months, the "Duke of Clarence" was sent into Teneriffe as the prize of a Spanish Privateer.

Every one of the four last Packets was homeward bound. The coincidence was too obvious to be overlooked.

Another fact about these captures must have arrested Lord Auckland's attention. There was hardly any fighting. Why was there not? The capturing Privateers were, it is true, of overmastering force in many cases, if not in all. But the "Antelope," the "Portland," and the "Princess Royal" had successfully resisted superior forces; and when was it ever imputed to English sailors that they feared to defend themselves against an

enemy because they could not bring into action man for man, or gun for gun? On this very Falmouth station, in past years, numberless actions had been fought as bravely as any in our annals; and these glories were by no means eclipsed for ever, but were in a few years to shine again with no less splendour than before, though Lord Auckland had not the satisfaction of foreseeing this.

It is not asserted that every Packet whose capture is mentioned in these pages was surrendered without firing a shot; but it is certainly true that in hardly one case did any serious fighting occur. The very sailors who were captured were not devoid of spirit, as appeared in the case of the "Marquis of Kildare," whose loss was mentioned above. The greater part of the crew of this Packet remained prisoners on board the Privateer, but twelve were left on their own ship, in charge of a prize crew. In the night these twelve rose upon their captors, drove them into the hold, and triumphantly navigated the Packet into Falmouth. They were doubtless commended, and perhaps rewarded, on arriving there; but it may be hoped that the agent took occasion to point out to them how much more serviceable their valour would have been had they proved it before their ship was captured and their mails lost.

Nobody believed the Falmouth sailors to be cowards. Indubitable facts and the long experience of the past showed that they were not. The

root of the mischief must be sought deeper than that.

Wherever it might lie, there was clearly no time to lose in searching for it. The complaints of the merchants were incessant; and when Mr. Henry Dundas, at that time Secretary of State for the Colonies, went so far as to instruct the general officer in command in the West Indies to send home duplicate and triplicate copies of his despatches by well-armed merchant vessels, "which appear to have a better chance of safe arrival than the regular Packets," and forwarded a copy of this galling letter to the Postmaster General, no one could any longer doubt that unless some quick and searching remedy could be found, the Post-Office might almost as well lay down the pretence of conveying the mails in safety. Lord Auckland frankly owned that Mr. Dundas' letter had not surprised him. Long before matters reached this point, he had inquired what evidence was taken that the capture of any particular Packet had occurred in the manner described by her officers. He was told that of evidence, properly so called, there was none at all, except the sworn statement of the captain, made before a notary selected by himself.

An officer of the navy who lost his ship, Lord Auckland observed, was invariably brought to court-martial. A number of honourable and experienced officers were appointed to judge his conduct; he

was called before them, and required to prove on oath, and by the evidence of witnesses, that his courage and skill had been properly exerted.

A Packet captain in the same situation was summoned before no court at all. He went, in company with one or two of his chief officers, to a notary in Falmouth, and before that gentleman executed a sworn statement, technically called a "protest." In form, this document "protested" against the conduct of the enemy which had captured, or injured, the Packet. It detailed just so much, or so little, of the facts as the captain thought proper to relate; and the notary had no other responsibility in the matter than the administration of an oath.

This was the whole proceeding. When the "protest" reached the General Post-Office, it was accepted as a matter of course; and on it steps were taken for repaying to the commander the amount of his loss.

Could it be right, Lord Auckland asked, that there should be no public inquiry, no examination of the whole crew, no statements taken from passengers! The Inspector of Packets was the person to whom it fell to answer this question; and he at once came forward to testify that he thought it the most satisfactory system in the whole world. It was the time-honoured custom at Lloyds, and must therefore be good enough for the General Post-Office. A sworn declaration! Were there no

penalties against perjury! The fear of incurring these penalties must be a perfect safeguard, if any be needed among honourable men!

The value of the opinions held by this Inspector of Packets, who must have somewhat resembled Dr. Pangloss (except, as shown by mountainous papers still existing, where his own fees were concerned), was quickly put to a fresh test. But in order to make clear the nature of the very important question which now arose, some amount of explanation and of retrospect is necessary.

Allusions have been made in previous chapters of this work to the fact that all Packets throughout the last century carried goods. Now this practice was expressly forbidden by a statute of Charles II.; but it does not appear that the prohibition had ever been enforced. Mr. Freeling, the Secretary of the Post-Office, stated in a report made about this time that he had been unable to trace the steps by which the trade had developed itself in the teeth of the statute, and that in his opinion the custom "was coeval with the Packet Service itself." However that may have been, the trade was certainly of antiquity sufficient to have struck deep roots at Falmouth. It was carried on without the slightest concealment; and was indeed expressly sanctioned by the Government, though it remained, as it had always been, illegal. In reports made on the capture of Packets, the presence of goods on board the vessel was set down with no more comment

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than that of provisions. Indeed, so recently as in 1798, in a code of new regulations applicable to the Packet station at Falmouth, the trade had been explicitly recognized, and the only instruction given to the agent in regard to it was that he must satisfy himself that no Packet carried so large a quantity of goods, or stowed them in such a manner, as to put her out of trim.

The Post-Office always looked unfavourably on this trade; and from time to time sought the assistance of the Treasury in abolishing it, and restricting the Packets to their proper use. But in those days of constant war, when the seas were unsafe for merchant vessels, and the ports now of one nation, now of another, were closed to English ships, the Government held that it would be inopportune to stop a commercial outlet on which many merchants of Bristol and other towns in the west depended for a chief part of their trade; and so the irregular system went on and grew unchecked.

On the Lisbon station the trade seems to have been more important than on the West India boats, though it was very profitable on both. The West India boats carried out cheese, potatoes, boots, and shoes, and, curious addition to the list, fighting cocks, for which there was a brisk demand. The Lisbon Packets exported every kind of manufactured goods, often to the value of £4000 on a single voyage. These were by no means the speculations

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of the captain or of the officers alone. The seamen traded, each on his own account. Every man had his own stowage space reserved under the ceiling of the fore-castle. Here his "ventures" were suspended, and no one claimed to interfere with them.

Sometimes the seaman's ventures consisted of goods entrusted to him by some merchant, to sell on commission at Lisbon or Barbados; sometimes he had purchased them himself; for not a few of the seamen were capitalists on a small scale, and most of them had formed regular connections with the merchants. The goods once sold in foreign ports, others were of course purchased there. Silks, wines, tobacco, numberless things which by a little ingenuity could be smuggled into Falmouth duty free; and in order to facilitate disposing of these imported bargains, a whole corps of female pedlars was in existence, locally named "troachers," who trudged the country and hawked about the goods of Jamaica or New York from farm house to country mansion.

There was thus at Falmouth an irregular trade of great value. Every seaman in the employment of the Post-Office was engaged in it. To most it had formed a chief inducement to enter the service; for the wages were very low, and would not of themselves have attracted men away from the Revenue Service or the Royal Navy.

More than once during the last few years of

the century suggestions had been made of scandals connected with the Falmouth trade; and hints had been thrown out that a stringent inquiry, conducted on the spot, might bring to light facts which would explain the frequent captures of Packets. The West India merchants, in guarded language, "prayed that . . . any abuses in the loading of the Packets . . . might be remedied"; but other persons spoke plainly what was here only hinted; and roundly declared that it was sometimes very profitable to be captured, and that the officers who were the most often captured were the most quickly growing rich.

The charge soon took clearer shape. It was said that, in accordance with a common practice, the goods received on board the Packets at Falmouth were insured in England for the double voyage, out and home. If then the goods were sold in the West Indies, it would be a possible thing for the crew to remit the purchase money in bills by some safe channel; and to surrender themselves quietly to the first Privateer they met. They ran the risk of spending some years in a French prison; but one cannot grow rich without some risk, and there was a good chance that the Privateer would put them ashore in their own boat.

When they once reached England, they were secure from detection. They declared before the Insurance Company that the Privateer had taken from them large quantities of goods which they

had not succeeded in selling abroad, or which they had purchased there hoping to sell at home. They claimed the value of those goods, and by the next Packet received that value a second time in the bills which they had themselves remitted.

This was the charge against the Falmouth officers, — a charge involving so much base dishonesty that one hesitates before accepting it as true of even the smallest section of the Service at which it was levelled.

Lord Auckland declined to believe in the possibility of "so black and desperate a fraud." Still, whatever incredulity might be felt at headquarters, the accusation was clearly one which demanded instant notice; and accordingly the optimistic Inspector of Packets was directed to proceed to Falmouth, and report on the matter.

Little time was lost by the Inspector. He quickly produced a report which positively asserted the existence of such fraud to be impossible. His reason was that no insurance company would pay the value of its policy in the absence of an affidavit declaring precisely the quantity and quality of the goods on board the Packet at the time of the capture. The honest man forgot that the very nature of the charge involved treachery and lying; and that men who could be supposed guilty of those basenesses would not be likely to hesitate at a perfectly safe perjury. Of course the Inspector's conclusion was not necessarily absurd, because his

reasoning was unsound. But there are two stories on record which go some way to prove that the one and the other were equally wrong.

To take the least conclusive story first. The "Earl Gower," commanded by Captain Deake, was on her way home from Lisbon in June 1801 when she encountered the "Télégraphe" Privateer cutter, of fourteen guns and seventy men, a force considerably superior of course to her own. Captain Deake plied his guns with vigour, however, and might perhaps have got clear off, had not fully half his crew gone below in a body, refusing either to work the vessel or to fight her. The action of these men is scarcely comprehensible on any other supposition than that they wished to be captured. Cowardice would have impelled them to flight; but they refused to work the ship, which was of course taken.

The second case tells a plainer story; and must always stand, exceptional as it may be, as a black disgrace upon the records of the Falmouth Service. The facts are as follows.

The "Duke of York," a Packet homeward bound from Lisbon, was chased throughout September 18th, 1803, by a Privateer of scarcely more than half her size, though more heavily manned. Towards evening the master, who was acting commander at the time, consulted with the surgeon as to the course proper for them to take in view of the fact that the enemy was obviously gaining on them. The surgeon stated that in his opinion resistance was

impossible. He advised surrender; and the master, after a short conversation, adopted his view. They came to this resolution while the enemy's vessel was still a mile distant from them, and before she had even fired a summoning gun they hauled their colours down.

It was then seven o'clock, and the night was falling rapidly. This circumstance however did not suggest to them that there was a chance of escaping under cover of the darkness; it brought to their minds only the fear that the enemy might not have seen their flag pulled down. And so, to avoid any misapprehension on the subject of their shame, they sent a boat on board the Privateer and proclaimed it in advance.

The story as here told leaked out by degrees. However, on the first receipt of the news in London, Lord Auckland heard it with so much suspicion that he resolved to use the occasion for instituting the Court of Inquiry, about the necessity of which he and the Inspector of Packets held such divergent views. A Court was accordingly constituted at Falmouth, composed of all the commanders in port at the time, under the presidency of the agent; but the result was disappointing. The commanders put their questions in such a manner as to shield the culprits as far as possible; and finally stultified themselves by finding that all the officers did everything possible to save their ship.

Perhaps little else was to be expected at the

outset of such inquiries. The commanders doubtless resented the change of system as an insult to themselves. They were all old friends and neighbours; *esprit de corps* was strong among them in proportion as their numbers were few; and, moreover, their Court having no legal standing, nor any power to administer oaths, there was nothing to excite a feeling of responsibility, or dignity, among the individuals composing it, such as might have outweighed the natural dislike to its establishment. The responsibility developed; the dislike wore off. In course of time these inquiries, which became part of the regular routine of the station, were found useful enough, and even indispensable.

On this first occasion, however, the finding of the Court was useless, if not positively mischievous; and some more stringent inquiry was plainly needed. It was entrusted to the Inspector of Packets, who was acute and shrewd when he could cast off the preconceived ideas bred by his long experience, and who had been shaken out of his optimism in some degree by recent events. He set himself to work in Falmouth with zeal and energy, and gradually disclosed a number of very remarkable facts. He traced, so far as possible, the value of the goods which each officer and sailor had on board, what insurances he had effected on the outward voyage, and what on the homeward, and finally what sum (if any) he had gained by being captured.

One man, he found, admitted that he had gained £300 by his misfortune. The surgeon, who advised the surrender, had certainly made £250 out of it; but, by a remarkable lapse of memory, he was quite unable to recollect what sum he had received in Lisbon for goods sold there; so that it was impossible to arrive at the full amount of his profit. The steward's mate was richer by £250; one of the seamen by £200; and most of the crew had pocketed substantial sums, made in the identical way indicated by the rumours spoken of above.

The next step was to ascertain whether any of these men, and especially those who had made large profits on this occasion, had been captured before.

The surgeon, who had been foremost in counselling surrender, and who was also (probably) the largest gainer among this pack of scoundrels, had also been captured more frequently than any of the crew, except three men, having been taken prisoner no less than three times before. How much money he had made on those three occasions is not stated. Three of the crew had been equally lucky. Four other men had been captured twice before, most of the rest once, and eight of them had been on board the "Earl Gower" at the time of the disgraceful circumstances related above.

The inference from these facts was so plain that not even the Inspector of Packets could fail to draw it. His report was hesitating, but on the

whole conclusive: and it contained this striking passage, "I cannot help being of opinion that if during the war officers and seamen are permitted to carry out merchandise on commission or otherwise, there is reason to fear that the loss of Packets may be very considerable, unless indeed under disinterested or high-spirited commanders."

There is a barb in this sentence for all who love Falmouth, and one would fain drop the subject at this point. But history has no concern with sentiment; and, as the matter is of importance, the following extract may be quoted from the minutes of the Postmaster General, written after a careful review of the whole subject.

" . . . These papers prove beyond a doubt that His Majesty's Packet could not have been captured if the skill and courage of her crew had been properly exerted. Their Lordships even incline to think that the French Privateer might have been captured if our vessel had been carried into action with the spirit which characterizes British seamen in general. No resistance was made. It was not even seen what was the force of the Privateer. The Packet was not even hailed or fired at by the enemy, yet a boat was sent off to meet the Privateer and to accelerate a surrender of which the seamen themselves speak as dishonourable and dishonest. . . . Under these circumstances my Lords the Postmaster General . . . never will consent that Mr. — the acting commander, or Mr. — the surgeon, shall again be employed in their service."

So then, it must be taken as proved that in this one case certain officers of the Falmouth Service sold their honour and betrayed their country. One

naturally asks whether any of the other captures mentioned in the previous pages were due to a similar treason. Since the war broke out thirty-two Packets had been captured, and of these twenty-one were taken on the homeward voyage.

It may be said at once that, as far as the now existing records show, no such misconduct as was proved against the officers of the "Duke of York" was ever alleged against any others. Doubts may have been raised in the minds of Lord Auckland or of Mr. Freeling; but if so, they were allowed to slumber again, and, after the lapse of well nigh a hundred years, it cannot be necessary to reawaken them.

In order to bring out more clearly the nature of these charges, and to show precisely how far they were well-grounded, the proper sequence of events has been somewhat neglected.

During the four years which elapsed between the first rumour of the scandals and the capture of the "Duke of York," considerable progress had been made in limiting the trade. Early in 1800 complaint of the existence of an illegal trade at Falmouth was made to Mr. Pitt by a private individual. Who this person was, on what grounds he objected to the trade, or by what influence he prevailed on the Treasury to issue a prohibition for which successive Postmasters General had appealed in vain,—these are inquiries on which the records

throw no light. The fact however is that he did prevail, and an order was issued prohibiting the private trade on the West India Packets, though for the present it was permitted to continue on the Lisbon boats.

In looking back on these events one cannot but suppose that in thus vitally altering the ancient conditions of service on the Falmouth station the Government were actuated by some motive much more potent than the desire to gratify a single individual. It must have been foreseen that the sailors would resent the loss of their large profits; that the chief attraction of the Service in their eyes was about to be destroyed, and this in the midst of a dangerous and costly war.

The discontent showed itself at once. There was something resembling mutiny at Falmouth. The crews of several vessels refused to proceed to sea, and their captains reported that they could not obtain sailors unless the trade were restored. The Government stood firm. The memorials of the seamen pointed out that their wages, if they must rely on them solely, were not sufficient for their maintenance and for that of their families. The statement was perfectly true, for the trade had been so fully recognized by the authorities that it was always held to be unnecessary to pay any but low wages to men who were earning so much by private speculation. The wages had to be increased, but the increase of course could not be equivalent to

the amount of profit lost by the new rule; and a smouldering mass of discontent was left at Falmouth which in years to come broke out again and again into mutiny.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NORTH SEA PACKETS.

THUS far, for the sake of clearness, the narrative has concerned itself with the Falmouth Packets alone. The successive developments by which the root of the mischief existing on the Cornish station gradually revealed itself to all the world were too important to be complicated with the affairs of other stations, especially when those affairs, with very few exceptions, were neither interesting nor considerable. In fact, it is only on the stations whence the North Sea Packets sailed that one is tempted to linger at all after leaving Falmouth. The record of the Irish Packets is incomparably dull. Squabbles between the Post-Office of Great Britain and the Post-Office of Ireland about the precise amount of influence which each should exercise over the Holyhead or the Milford boats, interminable arguments concerning the regulations under which noblemen's carriages might be stowed on deck during the voyage, lengthy surveys of the coast, complaints from the agent that the captains were disrespectful

and from the captains that the agent interfered unwarrantably in their private affairs—such were the subjects of the bulky reports which filled the pigeon-holes devoted at the General Post-Office to the affairs of the two lines of communication with the opposite side of St. George's Channel.

The Irish Packets, so far as we know, were never in action during the years of which this volume treats. Almost the same remark indeed might be made of the North Sea Packets; but here an interest of another kind arises. The Harwich and Dover boats played manfully a part in a drama of the greatest moment to this country. It was a game in which shot and powder had scarcely any part; yet it called for courage of the highest order, and for resource and seamanship such as British sailors have always shown themselves possessed of in time of need.

The Continental system which called out these faculties was as yet only a dream in Napoleon's heart; and the story of the North Sea Packets might have been left untouched until that system began to develop itself, had it not happened by a curious chance of fortune that in the year 1798 a sort of rehearsal occurred of the dangers of that troublous time which was yet to come. The winter proved to be of extraordinary severity. The shores of Holland and Northern Germany were beset with ice; the rivers were all closed, and by a sudden turn of temperature the Post-Office was confronted

with the identical situation which the masterful hostility of Napoleon created a few years afterwards.

Before proceeding to speak of the difficulties thus created, it will be necessary to explain that the North Sea Packets by no means corresponded to the Falmouth model. Small as the Cornish Packets must appear in the eyes of our generation, accustomed to the vast dimensions of the floating palaces in which travellers of to-day make the Atlantic voyage, the Harwich and Dover boats were smaller still. Many of them indeed were of only fifty tons, while none exceeded eighty tons. The Harwich boats, which plied to Helvoetsluis as their normal port of call, were a trifle larger than the Dover Packets which undertook the shorter voyage to Calais, and they carried somewhat heavier guns. Three-pounders were found to be too heavy for the Dover boats, and had to be exchanged for two-pounders; but the Harwich Packets always carried four four-pounders, and at a later period some of them were allowed a couple of extra guns of the same calibre.

In 1793, when the war broke out, the port of Calais was of course closed to English ships, and the mails for Italy and the Mediterranean could no longer cross France. The situation thus created was too familiar in the last century to occasion any embarrassment at the General Post-Office. In fact, the relations between the Postal authorities in

London and Paris were in those days so much the reverse of cordial, even when the two countries were at peace, that the outbreak of hostilities seems to have been not altogether unwelcome at Lombard Street, as closing a channel of communication which had never been used without friction and dispute.

The Dover station was at once closed, and the Packets transferred to Harwich, whence, after a short interval, the whole fleet of both stations was removed to Yarmouth, a port which was supposed to be more conveniently situated for the duties which lay before them. All the mails were forwarded to Helvoetsluis. The relations between the Post-Offices of England and Holland had always been good; and the Service worked well and smoothly until the French power menaced the integrity of Holland.

Throughout the year 1794 the rupture of relations with Holland loomed through the troubled atmosphere, and early in 1795 it became an accomplished fact. Town after town declared for the French. Pichegru's cavalry, careering over the frozen waters of the Texel, captured the Dutch fleet; the English troops retreated; the Batavian Republic was proclaimed; the resources of Holland were added to those of France, and another outlet for the Continental mails must be found, Helvoetsluis being henceforth closed against us as rigidly as any port in France itself.

In this emergency the British Post-Office naturally

looked to Hamburg, with which ancient city it had been in alliance for many generations. The mails were despatched to Cuxhaven, and were there landed and despatched *via* Hamburg into the interior without obstruction for more than three years. A great frost set in, however, during December, 1798, and before Christmas the severity of the weather had already produced serious difficulties for the Post-Office. The mails began to arrive at very irregular intervals; and each Packet as she reached Yarmouth brought fresh reports of the alarming speed with which ice was forming not only in the Elbe, but even beyond the estuary of the river, so as in a great degree to threaten interruption of all access to the coast. Meantime the frost grew daily more severe. On the 28th December four Hamburg mails were due, and London had been without trustworthy news from the Continent for the best part of a fortnight.

Such an interruption of the regular course of post would have been serious enough at any time; and if commerce only had been injured by it, would have called for the promptest remedy possible. But far greater interests were at stake than those of Threadneedle Street and Mincing Lane. Political events were occurring on the Continent of which intelligence reached London all too slowly at the best of times; and it was quite possible that in the bags lying idle in the Hamburg Post-Office there might be despatches containing news which,

whether for good or evil, touched the very existence of the country.

The forethought of the directors of the Hamburg Office had provided to some extent for such a contingency as had now occurred. They had established an agent on the island of Heligoland, whose instructions were to receive the mails whenever the Packets were unable to reach Cuxhaven, and to use any means suggested by his experience for forwarding them to their destination. It was scarcely likely that officials in London could quicken this agent's apprehension of the urgency of the situation, or suggest any expedient which he had left untried; and yet the uneasiness both in Downing Street and the City was rising to such a pitch that it was resolved to send an energetic officer to attempt both these tasks.

This resolution was hardly taken when the "Champion" frigate, having on board Mr. Grenville, a diplomatist charged with a mission of some importance, put back to Yarmouth, from which port she had sailed for Cuxhaven about a week before. The officers reported having encountered head winds against which they had vainly struggled to make their port, or even to reach the Holstein coast, where the envoy might have landed with some prospect of reaching his destination. They had sighted three Post-Office Packets beating about in the neighbourhood of Heligoland, apparently unable to proceed, while the master of a Bremen

galliot had informed them that both the Elbe and the Weser had been frozen up for three weeks.

The prospect appeared hopeless. Where the "Champion" had failed, it seemed useless to expect that a Post-Office clerk would succeed. For a few days, therefore, the matter drifted; but on the 4th January Mr. Freeling was summoned to Downing Street, and in the course of the interview which he had with Ministers so much stress was laid on the necessity of making a great immediate effort to obtain the mails and despatches which were lying at Cuxhaven, that on his return to the city he at once selected Mr. Henry Chamberlayne for the duty, and instructed him to make ready for an immediate departure.

At Downing Street the opinion was held that the conditions of weather which rendered it impracticable to reach the mouth of the Elbe might admit of a landing at Norden in Friesland, from which place a journey overland to Hamburg ought to offer no insuperable difficulties.

A sloop of war was sent round to Yarmouth, where it took up Mr. Chamberlayne, with two King's messengers, and at once set sail in company with a Post-Office Packet and a lugger. The latter craft was to be detached to obtain the mails at Heligoland, and bring them on to Norden, whither the sloop and the Packet were to proceed direct. The scheme failed hopelessly however. It proved absolutely impossible to land either at Norden or

elsewhere within striking distance of Hamburg; and after beating about the North Sea for ten days, wearing themselves out in ineffectual efforts to accomplish their mission, Mr. Chamberlayne and the King's messengers returned with the report that the thing was impracticable, and that no mails must be looked for until the weather moderated.

Their report, though in the main true enough, and made only after very great efforts to succeed, was already partially disproved in advance. A daring officer of the Yarmouth station had demonstrated that the ice blockade was not impenetrable, and had shown that on a service of this nature the proper person to despatch was a seaman, and one moreover to whom the navigation of the stormy North Sea was thoroughly familiar.

Captain Bridge, commander of the "Prince of Orange," had received two mails for Cuxhaven on board his Packet on the 9th of December; and it may be interesting to readers of our own day who by long experience have gained confidence in the speed and certainty of mails, to observe how long these mails remained in Captain Bridge's possession, and how he fared in his efforts to dispose of them.

It was by no means in the power of a Packet captain a hundred years ago to proceed to sea whenever he pleased. He was under the necessity of waiting on the winds; and for a full week after Captain Bridge had received his mails, those winds blew so fiercely from the east that it was quite

impossible for the "King George" to set out on her voyage.

Nothing short of absolute necessity kept the Packets lying idle. If any craft afloat got out to sea they were expected to do so; but not the best will or the finest seamanship around the coast could take a Packet from Yarmouth upon her course for Hamburg in the teeth of an easterly gale. And so the "Prince of Orange" lay at anchor, while more mails continually collected in the agent's office, until, when at last the wind veered round, and blew from the south, there were three other Packets also ready to put out to sea.

All four set sail in company; but almost before they had weighed anchor they were suddenly enveloped in a dense fog, in which they separated. At the same time the wind shifted again into the north-east, and rose quickly to a strong gale, with showers of snow and sleet, against which the four Packets beat vainly throughout two nights and a day, when, finding it absolutely impossible to make progress, they returned once more to Yarmouth. Two days afterwards the wind again became favourable, and the Packets, once more hoisting their anchors, went out of Yarmouth Roads with a strong breeze from west-south-west. The fair weather lasted long enough to bring the "Prince of Orange" in sight of Heligoland, where she remained throughout the night, making signals for a pilot, which were not responded to.

Now Captain Bridge was well aware of the critical importance of the service he was engaged on, and by no means intended to be prevented from executing it by the cowardice or sloth of the Heligoland pilots. He knew the coast well, and resolved to attempt a landing. Possibly he might succeed as well without a pilot as with one, since the case was one demanding resolution and daring rather than an exhaustive knowledge of the coast. He was venturing a good deal; for the risks of the sea were his, the Government accepting only those of capture or damage by the enemy.

At daybreak Captain Bridge took in his signals, and made all sail for the mouth of the Elbe. The voyage proved unexpectedly easy. The "Prince of Orange" met with no obstacles. The ice, possibly, had shifted by the action of the tide; but however that may be, the "Prince of Orange" succeeded where others had failed, and at 2 P.M. shot the ice close to Cuxhaven Pier.

This was well enough; but the dangers of the voyage were by no means over. With great difficulty and no small danger a line was got ashore across the pack ice; but this occupied some time. The tide was ebbing like a chain; the Packet had already begun to drift down stream; and before the line could be made fast by the helpers on the quay, it parted, and the "Prince of Orange" lay at the mercy of the stream.

Her position was now highly dangerous. The

ice floes closed around her, and navigation was impossible. There was nothing for it but to wait until she grounded, which she did at last upon a sandbank some considerable distance below the town, and not far from the village of Doos.

The "Prince of Orange" lay upon her side at some distance from the shore. Night was falling; the winter darkness was thick, and nothing could be done until daybreak. During the night the ice bore down on the Packet so heavily as to threaten momentarily to capsize her; but though at times it seemed impossible that she could stand the strain of the floes grinding against her timbers, she was still in much the same position when morning came. Moreover, the tide had fallen so far during the night that it was possible to reach the land; and Captain Bridge at once put the mails in safety, and ordering his crew to get ashore whatever they could of value from the ship, which still seemed only too likely to go to pieces, he hired a wagon in the village, and himself delivered the mails and despatches at the agent's office in Cuxhaven.

He made no long delay in Cuxhaven, being in great anxiety about his ship, but taking over all the bags which the agent had in charge, drove back in his wagon to Doos. The position there had changed for the better during his absence. The Packet had floated off the sandbank, and appeared on examination to be uninjured. The mails were put on board without delay, and Captain Bridge set sail for

Yarmouth, where he received great credit for his plucky exploit.

The Yarmouth commanders were all bold seamen, but few of them were willing to take the risks which Captain Bridge had run. The frost continued week after week, and with one exception, when Captain Hammond in the "Carteret" repeated Captain Bridge's feat, bringing home three mails in triumph, all intercourse with Northern Europe was cut off until the end of January.

It must appear to our modern ideas scarcely possible to exaggerate the inconvenience and distress proceeding from this long stoppage of political and commercial intercourse with the Continent. Such an event occurring at the present day would assuredly bring down to the ground many an old business house, and even shake the foundations of public credit. But our ancestors traded before the days of speedy answers and quick transactions. They were well used to the loss or long delay of letters, and had adjusted their affairs to the conditions of their time. The loss to them, therefore, cannot be measured by what it would impose on us; yet, after making all allowances, it remained very severe, and caused great anxiety to the Government.

As January sped away, bringing with it no change for the better, various suggestions were laid before the Postmaster General by persons who conceived themselves qualified to advise. Among these the most curious was considered to be one for the use

of balloons. Great merriment was made in Lombard Street over this idea. It was brought before Lord Auckland in a jocular report, and he, minuting the case in the same spirit, professed his readiness to appoint the inventor of the notion to the post of "Controller of Balloons," on the usual conditions of personal service, and of being paid after the return voyage. The project seems to us less mad than Lord Auckland thought it; but few men would have been found a century ago to whom the possibilities of ballooning had revealed themselves.

However, whilst one suggestion was being rejected after another, it was certainly desirable to do something, if only to avoid the reproach of inertness; and the receipt of letters of advice from several Greenland merchants in the city seemed to offer ideas which were worth pursuing. These merchants pointed out that it would be easy to collect a number of sailors who were accustomed to find themselves entangled in the ice, and whom experience had taught how to make the best of such a situation. A few such men were hastily brought together, and added to the crews of two of the Packets, each of which was also provided with an ice-boat. At Heligoland preparations were made for more carefully organized attempts to reach the mainland. All these designs were, however, formed too late, for while they were still being perfected, the thaw came, the ice broke up, and the postal communication fell back into its normal course.

So great a difficulty does not seem to have been caused by frost on any other occasion. But the time was drawing near when the will of one man was to erect and hold against English ships a barrier more impenetrable than that of winter, and during those years of doubt and of anxiety, the experience gained by the Post-Office in 1798 and 1799 was turned to good account.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND FRENCH WAR.

WITH the outbreak of the second French War, the Falmouth service entered on a new and better period. It is in fact to the years now opening that Falmouth men look back with pride and satisfaction, years in which one gallant action followed another in quick succession, whilst the officers and crews of every Packet seemed to vie with each other in courage and devotion to their duties.

A large portion of the credit of the better temper which manifested itself from this time forth must of course be attributed to the zeal with which Lord Auckland and Mr. Freeling had plied the reformer's broom; but as no regulations or discipline from headquarters can avail greatly against a supine or hostile executive, it is only fair to acknowledge that the officers at Falmouth worked most heartily in the same direction as their chiefs. Indeed, it would seem as if the reproach cast upon the station by the conduct of the officers of the "Duke of York" had bitten deeply into the heart of the whole establishment,

and roused them to shake off the old and evil practices which had led to such disgrace. There was a dark stain on the honour of the Service, and every man set himself to wipe it out. How nobly this was done the following pages will amply show.

Among a number of less important reforms which had been carried out during the last three years perhaps the most useful was the ingenious system by which the absenteeism of the commanders was checked, while at the same time a substantial benefit was conferred on the Service. A system of mulcts was established, under which every commander wishing to remain on shore when his turn came for proceeding to sea sacrificed a certain proportion of the profits which he would have made upon the voyage. But at the same time the sting was taken out of these money fines, and they were even made popular, by a regulation throwing them all into one fund, the interest of which was devoted to pensioning the widows and orphans of captains and masters who were left in distressed circumstances. Mulcts, which were really nothing more than enforced subscriptions towards an object which must be congenial even to the mulcted, were in fact not open to criticism. The amount of the penalty was sufficiently large to induce some hesitation before incurring it, but as no exemptions from it were granted, even for reasonable business, the pension fund grew and prospered, and proved of the greatest benefit to the Service.

Among the captains who by this salutary new rule were tempted back to their own quarter-decks was Captain Yescombe, the remarkable story of whose escape from a French prison in the year 1794 has been told in a former chapter.

Since the events there described, Captain Yescombe, at his own urgent request, had been allowed to perform his duties by substitute, on the plea of having received a strong hint that it would go hardly with him if he were a second time made prisoner.

What it was that he feared, or on what ground, is not easy to make out ; but it is clear that he had some apprehension of more than ordinary danger in resuming his sea life, and that he managed to convince the authorities of the reality of this danger. It is therefore not a little strange to find that on his first voyage after the war broke out again his forebodings were verified, and his ruin compassed by a French vessel named "The Reprisal."

It was on July 23rd, 1803, that the "King George" set sail from Lisbon for Falmouth. The passage should have occupied about a week ; but the "King George" never arrived in port. Her fate was not long doubtful. On August 12th the "Auckland" Packet, which had left Lisbon some days later, sighted a Swedish galliot, which signalled to her to speak with them. On bearing down accordingly, the officers of the "Auckland" found that the galliot was manned by their friends and colleagues of the "King George," the refugees of a lost sea fight, in

which, though most of them had received severe wounds, all had escaped alive, save only Captain Yescombe, who had died of his hurts on the previous day.

The fight, it appeared, had occurred on the 30th July. The Packet made a stout resistance, and at first with some hope of success, notwithstanding the obvious superiority of the enemy, a Privateer carrying fourteen 4-pounders and a hundred men, whilst the "King George" had only twenty-six men and six guns. The Falmouth men served their guns well, but they suffered so heavily in their spars and rigging that at last, after a heavy cannonade lasting nearly an hour, the enemy obtained an opportunity of boarding.

From that moment the last chance of saving the Packet disappeared. The French poured fifty men, chiefly blacks, upon her decks. There was a desperate scuffle, but a few minutes decided the affair. Captain Yescombe fell, shot through the thigh. Mr. St. Aubyn, the mate, and three seamen were wounded, the rest were quickly overpowered, and the ship was won.

The French carried their prize into Vigo, and it was in that port that the Cornishmen hired the galliot, in which they were returning home when the "Auckland" met them. Captain Yescombe, by the accounts of those who were present at his last fight, conducted it with skill and courage. He was highly respected by his colleagues, and it cannot

be said that he left them any but an animating example.

It may be observed at this point that the maxim enunciated so often in 1793, when the new model was introduced, namely, that "the idea of defence was to be wholly abandoned," appears much more rarely in official reports of the early years of this century. It was still cherished by the Department, but chiefly for public consumption. It reappeared down to the very eve of the peace whenever the merchants complained, but to their own officers, my Lords the Postmaster General used very different language. They could not indeed supply their captains with heavier armaments, but they could and did stimulate them on every occasion to make a spirited use of what they had, and to such encouragement the Falmouth men responded nobly.

At this period a figure appears on the stage at Falmouth which deserves more than a passing mention. Captain John Bull was exceedingly well known in his day, both as a good seaman and a gallant officer, and his ship, the "Duke of Marlborough," shared in his well-earned reputation.

In the "Duke of Marlborough" Captain John Bull fought more actions than any other Packet officer, and, though he by no means won them all, yet when he was most unfortunate, he emerged with credit, and an added title to the confidence of the public. There was, moreover, a bluff heartiness about him, a breezy contempt of danger, a dogged persistence

in carrying through whatever he had undertaken, which excites our admiration even after the lapse of so many years, and goes far to explain how it happened that in his life-time he was regarded as the embodiment of the best qualities of the Falmouth Service, and by an affectionate deference on the part of his colleagues was awarded by them the nickname, or title, of "the Commodore."

The "Commodore's" first voyage as commander—in succession to his father—served to prove the qualities which brought him fame. The "Duke of Marlborough" was not yet built, and Captain Bull was in command of the "Grantham," a fine, full-rigged ship, which, from some unexplained accident, suddenly foundered while lying at Barbados. Captain Bull was on shore at the time, and the officer left in charge had only time to save the mails before the ship went down, carrying with her almost the whole of Captain Bull's possessions.

The blow was a heavy one, for the "Grantham" belonged to Captain Bull. If he had remained on the spot, he might have recovered some portion of his property by salvage, but there was no time for delay. His duty was to convey the mails to Jamaica, and he lost no time in chartering a schooner, in which he reached Jamaica even earlier than he had been expected. The plucky way in which so young a captain faced his misfortunes won for him a considerable amount of esteem among the merchants in the island; and feeling confident that their property

was safe in his hands, they appealed to the Governor and to the Deputy Postmaster of the colony to entrust to him the mails which the "Grantham" should have carried home to England, and to authorize him to charter a vessel for the passage. The Postmaster hesitated. He would have preferred to hold the mails over until the Packet of the following month arrived, but in the end he yielded to the wishes of the merchants. A Privateer, the "Caroline," was hired, and Captain Bull set sail for England.

It was curious how persistently ill-fortune pursued him. On the very day on which the "Caroline" left Kingston harbour she sprang a leak, and after vainly endeavouring to keep the water under, Captain Bull was obliged to bear up for port. To add to the dangers of his position, a strong breeze rose, which quickly increased to a full gale. The ship was labouring heavily, and making water most uncomfortably fast. It was clear that she could never reach port, and Captain Bull resolved that their only chance lay in running her ashore.

In such a storm the expedient was desperate enough, but a spot was selected in which it seemed possible that the ship might hold together, and by skilful management the lives of all on board were saved. The mails, too, were got ashore uninjured, and for the second time within ten days Captain Bull presented himself at Kingston in the capacity of a shipwrecked mariner, possessing nothing of his

own except the clothes in which he stood, but bringing with him all the public property entrusted to his care.

Confirmed in their confidence by this second proof that it was well bestowed, the merchants would have their mails entrusted to no one else, and within three days Captain Bull was once more afloat, this time on board the "Thomas," an armed ship bound for Liverpool. The "Thomas" was a good and seaworthy craft, and the voyage passed over without incident until in mid-Atlantic she encountered a French corvette of twenty-four guns, which bore down and opened fire on the "Thomas." A sharp action followed, which might have ended unfortunately had not a lucky shot cut away the mizzen-mast of the corvette, and in the confusion of this disaster the "Thomas" made good her escape.

Captain Bull had lost his ship, but he had gained his reputation. From this time forth he was always named as one of the most active commanders on the station. The "Duke of Marlborough" replaced the "Grantham," and in this famous Packet many notable people elected to make the voyage home to Falmouth, relying on the skill of her well-known captain. So general indeed was the impression that the passage could be made with perfect safety on board the "Duke of Marlborough" that Sir Thomas Maitland, when his command in the Windward Islands expired, refused to go home in a frigate, declaring that he preferred to sail with Captain Bull.

In April, 1804, the "Duke of Marlborough" was outward bound to the Leeward Islands; and, when about twenty-five leagues to the eastward of Barbados, she was chased by an armed schooner. Captain Bull altered the course of his ship, and made all sail to avoid an action, if possible; but at the end of an hour it was evident that the stranger ship was gaining ground. Her behaviour left little doubt that she was a Privateer out of one of the French islands; but, in order to settle the matter, Captain Bull made the private signal; and finding it remained unanswered he called his men to quarters.

All preparations for the coming fight were completed long before the enemy came within range. The boarding nettings were triced up, and stuffed with hammocks and spare sails; the boat was cut away, so as not to impede the action of the stern guns; the mail was brought on deck, weighted with pigs of iron, and placed near one of the portholes, in charge of a sailor who was instructed to sink it instantly should the enemy appear likely to take the vessel; the small arms were served out; the men had their dinner, and were all at their posts when at about 3 P.M. the enemy came within range, and opened fire.

A broadside from the "Duke of Marlborough" was the answer to this salute; and before the smoke of these discharges cleared away the Privateer was within pistol shot distance of the Packet, both



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H.M. PACKET, MARLBOROUGH.

running before the wind; and a very hot cannonade ensued.

A few minutes' observation sufficed to show Captain Bull that he was in the hands of an enemy of much superior force. There were five guns on the schooner's broadside, while the "Duke of Marlborough" had but three; and whenever he could get a view of his opponent's deck, he saw it crowded with men, beside whom his little handful of thirty-two men and boys looked insignificant. But this was not the worst of it; for ere long musket balls began to rattle about the decks of the Packet. A passenger fell, shot through the head; a few minutes later a seaman was killed; and it was soon seen that no less than fifty riflemen were posted in the tops of the schooner, whence they were picking off any one who showed himself from under cover of the bulwarks.

Captain Bull could spare no man from the deck of his ship; and was thus unable to retaliate. He was now, however, within about twelve leagues of Barbados; and there was a good chance of running under shelter of the island, if he were not first dismasted. At the end of an hour, however, during which he maintained a stout resistance, it was clear that he could not much longer manœuvre his ship, which had suffered greatly in her spars and rigging. Two more of his men were down. He himself was almost wholly incapacitated by a rifle bullet which had pierced both cheeks; and at this juncture, the

Privateer ran suddenly alongside, the "Duke of Marlborough" refused to obey her helm, the French made fast their grapplings, and were pouring down in overwhelming numbers upon the Packet's deck, when Captain Bull, perceiving that further resistance was hopeless, ordered the mail to be sunk, tore up his private signals, and struck his colours.

The French captain knew how to appreciate a gallant enemy; and Captain Bull always acknowledged the kindness shown to him, and to the wounded. The "Duke of Marlborough" was navigated into Guadeloupe, where the unwounded sailors were thrown into what Captain Bull described as "the most horrible dungeon that can be conceived, where they had scarcely sufficient air to breathe." Fortunately they were not kept long in this confinement, but were liberated after a short captivity, and permitted to return to England.

It may be useful to remark at this point that these French Privateers, of which such numbers were sent out from Guadeloupe and Martinique, were not only formidable by reason of the numbers of their crews and the weight of metal which they carried, but even more on account of the desperate courage with which they attacked. Many a sloop of the British Navy, armed and manned with a force far superior to that of the Post-Office Packets found it no child's play to encounter one of these ocean free-lances, and some had reason to regret having challenged them. The "General Erneuf"

was widely known and dreaded in the Caribbean Archipelago, as was also her sister ship, "La Dame Erneuf." The career of the latter vessel was stopped in 1805 by H.M. brig "Curieux," after a very sharp action, in which, as Captain Bettesworth testifies in his report, the French had "30 killed and 41 wounded." And "in justice to his gallantry," the captain adds, "I must say he never struck whilst there was a man on his decks."

Such being the spirit in which the French Privateers were fought, it is not wonderful that they committed great ravages among our commerce. The "Duke of Marlborough" was converted into a Privateer, and on her first voyage captured H.M. sloop "Lily." The sloop in her turn was rechristened "General Erneuf," the original vessel of the name having been lost in some unexplained manner. The name had lost its luck, however, for she was quickly brought to account by H.M. sloop "Reynard," Captain Jeremiah Coghlen, who in thirty-five minutes reduced her to such a condition of helplessness that her captain blew her up in preference to surrendering.

With facts such as these before us, it is impossible to make light of the actions fought by the Falmouth Packets against these formidable adversaries. The merit of a fight does not depend on the numbers of the men engaged, but on the quality of the defence offered by the weaker party. The character of a forlorn hope attaches to every

one of the battles into which these little vessels carried so high a spirit; and it must always be a matter of regret that the records of so many of them have been allowed to perish.

There lies before the writer a list of actions fought in the years 1804 and 1805, every one of which might well be thought to deserve some record, had not the details of them been forgotten. It was justly accounted no disgrace to Captain Bull to surrender to the "General Erneuf"; yet Captain Patterson, in the "Eliza," fought and beat this very Privateer a few months later. The action lasted two hours and a half; and one would give much to know what passed during that time, for it is certain that the Privateer did not drop the prey in which she had fixed her teeth without hard and heavy fighting.

In May, 1805, Captain Mudge, in the "Queen Charlotte," defended himself for two hours against a Privateer of 16 guns and 110 men. Captain Mudge had seen much service in the navy, and had been present at the engagement with Admiral Langara off Cape St. Vincent in 1781. He was a brave and experienced officer, of whom it might be said with confidence that he fought to the very utmost before he surrendered.

It is unfortunate that these and many another gallant fight can never now be described; but we are happily in possession of fuller details of a very important public service rendered about this time

by a Falmouth officer, on almost the only occasion when the forces of a Packet were employed, and properly employed, in an action which might have been avoided, but was deliberately sought.

The island of Dominica, in some respects the most beautiful of all the West Indian group, was an object of continual envy on the part of the French. Lying as it did almost within sight of their own island of Guadeloupe, it seemed not impossible that by a sudden attack it might be captured; and it is strange that the danger of such a surprise was not more carefully guarded against by the English Government.

Whatever may be the explanation of this negligence, it happened that in May, 1806, though a number of sugar ships fully laden were lying in Rozeau Bay, the capture of which would inflict a most serious loss upon the planters, there was actually no ship of war in the bay or in the neighbourhood for their protection. It is true that H.M. sloop "Dominica" had been sent to cruise off Guadeloupe; but even with the greatest zeal and enterprise, this vessel could scarcely have counted on intercepting more than a small proportion of the Privateers which lurked in every bay and creek of that notorious island, while, as it happened, any schemes which her officers had formed in this direction were promptly frustrated by a mutiny of the crew, who seized the vessel, took her into Guadeloupe, and reported to the French the defenceless state of Dominica.

Of course such an opportunity was not likely to be lost ; and it was fortunate for the Dominica planters that no French frigate or ship of the line was lying at Guadeloupe that day. Had the French been able to place such a vessel at the head of their flotilla, it can scarcely be doubted that the island must have fallen, for its shore defences were not adapted for resisting a strenuous attack, and the troops in garrison, consisting of detachments of the 46th and 3rd West India Regiments, were by no means numerous.

As it was, the outlook was sufficiently serious. The French promptly took the traitorous crew out of the "Dominica," replaced them with sailors of their own nationality, and added as many troops as the vessel could carry. They re-named her "Napoleon," gave her as consorts "L'Imperial," a national schooner, and a sloop, both packed with troops, and added a couple of row-boats or galleys well stored with arms and ammunition. General Hortade took command, and the flotilla appeared off Dominica on the 24th May.

Its appearance aroused very great and natural alarm. A glance showed that the expedition was a strong one ; and, even if a landing could be prevented, it was difficult to see how the sugar ships could be saved. To slip their moorings, and stand out to sea in different directions, would probably be to meet destruction singly ; while in harbour they were at least under protection of whatever guns

could be placed in position for their defence. There was no time to unload the cargoes, and but little chance of saving them; and the merchants gathered on the quay in consternation, watching the French ships grow nearer and nearer.

At this crisis, and while the enemy was still some miles off the land, two English ships entered the bay. One of them was the Packet, "Duke of Montrose," commanded by Captain Bert Dyneley, a brave and skilful officer. The other was H.M.S. "Attentive," which had been told off to convoy the Packet and the mails from Barbados through the archipelago of islands, among which Privateers swarmed almost as thickly as the sea birds.

The arrival of an English ship of war seemed to the Dominica merchants a providential deliverance, and under the orders of General Dalrymple, President of the island, the "Attentive" lost no time in standing out to sea again to intercept the enemy.

Her movements were watched from shore with keen anxiety, but the "Attentive" proved herself a wretched sailer. It was not the practice of the Admiralty to tell off for convoy duty any vessel which would make a good cruiser; and if the emergency had been less serious, Captain Dyneley, who must have found it difficult and irksome to keep back his own fine-sailing brig to the slower pace of the escort, might have been amused to see that the "Attentive" stood no chance whatever of

intercepting the French ships, every one of which was sailing easily away from her.

There was now no time to be lost. It was plain enough that the enemy would work havoc among the sugar ships, and might even land their troops before the "Attentive" could get into action. Only one chance of checking them remained; and General Dalrymple, backed by all the merchants of the island, appealed to Captain Dyneley to take a detachment of troops on board his Packet, and risk her in defence of the island. This was a proposal which raised several serious considerations.

The Packets of course were no part of the fighting forces of the country. They were not even national property, but belonged nominally to the commander.

The undertaking of the Department to pay for damage sustained in action might or might not apply to the present case. As far as Captain Dyneley knew there was no precedent for it. His standing orders were to avoid action whenever he could; but he was now called on to seek an engagement, to throw his Packet in the way of a greatly superior force, and that, moreover, on a service quite distinct from the business of the Post-Office. Here was no question of protecting the mails, but rather of putting them in danger.

It is true that the service he was asked to render seemed the only means of averting a national disaster, and might be thought likely to establish a

strong claim on the gratitude of the Government. But Captain Dyneley was well aware that when the actions of officers on critical occasions came to be considered in the serene atmosphere of Whitehall, they were often measured by standards very different from those applied to them on the spot; and while he probably felt little doubt that the Postmaster General would make a generous appeal to the Treasury not to let him remain a loser for acting patriotically, he could be by no means certain that the trustees of the national purse would not argue that he ought to have stood out to sea, leaving the sugar ships to fight it out with the French, and that he acted most irregularly in thrusting his Packet into danger.

Captain Dyneley stated these facts to the President and merchants, and pointed out that while he was quite willing to risk his life and the lives of his crew upon a very hazardous service, it was scarcely reasonable to ask him to stake his ship also, which was worth £5000. He therefore proposed that the merchants should jointly guarantee to pay this amount, in case the "Duke of Montrose" were lost, and the Government declined to pay for her. But the merchants declined absolutely to entertain the proposal.

Captain Dyneley then proposed to divide the responsibility, taking on himself the risk of the masts, yards, rigging, and all the equipments of the Packet, if the President and the merchants would

guarantee the value of the hull. This offer also was declined, and it was made clear to Captain Dyneley that if he attempted to save the merchants' property, he must stake all his own on the event. The merchants would guarantee nothing. Not even the sight of the French ships drawing momentarily nearer induced them to unlock their purse-strings; and if Captain Dyneley had insisted on his perfectly reasonable request, Dominica would have fallen, and might have remained a French possession to this day.

Happily for this country, its honour at that crisis did not depend upon a merchant. It was in the hands of a man whose mind was not dominated by the fear of money loss, and who, much as he might regret the risk of losing the capital on which his wife and children must depend if he fell in the coming action, dreaded far more the disgrace of seeing the Union Jack hauled down, and the tri-coloured ensign floating over Rozeau Bay. At this moment the Falmouth captain stood for England.

There was no time for reflection, and very little for preparation. Captain Dyneley cheerfully resolved to take upon himself the whole risk and responsibility of employing his Packet upon a service which, however it might result, could not be called a Post-Office service. He sent on shore all the mails which he had in charge, giving careful instructions that they were to be destroyed if in any danger of capture by the enemy. He called his crew together, explained to them what he was about to do, pointed

out that they were by no means bound to follow him, and offered leave to go ashore to any man who cared to do so.

Of course not one of the Falmouth men flinched, and by the time Captain Dyneley had satisfied himself on this point, several boats full of troops had come alongside. Twenty-six men of the 46th Regiment, and thirteen of the 3rd West India Regiment, were taken on board the "Duke of Montrose," making up with her own crew a complement of rather less than seventy men; and thus provided, the Packet slipped her cable, and stood out of the bay to meet the advancing enemy.

It may be conceived with what anxiety the movements of the "Duke of Montrose" were watched from shore. The flotilla of French ships was full in sight, perilously near the harbour. The "Attentive" was lying at some distance, evidently unable in the light wind which prevailed to manœuvre with any effect. Captain Dyneley's Packet, a vessel of not more than one hundred and ninety tons, was no larger than the smallest of the three sloops in the track of which she was thrown, and to the spectators on the quay it seemed that the three, acting in concert, must quickly send the "Duke of Montrose" to the bottom.

The first encouraging fact noticed by the merchants was that the Packet sailed incomparably better than any one of her enemies, and could choose her position as she pleased. She was, more-

over, very skilfully handled, availing herself of every puff of the wind, which was now growing so light as to give some uneasiness. Whether by accident or design, the French vessels had become scattered, and Captain Dyneley seized the opportunity of dealing with them separately. By far the most formidable of them was "L'Imperial," and he therefore singled her out, and bore down on her as fast as the weather permitted.

Unfortunately, the wind now failed altogether, and the spectators on the quay saw with dismay that the "Duke of Montrose" was ceasing to cut the water, and lay with canvas hanging loose out of gunshot of "L'Imperial." As quickly as this was perceived, however, hasty movements were seen on board, the boats dropped over the side, a dozen men leapt into them, and with a cheer which came faintly over the water to the ears of the merchants, and put some heart into them, the Falmouth men towed their ship towards the enemy.

A short range was what Captain Dyneley wanted, his eight guns consisting chiefly of 12-pounder carronades, and he placed the "Duke of Montrose" within pistol-shot of "L'Imperial." A very hot action then began. From the shore nothing could be distinguished but a cloud of smoke in which the two vessels were obscured. The "Attentive" was unable to attain a position which would enable her to give the Packet any assistance; and irksome as it must have been to her officers to see their convoy

doing the work, she seems to have contributed nothing to the result, unless, indeed, it was her presence on the scene which restrained the other French vessels from interfering in the fight.

If so, she rendered invaluable service, for Captain Dyneley had his hands full, and a very little would have inclined the scale against him. During three-quarters of an hour the fighting was desperate; but at last the English gained the upper hand; the smoke began to clear away, and the people watching on shore saw the tricoloured ensign drop from the mast and the Union Jack hoisted in its place.

This was an excellent beginning, but the work was only half done; and Captain Dyneley, having taken possession of his prize, lost no time in giving chase to the "Napoleon," which vessel appears to have been occupied chiefly in demonstrating how much faster than the "Attentive" she could sail, and in declining the action which the latter offered. In this prudent course she found no difficulty; but when the "Duke of Montrose," an incomparably swifter vessel bore down and offered fight, her crew flushed with the victory which had robbed the expedition of its most powerful component, the commander of the "Napoleon" judged that the time for Fabian tactics had gone past, and sought refuge in flight.

Unfortunately for himself he had delayed a little too long. Not only was the "Duke of Montrose" in a position whence she could have overhauled the

"Napoleon" in a comparatively short space of time, but there were already in view, rounding a point of the coast, the white sails of an English cruiser, which, attracted by the firing, was running down to see if she could be of use. Captain Dyneley continued the chase long enough to assure himself that the newcomer, which proved to be H.M.S. "Wasp," Captain Bluett, could not miss the "Napoleon," and then returned to Rozeau Bay where he found the circumstances completely changed.

The "Attentive" had succeeded in capturing the row-boats, and as the "Duke of Montrose" re-appeared on the scene of action had just scuttled them. There remained only one vessel of the whole flotilla, and about this one it was unnecessary for either the "Attentive," the "Duke of Montrose," or the "Wasp" to concern themselves. For the apprehension of a conflict on shore was no sooner removed by the capture of "L'Imperial," than the soldiers who were in charge of the land defences became impatient of their inaction; and Lieutenant Hamilton, having obtained leave, manned a couple of boats with soldiers of his own, the 48th, regiment, pulled out to the French ship, and captured her after a brief encounter.

Thus of the whole expedition not one ship or man escaped; and an hour's energetic action had turned the well-founded apprehensions felt for the safety of Dominica into security. Captain Dyneley

was undoubtedly the saviour of the island. Had he not checked the course of "L'Imperial," that vessel, which doubtless carried General Hortade, would have executed her plans without impediment. The "Attentive" could not overhaul her: the "Wasp" was too far away to be of use in preventing a landing. Had the French troops been disembarked there must have been desperate and bloody fighting, the result of which could not be forecast. The loss of property would have been immense, the discredit to England and the loss of prestige in the West Indies would have been greater still.

Whether the merchants expressed their acknowledgments to Captain Dyneley in any form is not recorded in the official papers from which these facts are drawn; but General Dalrymple in his despatch to the Admiralty stated the case not unfairly, though it cannot be said that he wrote with any undue appreciation of the services of the Post-Office commander. He admitted that the capture of the two most formidable ships in the hostile flotilla was due, the one directly, and the other indirectly, to Captain Dyneley's enterprise and pluck; and added, "his zeal and disinterestedness are highly commendable, as from his instructions he had a good deal to lose."

On Captain Dyneley's return to England his own chiefs were well able to interpret this carefully guarded language, and from them at least he

obtained the admiration which was his due. The Postmaster General prevailed on the Admiralty to convey to him a special expression of thanks and approval, and marked their own sense of his conduct by an honorarium of a hundred and fifty guineas. The Patriotic Society voted him a handsome piece of plate, and congratulations reached him from every quarter.

It is satisfactory to read that recognition of his gallant conduct reached him promptly, because the time within which it could serve to gratify him was already short.

The "Duke of Montrose" lay at Falmouth until the middle of November, when she sailed again for the West Indies. A month later she was within fifty leagues of Barbados, that fatal region in which so many Packets had to fight for their existence, when in the early dawn a strange sail was descried from the masthead. An hour made it plain that the newcomer had altered her course and was chasing the Packet: in the course of the morning she drew so near that no doubt was left of her being a French Privateer.

Captain Dyneley put his ship to her best point of sailing, and did all in his power to avoid an action as his instructions enjoined. Well as the "Duke of Montrose" sailed, however, the enemy sailed better, and throughout the day she gradually gained steadily. During the night she was not shaken off, and about 9 A.M. on the following day,

December 12th, she came within range, opened fire, and almost at the same moment ran down and grappled the "Duke of Montrose," hoping to capture her by a sudden assault.

In an attack of this kind the superior numbers of the Privateer's crew (she carried eighty-five men against twenty-eight on the Falmouth vessel) gave her an immense advantage, and this advantage was turned into an overwhelming preponderance by the fact that she possessed a long 12-pounder (called in one report a 24-pounder) fixed upon a traverse, and so capable of being directed on any spot with ease.

Captain Dyneley maintained a most obstinate resistance, though on this occasion the safety of his capital was not in question, since the Post-Office was pledged to pay for Packets captured while employed on their own service. Time after time the French were driven back to their own ship, unable to gain the slightest advantage. For no less than three hours the two ships remained locked together fighting incessantly, and it is impossible to say how the action would have ended had not Captain Dyneley unhappily fallen in one of the boarding attacks. His mate and three seamen were already slain. Two others were dangerously wounded, and the crew, dispirited by the loss of their commander, and exhausted by their long and desperate resistance, hauled the colours down and surrendered.

So ended, bravely and honourably, the career of Captain Bert Dyneley. The naval history of this country tells of many exploits performed upon a grander scale than his and followed by consequences of more importance. But if the quality of the achievements be considered rather than the numbers of the contending forces, Captain Dyneley, who cheerfully risked his property as well as his life in a national service entirely out of his line of duty, and who a few months later laid down that life in defending his trust with an obstinacy which his chiefs did not expect and had not equipped him for, deserves a better fate than to be entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CONTINENTAL SYSTEM.

RELIEVED as they were by recent events from all apprehension about the conduct of the Falmouth Packets, my Lords the Postmaster General yet found themselves involved in anxieties and difficulties, which were daily growing more acute. It was the growth of the Continental System, the blockade of all intercourse with the ports of Europe which give rise to these difficulties; and to follow plainly the efforts made to cope with this new situation of affairs, it will be necessary to revert once more to the outbreak of hostilities in 1803.

The inhuman decree issued by Napoleon at the commencement of the war, ordering the seizure and detention of all English subjects between the ages of 18 and 60 who, for whatever reason, were present on territory subject to French control at the moment when war was declared, has no defenders now. That barbarous seizure of peaceful travellers, both men and women, of merchants

following their lawful callings, and of Government servants, who had not yet been ordered to quit their posts, stands universally condemned as the act of a savage rather than of a civilized enemy. "It was an act," says M. de Bourrienne, "which no consideration can justify"; and in face of this emphatic condemnation of Napoleon's private Secretary, it might not have been necessary to refer to the matter had not the decree struck the Packet Service with peculiar force.

The war broke out suddenly, and almost without warning. At Helvoetsluis the business of the Packet Station was in full progress. Four Packets lay in the roadstead; the commanders were on shore, the agent was transacting business in his office. No hint or rumour of danger to themselves had reached them. They knew that the negotiations between their own Government and that of France had reached a critical stage; but they believed that timely notice would be given of any rupture, and they continued their peaceful avocations in reliance on the good faith which regulates the intercourse of nations.

So strong was the confidence in this good faith that not one of the Packets was armed. Their guns were lying in store at home, as was the practice in time of peace; for to make show of readiness of war would not only have been unnecessary but insulting, and might well have precipitated a catastrophe. Thus, when a small force of French

soldiers marched suddenly into Helvoetsluis, no apprehension was felt at first; and no other feeling than incredulity was excited by the intimation of the officer in command that the English must consider themselves prisoners, and their ships prizes of war.

Remonstrance was utterly useless. The agent, the commanders, the seamen, even the British envoy, Mr. Leston, whose character as a diplomatist should have rendered his person sacred, all were seized, and thrown into the common prison of the Brill. The unfortunate men did not yet doubt that the French commander had exceeded his authority, and would be promptly disavowed by his Government; and as more and more prisoners were continually added to their number, they kept up their spirits by the confident anticipation of a speedy release.

Somewhat earlier on this memorable day, two messengers, Mr. East and Mr. Wagstaff, had left the Hague charged with despatches of great importance. They found themselves in some danger of arrest while they were still within the city; but having gained the open country, they did not doubt that in some one of the Packets which were lying at Helvoetsluis they would be able to get a passage home. They had not travelled far when the news of what had happened at Helvoetsluis was given them by some country people. Mr. East did not believe it; and, being directly connected

with the Diplomatic Service, he felt confident of his personal safety even if the intelligence were correct.

Mr. Wagstaff was in a different position; and was inclined to attach more credence to the story. It was decided that the two travellers should separate; Mr. Wagstaff making for Scheveningen, in charge of the despatches, while Mr. East, who was acquainted with their tenor, continued his journey to Helvoetsluis, where he was promptly arrested, despite his protestations, and sent to join his countrymen in the Brill prison.

Mr. Wagstaff, travelling on foot through the night, managed, after several narrow escapes, to reach the seashore, along which he proceeded to Scheveningen, sheltering himself among the sand-hills which line that coast.

Scheveningen, though within two miles of the Hague, where French soldiers already swarmed, proved to be unguarded. The town was then, as it is still in these days, no more than a small fishing village, possessing neither pier nor harbour, but only an open shore, on which the fishing luggers beach themselves on returning from a voyage. Perhaps the French thought the place too insignificant to need a guard; but, however that may be, Mr. Wagstaff found a fisherman willing to take him across the channel, and landed safely in England on May 26th, 1803.

It may be that the kidnapping of the unlucky

prisoners at Helvoetsluis, and many another town in Holland and France, was a symptom rather than a cause of the peculiar exasperation with which the coming war was fought, but it certainly added vastly to the hatred with which Napoleon was regarded in this country; and when it was found that the release even of the diplomatists could be obtained only with the greatest difficulty, while all the remaining prisoners were reserved for a confinement of indefinite length, the general indignation knew no bounds.

A few of the Packets' men, headed by Captain Flynn, managed to burst out of the Brill prison on the last evening of their sojourn there. They succeeded in reaching the beach, seized an open boat, and after many hours of great danger, were picked up by an English ship. The rest of the prisoners were taken to Verdun, where they appear to have been not ill-treated. Mr. Sevrigh, the Post-Office agent at Helvoetsluis, retained during the whole period of his captivity, which lasted for nine years, the authority with which he had been invested, keeping up some sort of discipline, and constituting himself the protector of the sailors. He received and distributed the allowance of six sous a day which the English Government granted to each captive sailor; and, being gifted with strong sense and discretion, was able to intervene with good effect whenever his men came into conflict, as restless seamen will, with the Commissary or his

subordinates; to secure justice for them, and in many ways to mitigate the hardships of their unfortunate position.

Before leaving these men in their dreary captivity, it may not be out of place to refer to the extraordinary courage and endurance shown by some of the prisoners who attempted to escape.

John Carne, a native of Penryn, had been captured on one of the Falmouth Packets. He lay in prison for fifteen months; until one night he found an opportunity of climbing the prison wall. The wall was forty feet high; but Carne took the chance and leapt down. He fell upon his head and shoulders, broke his collar bone, and bruised himself very severely; but fortunately he was still able to walk, and, injured as he was, got clear away from pursuit. Travelling always by night, through bye roads and over hedges, half-crippled with his broken bone which remained unset, he lay by day concealed under bridges, or among reeds in river beds; and so, toiling on doggedly, he reached the coast at last, and in some way managed to cross to his own country.

Bourrienne in his memoirs tells on good authority a still more extraordinary story. Two English sailors in the year 1804 made good their escape from Verdun, and arrived at Boulogne without having been discovered, though all the roads were watched with great care. When these men reached the sea-coast, whence England was in sight, they were

still as far from liberty as at Verdun. Napoleon was at Boulogne, supervising the collection of the flotilla which was to convey his armies into England. Every craft for miles along the coast was registered and watched. The two seamen had no money, and lay in hiding, desperate and almost hopeless.

At last they determined to construct a boat, and began gathering such scraps of wood as they could find. They had no tools except their knives, but with these the ingenious fellows fashioned a boat at last, though it was no more than three or four feet wide, and a trifle more in length. They covered it with a piece of sailcloth. It was so light that a man could easily carry it on his shoulders; and in this frail cock-boat they determined to cross the channel.

An English frigate one day lay off the coast, reconnoitring, and the two sailors made a bold effort to reach her. They pushed off in their skiff, but not unobserved; for they had made only a few hundred yards when they were pursued and brought back by the Custom-house officers. They then ran an excellent chance of being shot as spies, but their story reached Napoleon's ears. He sent for them, and questioned them. Their boat was brought with them.

"Is it really true," he asked, "that you thought of crossing the sea in this thing?"

"Sire!" they answered, "if you doubt it, give us leave to go, and you shall see us depart."

Napoleon could not but admire their audacity, and, acting on a generous impulse, gave the men their liberty, and caused them to be placed on board an English ship. The incident was never forgotten by him; and even in his last days at St. Helena he referred to it with admiration.

One more incident of the same nature is worth recording. A number of sailors of the Packet Service were in confinement at Amboise on the Loire. The gaol was densely crowded, the food was bad and insufficient; fever broke out, and the havoc among the unhappy sailors was immense.

To relieve the congestion in the prison some of the men were allowed a certain amount of liberty, and permitted to earn a few sous by ferrying persons across the river. One day they escaped, and after long wanderings reached the town of Nantes, where they were at once arrested, and brought before the prefect. They declared themselves to be Americans, but the prefect was incredulous and questioned them in a very searching manner. The men however had some knowledge of New York, and answered his inquiries well enough. The prefect was thrown back by the accuracy of their replies, but still not satisfied. At last a final test occurred to him.

"You say you were in New York in the year 17—," he observed, and the men assented.

"Do you remember anything of particular interest which occurred in that year?"

"Certainly," the spokesman of the party answered

readily. "A large vessel lying at the pierhead foundered suddenly and unaccountably."

"Pass them on," said the prefect, "their story is true, I was there myself, and saw the vessel founder."

When it was no longer possible to forward mails to Calais or to Helvoetsluis, the administrators of the Post-Office turned their attention to the Hamburg route, as in former years. But Napoleon was already pressing his great policy of excluding English trade from the Continent, and one of his first measures was to station a considerable force at Cuxhaven for the express purpose of stopping all commerce with this country. The independence of Hamburg was not yet violated, and the Senate of the ancient Hanse town was quite ready to receive in secret any mails which could be smuggled into the city. To manage this was not impossible, though very difficult, and throughout the year 1804 a considerable number of letters appear to have filtered through.

For their greater convenience in plying this dangerous system, the North Sea Packets frequently made Heligoland their station; but as mails alone could be disembarked upon that island, while all passengers must find a safer route, the normal passage was to Gothenburg.

The voyage to Gothenburg was long and stormy, and it became advisable to select a point nearer Hamburg. Husum in Holstein was admirably situated for the purpose; and throughout 1805

and the early months of 1806 the mails were sent thither. There does not appear to have been any insuperable difficulty in forwarding them from Husum to Hamburg. There was still a British agent in the latter city, and the Danish Government which controlled the former was as yet neutral, if not friendly to England.

It was by no means in accordance with Napoleon's purposes, however, that the Hamburg gates should remain ajar to English commerce and correspondence. Closely occupied as he was throughout the year 1805, he found time to advance his great design for striking at England through her commercial supremacy. "Go to Hamburg," he said to Bourrienne in March, "it is there I will give a mortal blow at England."

And so the power of France grew steadily in Hamburg, while the ancient Syndic of the city saw its independence gradually sapped. Already violent outrages were committed by the French agents upon messengers carrying English letters. A courier on his way from Vienna to England was seized in a forest, robbed of his despatches, and left bound to a tree, where he would certainly have perished, had he not been released by a woman who was accidentally passing through the forest. Such were the risks confronted by the English messengers; but despite all such dangers the Postal Service was maintained, irregularly indeed, and with delays and interruptions which caused wide-spreading

losses. The wonder is not that the Service was imperfect, but that it was maintained at all.

The difficulties grew as the months went by. The decrees of March, 1806, which Prussia was forced to issue, excluding British ships from all the ports of Prussia and Hanover, added little to the difficulties of the Post-Office, for neither Denmark nor Hamburg was concerned in it. But a darker cloud was rising fast. The French began to menace actively the independence of Hamburg. In October it was notified by the Hamburg Post-Office that the situation of affairs no longer admitted of the receipt of mails for Prussia, Russia, or Germany, and for many days after the receipt of this gloomy notification no news whatever reached London from the Elbe.

Late in November a few bags of letters filtered through, giving a more hopeful account of the situation, but even while these letters were being read, the French had entered Hamburg, and the revenues of the Post-Office, the ancient property of the House of Tour and Taxis, had been appropriated by the agent of Murat.

Quickly on the heels of the messengers who carried this intelligence followed others bringing the notorious Berlin decrees, of which the paragraph affecting the Post-Office was short and simple. "All trade and correspondence with the British Islands are prohibited. In consequence, all letters and packets addressed to England, or to

an Englishman, or written in English, shall not be transmitted by the Post-Office, but shall be seized. . . ." Napoleon had struck his "mortal blow," and the clang of the Custom-House doors closing against British goods along the whole coast of Europe, north, west, and south simultaneously, save only in Portugal and Denmark, sounded in his eager ears the knell of England's power.

Thus was created the most serious situation which had ever confronted the General Post-Office, the most serious, one might say, if it is ever safe to forecast the complications of international affairs, with which it can possibly have to deal. The public looked to the Postmaster General to carry their correspondence, commercial and private; the Government called on them for the safe delivery of despatches. My Lords took down the map of Europe and found that from the Elbe to Dalmatia their Packets could land in Portugal alone, a country whence mails must be forwarded not only through a hostile territory, but across lofty mountain passes, and through provinces so wild and unsettled that it appeared hopeless to think of organizing mail routes from Lisbon for Germany or Austria.

The chances of smuggling letters into Hamburg was the only one worth consideration, and the thoughts of the officials in Lombard Street remained fixed on Northern Europe.

When the French entered Hamburg, Mr. Thornton, the British Consul, retired to Husum. He saw no

prospect whatever of forwarding the mails which arrived from England, and being somewhat uncertain how long his position in Holstein might be secure, he thought it well to send the bags back to London. This was in November; and in the following July those mails were lying still at the General Post-Office, waiting for some chance of conveyance to their destination. It needs but a small effort of the imagination to realize what widespread mischief might result from the detention of a mail for seven months. Such a fact, more than pages of description, brings home to our minds how hard and heavy was the burden which our grandfathers bore in the days of the great war.

The scope of the present work, concerned as it is solely with the difficulties and successes of Postal administration, does not demand any relation of the various measures and counter-measures taken by one or the other of the parties in the struggle for supremacy. It is enough to observe that the great system proved scarcely more successful than any other attempt to fetter the natural impulses of nations by any artificial restriction. Licenses to import English goods were granted in great numbers by Napoleon himself, as a source of revenue. His officers in many places, seeing that the chief burden of the system fell on the German merchants not on the English, evaded their instructions. "I received orders," says Count Rapp, "to commit all

articles of English merchandise to the flames. This measure would have been most disastrous. I evaded it . . . and Dantzic lost no more than what amounted to 200 francs, and Koenigsberg still less." A gigantic system of smuggling grew up, and on this contraband trade Count Rapp also looked benevolently. "I frankly confess," he writes, "that I did not watch the coast of the Baltic with the vigilance that was prescribed to me." And thus it happened that what with licenses, a convenient blindness of the executive, and a bold and daring trade by smuggling, the great barrier erected against England proved to be rather a trellis than a barricade, and was penetrable at many different points.

Of course it was more difficult to introduce letters than goods into Germany. Mail-bags must be consigned to some responsible person. They betrayed their origin moreover, and were thus a certain source of trouble in case of discovery at any point of the route by which they travelled. All letters addressed in English or bearing English post-marks were opened and read by the French officials before being destroyed. If they contained any reference to property, that property was liable to be seized and burnt as being English or of English origin. These risks were avoided for the present by sending all letters from England to correspondents in Altona, who enclosed them in fresh covers and re-posted them to Hamburg or to places beyond.

The following extract is from a letter written to the Secretary of the General Post-Office by Mr. Nicholas, British Consul at Altona, to whose judgment and knowledge of the various changes in the situation of affairs the Department was very frequently indebted.

“I am sorry to tell you,” Mr. Nicholas writes, under date of May 30th, 1807, “that we this moment receive the intelligence of Dantzic being in possession of the French on the 26th inst. . . . Such letters for that place as I may receive from you before this letter reaches you, I shall keep in my office until I receive your directions, as the French will at first look after all letters to discover British property. . . . I have made many inquiries how English letters sent under cover to merchants of this town addressed to Austria and Italy have gone. A banker of this place, Messrs. Israel and Dehn, assures me that they forward at least 50 to 200 a week, which he receives under cover from England, and that he has as yet never known one miscarry, nor heard of their being opened. I readily believe this, as to judge from the general conduct of the persons employed, their only object is to make money. . . . I am convinced that the mercantile correspondence is not interrupted in the least, and that the revenue alone suffers, as from what I saw in Husum, the practice of the merchants is to write on a very thin paper and put their letters under one cover. I observed some instances of this nature

where certainly 30 or 40 letters were enclosed, and the postage charged was not the amount which ought to have been paid for five single letters."

Mr. Nicholas was firmly persuaded that the patriotism of the Duke of Berg's (Murat's) agents in Hamburg was so far qualified by respect for the Post-Office revenues which they had seized as to leave them open to a bargain. He accordingly approached them secretly, and found them quite disposed to treat. The Duke's Postmaster pledged himself that the letters should go safely; that they never had been, and never would be, opened; while Mr. Nicholas, who strongly urged the conclusion of this bargain, was persuaded that the greed of the Berg officials was an excellent pledge of their good faith.

Bourrienne, who, in addition to his other functions, was the Duke of Berg's agent in Hamburg, has nothing to say about this negotiation, so strangely opposite to the policy of Napoleon that one might call it traitorous if one did not acknowledge that the base motive of pecuniary interest may have been mingled with a more honourable desire to avoid the total commercial ruin of the countries which the Continental System was crushing into bankruptcy.

For the English Government the question of good faith was not the only one to be considered. It was a strange proposal that a friendly treaty should be made with the agents of a hostile nation.

The whole situation was extraordinary ; but even if natural scruples could be set aside, even if honour permitted such a negotiation, it was clear that the ancient friendship of the Hamburg office would be jeopardized by concluding it. The French occupation would pass away, and the lawful owners of the Hamburg revenues would resume them in happier times. Nothing must be done which could be construed into a recognition by the British office of the violent usurpation of the French. And so the provisional agreement concluded by Mr. Nicholas was set aside, much to the disappointment of the Duke of Berg's officials, who renewed their proposals more than once, but always with the same result. Probably this termination of the matter was lamented also by the English merchants, if indeed they knew of the negotiations ; but they had more ground for complaint a few weeks later.

The device of forwarding letters under cover to Altona had, as Mr. Nicholas showed, proved successful ; but the time was at hand when this channel was to be blocked. Holstein was already threatened by the French. Writing on the 29th July, an old correspondent of the British Post-Office warned the Secretary that in another fortnight Holstein would be beset. The crisis was more serious than the writer of the friendly warning knew. The treaty of Tilsit had been signed. The movement on Holstein was preparatory to a seizure of the Danish fleet, to be used against this country. The English

Government struck hard and quickly, and within the period named a British fleet was working into position before Copenhagen.

What followed is well known; but the measures of the English were taken so secretly that the general public by no means understood what was going on, and two Packets arriving early in August at Tonningen, which for some time had been their station, were greatly perplexed on finding an English gun-brig stationed at the mouth of the river Eyder, giving orders for no British vessels to pass.

Such orders did not in the opinion of the commanders justify them in carrying their mails back to England. Their vessels might be stopped, but boats were allowed to come and go as before; and the two commanders consequently went up the river in their boats, taking the mails with them.

When they approached the town they were hailed from the Danish quarantine cutter, with orders that unless the Packets came up to their usual anchorage, which happened to be exactly under the guns of the battery, the mails should not be landed. The captains insisted; the Danish officer grew furious, and actually proposed to flog the Danish pilots, who had accompanied the captains, for leaving the Packets outside the bar of the river.

In the end, the dispute was arranged and the mails were landed; but events were occurring which

could not fail to sting the Danes into the bitterest enmity against us ; and most of our countrymen in Denmark were indeed already applying for their passports. The English brig at the mouth of the Eyder seems to have been removed after a few days ; and the Packets came up the river as before.

On August 15th, the "Lord Nelson," Captain Stewart, arrived at Tonningen with mails from Harwich. The bags were landed without interruption, and were being taken through the town to the agent's office, when the wagon in which they were carried was suddenly surrounded by a throng of Danish officers and soldiers who, on looking into it and seeing that it contained mails, compelled the driver to proceed not to the office of the British Post-Office agent, but to the Danish Post-Office. "Upon this," wrote the agent in reporting the circumstances to London, "Captain Stewart endeavoured to conceal the bag for the agent containing the despatches and letters for His Majesty's Ministers on the Continent ; but this bag was also taken from the steward, who had placed it under his coat, and everything was delivered at the Danish Post-Office. Captain Stewart immediately repaired to me, informed me of the circumstance, and also told me that another Packet boat was in sight. I therefore despatched a message to the captain of the second Packet ordering him not on any account to land his mails

or despatches, and to keep, if possible, out of range of the batteries.

“I then wrote to the Danish Postmaster requesting he would immediately deliver to the gentleman bearing my note those bags ticketed “the agent at Tonningen.” Mr. Schultz who carried this note found sentinels at the door of the Post-Office, and had some difficulty in presenting my note. Ultimately he brought me a verbal answer, refusing the delivery of the bags. The Postmaster told Mr. Schultz he was authorized in what he had done, but refused to name the source of his authority.

“I then myself repaired to the Postmaster, who named the Commandant of the port as having authorized the detention of the bags. I immediately wrote in polite terms to the Commandant, requesting he would issue the necessary orders for delivering to me that part of them which was directed to the agent. To this letter I received a verbal message stating he did not think it necessary to answer my letter, and that he was much surprised that those gentlemen who had the day before taken out their passports had not left Tonningen. I believe every person connected in any way with the British Government had the preceding day taken out passports to enable them to depart as circumstances should occur. During these transactions the second Packet boat had arrived, and, the messenger not having been able

to deliver my orders, had landed her mails. The captain endeavoured in vain to regain possession of them. He himself with the mails and despatches, was escorted to the Danish Post-Office. After many difficulties the two captains, some English people, and myself got permission for a boat to convey us on board the Packet boats; and while lying alongside the Danish guardship, waiting for permission to pass her, a gentleman from the shore came on board the boat to say that if I would return, the bags destined for me should be put in my possession the following morning. I then proceeded on board one of the Packets, both of which (from the circumstance of the Battery at Vollonig having received a considerable addition of soldiers in the course of the evening) had thought proper to drop down out of reach of the guns. The following morning I repaired again to Tonningen and received the bags destined for me, their seals perfectly unbroken. I disposed of the contents of the bags according to directions received from Mr. Thornton, and prepared to follow that gentleman, having understood he had already left Altona.

“It being Post-day, I sent to the Danish Post-Office and received the mail as usual for England. Captain Kentzinger and Mr. Agent Schultz, who had disembarked again from the Packets, now waited upon the Commandant to sign our passports again prior to our final departure, who immediately expressed much surprise that we were not departed.

We stated that we had returned to execute the business of our different departments, having received an intimation that we might do so in perfect security. The Commandant expressed himself a perfect stranger to any such indulgence or permission having been granted, and said the measure of detaining the mails proceeded entirely from the hostile measures of the English in putting Zealand into a state of blockade; and conceiving this declaration demonstrative of the insecurity of any despatches that might arrive in future, and Mr. Thornton's instructions recommending my departure, I left Tonningen with the Packet destined to sail on Sunday, the 16th instant, first leaving instructions to the captain of the Packet who brought the second mail to remain in the river a few days to warn any other Packet that might arrive of the danger, and to bring away any remaining English passengers who might not have had sufficient notice of the necessity of immediately embarking."

The Danes had shown themselves both honourable and forbearing in allowing the Packets an opportunity of getting clear away, but to permit one of them to remain hanging about the mouth of the Eyder, as the agent had directed, was quite another matter. Accordingly, about 5 A.M. on the 17th August, Captain Deane, who had been left in the "Lady Nepean" upon this service, descried a brig being towed down the river by several boats. It was the guard-ship from Tonningen which was upon

them; and as she had evidently not left her anchorage without hostile intent, Captain Deane thought it prudent to weigh anchor, and make ready for departure.

The sails were hoisted but it was unfortunately almost dead calm, and though the Packetsmen got out their boat and towed, the Danish brig made far quicker progress, and at 6 A.M. had come within musket shot. At that moment, just in the nick of time, a little breeze sprang up from the northward, and the "Lady Nepean," receiving it first, forged ahead once more.

Seeing what had occurred, the Danish boats dropped back alongside the guardship, and Captain Deane could see that a number of muskets and cutlasses were being handed in, while the crews of the boats were increased to about 50 men. The situation was growing awkward. The breeze was still light, and the "Lady Nepean" forged only slowly through the water. The boats were fast coming on, the men cheering loudly. Captain Deane hailed them, but received no answer, and thereupon, not choosing to assume that they meant to attack him, ordered one or two muskets to be fired in the air. Instantly the boats replied with a volley of small arms, and at the same moment the brig opened fire. By this time, however, the breeze was rising fast. A few well-directed shots caused the boats to sheer off in some confusion. The fire from the brig did little harm. Ere long the Packet

was out of range, and she completed her voyage to England without misadventure.

It is impossible to avoid drawing contrasts between the conduct of the Danes at Tonnigen and that of the French under the very similar circumstances at Helvoetsluis. In both cases English ships were in port and English officials engaged on shore, in reliance on their absolute safety until due warning was given to them that they must leave. The circumstances were, it is true, not exactly alike; for the French had no greater cause for exasperation against us than must always exist between hostile nations, whereas the Danes were smarting under an aggression which was unprovoked and intolerably wounding to their pride. Whether it is or is not possible to justify our seizure of the Danish fleet is a question over which historians will wrangle till the end of time. But to the Danes it could have seemed nothing but a gross and wanton outrage, and though the events just described preceded the actual bombardment of Copenhagen, the British expedition had already made such progress that in looking at the self-control exhibited, one can only wonder and admire.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO BRILLIANT YEARS.

THE loss of Denmark's friendship may possibly have been balanced in the eyes of Mr. Canning by the possession of her fleet, but to the Postmaster General and the other officials at Lombard Street, who were responsible for the maintenance of Postal communications it was a very grievous disaster. The device of sending letters under cover to Altona, involving as it did much inconvenience and delay even if the letters were as safe as Mr. Nicholas believed, had been resorted to with much grumbling on the part of the merchants, who only discovered its value when it had become impossible. Gothenburg was now the only port in Northern Europe available for the Packets. The station was inconvenient ; the passage was long and stormy. The Swedish Post-Office in Hamburg had been closed for some months, and it was consequently by no means clear that there was any great advantage in sending the mails out of England at all. A certain number were doubtless forwarded from Gothenburg by various secret

and irregular routes, but it was indeed a desperate crisis which made it necessary to entrust valuable letters or remittances, on which the credit of a substantial merchant might rest, to smugglers and the other wild and lawless characters who would alone venture to incur the risks inseparable from the undertaking.

The situation was intolerable. The merchants were clamorous for some assistance, and it was only too evident that unless the trade of the country were to perish, and with it our supremacy, an expedient must be quickly found. At this juncture the capture of Heligoland provided a base from which efforts might be made to reach Hamburg with some chance of success.

No exposition is needed to show how great the value of Heligoland was to this country. The island lies but a few hours' sail from the mouths of the Elbe, the Weser, and the Ems. British goods might be landed there with perfect confidence, for little need be feared from any naval attack, and could lie there unmolested until the fishermen of the island, or of the Hanover and Holstein coasts, smuggled them into Bremen or Hamburg. A very valuable trade of this description soon sprang up, for the profits were great enough to gild the risks. The goods were, of course, contraband in Hamburg, but the exacting requisitions of clothing for Napoleon's army made it necessary for the citizens to chance the penalty, and to trade

with the smugglers at any hazard for Yorkshire cloth.

Heligoland was captured on September 4th, 1807, and whilst the Government were still debating about the best means of making use of it, news was arriving from the opposite corner of Europe which made the new acquisition seem more and more valuable, for the French designs on Portugal were becoming manifest. The Prince Regent's friendship for us was receiving shock after shock from Napoleon's menaces, and it was obvious that the time was at hand when the cordon which had blocked against our shipping every harbour from the Baltic to Dalmatia, except Gibraltar and the coasts of Portugal, would be drawn across the entrance of the Tagus also.

Napoleon demanded three things of the Prince Regent. Two of these demands, of which the whole number were levelled against England, the Prince had courage to refuse, namely, the detention of all Englishmen then in Portugal, and the confiscation of their property. The third demand, which was also the most important of the three, he at last conceded, with a kind of weak belief that he would thereby, while sacrificing the neutrality of his country, promote a general peace; and accordingly, on October 27th, Mr. Chamberlain, the Post-Office agent at Lisbon, transmitted to his Department a copy of a proclamation issued on the 22nd, which announced that the harbours of Portugal

were henceforth closed to British vessels, whether of war or commerce.

“Some private information I have just received,” wrote the agent, in commenting on this proclamation, “leads me to apprehend that this government may seize the English who remain here—and certainly they have had strong and sufficient warning to withdraw—in order thereby to appease the wrath of Bonaparte.” And he went on to lament that the moment had been let slip for supporting the Prince Regent with a British fleet. “Every preparation is made to oppose the entry of a fleet, and I much fear that it will now be impossible for any but a very immense force to attempt the Tagus. I have long dreaded this, for I have been aware of the system that was being carried out, and it grieves me beyond expression to see the moment rapidly approaching when the navy and all the Brazilmen, which are just so many men-of-war, the finest vessels in the world for carrying troops, fall into the hands of Bonaparte. There is perhaps yet time to prevent this evil, but it is barely possible. . . .”

On the following day he wrote again. “We are in hourly expectation of a proclamation ordering his Majesty’s subjects to quit the kingdom. Our stay must be short.” It was, indeed, a hazardous position. Junot at the head of his army was pushing rapidly through Spain. The Portuguese Cabinet saw no safety save in acts of hostility towards the English. The crime of Helvoetsluis stood on record

as a warning of what might be expected when the French arrived, and the British residents on the Tagus poured out of the country day by day. Mr. Chamberlain's duty was to maintain the Postal Service until the very last moment; no order for arresting the English had yet appeared, but it was expected hourly, and the agent, who could not hope to be exempted from its scope, took the precaution of chartering a small armed schooner which was to lie off the coast in readiness for sailing night or day.

The crisis came on November 11th. All Englishmen, save the Ambassador and his staff, were to be arrested. Mr. Chamberlain concealed about his person a number of despatches for the Foreign Secretary, and, escaping from his lodging, made his way to the coast. To his dismay his schooner was nowhere to be found. A violent storm had blown her out to sea. He hired a boat, and made efforts to reach some of the British vessels in the offing, but the sea ran so high that he was obliged to put back three times, and at last the sailors declined to go out again. Mr. Chamberlain therefore started off on foot, and after a perilous journey reached Cascaes, where, by good luck, he found the "Walsingham," a Falmouth Packet, which, on attempting to enter the Tagus as usual on the previous day, had been fired on from the batteries, and was now standing on and off the coast in the hope of ascertaining the precise situation of affairs.

Mr. Chamberlain's arrival settled any doubt as to the hostility of the Portuguese, and the "Walsingham" at once set sail for Falmouth.

The only hope of the Post-Office now lay in schemes of smuggling, conducted from Heligoland. Suggestions were pouring in upon them. Plans more or less impracticable emanated from every crazy enthusiast in London, and the general public demonstrated no less clearly than in our own times its conviction that it was qualified to instruct the experts.

There were anxious consultations at the Foreign Office between Mr. Canning, Mr. Freeling, and Mr. Thornton, who was fortunately at hand to give the benefit of his unrivalled local knowledge and of that sagacity which had extorted the admiration of Bourrienne.

The immediate difficulty was to find a means of communicating to the Senate of Hamburg, then, as always, friendly to the English, the fact that mails were lying at Heligoland, and to concert with them some scheme for introducing those mails into the city.

To do this was a matter of great difficulty, since all the approaches to Hamburg were very closely watched. It was also dangerous, for if the messenger were captured, he would certainly have to face a long imprisonment; and worse than imprisonment might befall him, for he ran an excellent chance of being shot as a spy. A man of courage must

therefore be chosen, and one of resource, of undoubted honesty, faithful to his employers, and adroit in action. Such a man was not easily found; but Mr. Thornton at last put forward his servant, James Giltinan, who had been long with him in Hamburg, and was well acquainted with all the surrounding territory.

Giltinan accepted the dangerous mission very readily. He sailed from Harwich on a Packet bound for Heligoland, and within a few hours of his arrival in that island he left it again on board a schuyt, bound for the mouth of the Elbe. The Heligolanders were confident that he would never succeed in penetrating to Hamburg, and the event proved them right. A furious storm delayed all news for some days, but at last the schuyt returned with the melancholy news that Giltinan had been made prisoner between Neuwerk and Cuxhaven, and sent to Hamburg in close confinement. What befell him there does not appear ever to have become known.

Upon the failure of this gallant venture various plans were considered, but all were laid aside as offering no prospect of success commensurate with the risk involved. The Post-Office declined to make itself responsible for any further efforts, and resolved to confine itself to landing the mails at Heligoland, where they must lie until good fortune provided some means of forwarding them. To such a condition of impotence the policy of Napoleon had reduced the Post-Office in the year 1807.

It is now time to return to the operations of the Falmouth Packets. A new service to Gibraltar and Malta had been opened in the year 1806, in deference to the wishes of the Mediterranean merchants, and still more perhaps to the foresight of the Government which anticipated the closing of the Northern ports. The "Cornwallis," Captain Anthony, was the first Packet despatched on this voyage, which the hostility of Spain rendered rather dangerous. The passage through the Straits brought the "Cornwallis" into close quarters with the Spanish coast, and six gun-boats sallied out from Tarifa to intercept her.

These gun-boats carried 24 and 30-pounders, heavy guns for those days, with from fifty to seventy men each, and their plan of attack was a simultaneous onslaught. They were probably Privateers, for they fought under the bloody flag in token of their resolution to give no quarter. Captain Anthony had anticipated some such attack; and on meeting Collingwood's fleet on the previous day, had asked for convoy through the straits. Collingwood, however, could not spare a convoy, being in constant hope of meeting the French fleet and bringing it to action.

"Just at first," says a passenger on board the "Cornwallis," "when we saw the enemy coming we wished we had had the convoy; but we soon forgot that when our blood warmed, for all on board had to turn to and work his best. Everybody on board

did not seem to mind at all, down to the little boy who serves us in the cabin, although we could see they more than twice outnumbered all of us, for one Englishman is as good as two frog-eaters, and I am sure as good as any two of those rags of Spaniards. I saw that little David, the cabin lad who carried up the powder from below, sang merry until he had no wind with running up and down so much, and he only cried one bit at first, when a splinter from the boat's bottom cut his forehead. His face was very black from the smoke, and he looked mighty comick when I wrapped his head up in my large kerchief, which I did when I was recovered from my fright.

"It was at ten o'clock on Monday morning, July 28th, 1806, a very hot day with little wind, that we engaged in coming through the Gutt, and we fought them for getting on for two hours, till nearly noon, about fifteen to twenty miles from Gibraltar. . . . The captain, seeing as how I was quite well again from my sea-sickness, and that I look steady, gave me the charge of all the powder, which gave me plenty to do. To every man on board cutlasses was served out, for we must not trust to our cannon alone, as they mostly try to board a ship, and take it by power of numbers.

"If a light wind, they make use of their oars and sweep along very fast, and board on all quarters at once if they can. Our ship with her stern gun, a long 9-pounder, spoke such language as they

could not understand. She fired about sixty shots, and kept them at their proper distance, and was our principal defender. I suppose we fired two hundred shots on the whole, and did much damage to the gun-boats, one of which we sunk, and many of her men, thank God, was drowned in the sea, though the other boats being near picked up some. Once or twice when we struck them with our grape their shrieks was verry awful and loud.

“Captain Anthony behaved bravely, and much praise is due to him for his spirited conduct. Mr. Mitchell, from Berwick on Tweed, fought with uncommon vigour; he fired three of the guns. As soon as one was discharged he ran to another; and directed the shot in a gallant style. The first shot that the Spaniards fired blew away the bottom of the boat which hung astern of the ship, and broke the cabin windows. A piece of wood from the boat struck me in the back, and I was much alarmed lest I was shot; but I received no hurt, only a great fright, at which Captain Anthony found time to laugh heartily.

“They fired grapeshot at us, which did much damage to the sails, and broke one of the irons which support the boarding net, and wounded some of our men. Only one was killed in the engagement, a man named Reeves, from Lichfield it is thought, who was a brave and good sailor. He was shot through the thigh and breast, and must have been killed instantaneous, for he did not look

agonized. This is the first man I have seen killed. At about twelve o'clock the five gun-boats retired, having had more than they expected; the breeze was still light, and they returned, but we think not all of them, to Tarifa."¹

Now this somewhat rambling account, the narrative of a plain merchant, not much skilled in the use of his pen, telling us exactly what struck him, too manly to be ashamed of owning himself to have been both sea-sick and frightened, yet showing us in his modest way that he was usefully employed in helping those who did the actual fighting, this straightforward, sensible story puts the whole scene before us more clearly than a thousand official reports. Little David running upstairs "singing merry," not old enough to keep his tears back when the splinter wounded him on the forehead, forms a picture too vivid to be forgotten. Captain Anthony's hearty laugh when his passenger thought himself shot, helps us to realize the joviality with which our grandfathers went into action, too confident in themselves to trouble their heads about the issue, even when fighting against six enemies at once.

The Postmaster General did not think much of this action, ranking it somewhat low among the

¹This quotation is made, with the kind permission of the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, from an article which appeared therein in May 1887, entitled "From a Diary of 1806."

achievements of the Packets chiefly because it was a running fight. One might have supposed that the sinking of one of the gun-boats, together with the skill in manœuvring exhibited by Captain Anthony in repelling the other five, entitled him to a considerable share of credit. He gained more however for his conduct nearly a year later, namely on July 2nd, 1807.

On that date the "Cornwallis" was chased by a lugger about thirty leagues off Brest. The lugger came on under English colours; but Captain Anthony, finding that she made no answer to the private signal, instantly cleared his decks, called his men to their stations, served out cutlasses and pistols, and waited for the lugger with his guns ready shotted.

It was well that he had sailed the seas long enough to be cautious; for the lugger, having flown her English colours until she came within half pistol shot distance, suddenly hauled them down, and ran up the Spanish flag at the mizzen, and the French ensign, topped with a red flag, the signal of no quarter, at the main. In the same moment, without hail or summoning-gun, a broadside roared out, followed by a rattling volley of small arms, by which her commander doubtless thought to shake the nerve of the Falmouth men, and by one sudden blow to win an opportunity of boarding.

He was mistaken in his men, and he had forgotten the "Cornwallis'" stern guns. Her broadside

came crashing into him before the smoke of the first discharges had blown away, and Captain Anthony was perfectly awake to the manœuvre his enemy was contemplating. He saw the lugger making sail; he understood full well that she was bearing down to grapple him on the starboard quarter. His couple of 12-pounder carronades were double shotted, and as the lugger sheered up under the stern of the "Cornwallis" she got such a storm of grape and canister along her decks as took the heart out of her for boarding; while as she fell away in some confusion the Packet's starboard guns came to bear, and were discharged at short range with terrible effect.

This was the decisive moment of the action, and the event was never afterwards doubtful, though the fight was by no means over. The lugger sheered off to a safer distance, and commenced a heavy cannonade which did much injury to the "Cornwallis," dismounting one of the stern guns which had served her so well, wounding three men seriously, and almost crippling her in sails and rigging. The enemy, however, either suffered more, or did not realize how effective her fire had been; for she showed no inclination to come to close quarters again, and after about an hour hauled off, and stood away to the southward, leaving the Packet-men to enjoy their triumph.

Somewhat earlier than this, namely on May 28th, 1807, the "Duke of Marlborough" was in the neigh-

bourhood of Barbados, when the lookout at her mast-head reported a schooner in sight running before the wind a few miles away to the southward. Captain Bull was not on board, and the Packet was in charge of Mr. James, the master, an officer whose growing reputation both as a navigator and in action already marked him as destined for an independent command. Mr. James was well aware of the great probability that any strange vessel encountered in that situation was an enemy; and he made his preparations without loss of time. It was half-past four in the afternoon when the schooner was sighted. By five o'clock the decks were cleared, the boarding nettings triced up, the arms served out, the mail brought on deck, the guns loaded, and the men were at their quarters, cheerful and confident.

Hardly were these arrangements completed when the schooner tacked and made all sail in chase. At 10.15 P.M. she came up astern and fired the first shot, to which the Cornishmen replied with their full broadside. On this the action became general, and the two vessels pounded each other for three-quarters of an hour at close range without serious damage on either side.

Mr. James, confident in the gunnery of his men, felt no apprehension about the result of this cannonade. What he did fear was a boarding assault, for the numbers of the enemy were far superior to his own. At 11 P.M. he perceived that

the French were collecting their boarders. The moment was favourable to them. The vessels were nearing each other. The boarders were gathering in numbers sufficient to sweep the little crew of Cornishmen into the sea; and Mr. James saw with alarm that the situation of the vessels was such that for the moment he could not bring a single gun to bear.

There was not an instant to lose. The Frenchmen were already clambering upon the bulwarks of their ship balancing themselves in the act of springing. In another moment the whole party would have been scrambling over the nettings of the Packet, when Mr. James, seizing the helm, jammed it hard-a-port, and laid the "Duke of Marlborough" right across the enemy's bows.

By this bold manœuvre the tables were turned. As the Packet forged across the schooner's track, every gun in her broadside came to bear successively. Each one in turn raked the French ship from stem to stern with grape-shot and canister, and when Mr. James had leisure once more to look about him, he saw that there was confusion among the enemy, who had evidently sustained a heavy loss. The Frenchmen rallied from this blow surprisingly fast, and in a few minutes secured another opportunity of boarding. The favourable moment had gone by however. The Cornishmen were fully prepared, and not one of the boarders managed to gain the deck of the "Duke of Marlborough." This second failure

seemed to take the heart out of the attack, for shortly afterwards the Privateer sheered off and was seen to heave to with the evident intention of repairing damages.

She had not yet done with the Packet, and about midnight made sail once more in chase, coming within range at 8 A.M., when a heavy fire of great guns were opened on both sides, and maintained very warmly for two hours and a half. At the end of this time, finding she had gained no decisive advantage, and having had enough of close quarters on the previous evening, the Privateer again sheered off and left the "Duke of Marlborough" to pursue her voyage unmolested.

In these two actions six Packetsmen were wounded, one mortally. The amount of loss sustained by the Privateer, which was a large vessel of fourteen guns, well known as having captured many English merchantmen, could not be ascertained, but it was the opinion of some of the officers of the "Duke of Marlborough," that if they had pressed their advantage she could not have escaped. Allowing, however, for very heavy losses, the number of Privateersmen capable of fighting at the close of the action doubtless far exceeded the whole complement of the Packet, and Mr. James, whose first duty was to expose the mails to no unnecessary risk, certainly exercised a wise discretion in refusing to embark in such an adventure.

This, it may be added, was by no means the

only case in which the crew of a Packet, flushed with success, were compelled to refrain from pushing their victory to a conclusion, and so to abandon the prize money which was almost in their grasp. It was hard to let a beaten enemy escape, and it is a striking proof of the good feeling existing among the sailors on the Falmouth Packets that they tolerated such an event without a mutinous outbreak.

A few months later there occurred a fight, which, if not more bold and desperate than half a dozen others recorded in this volume, attracted a larger share of public recognition, and won for the officer in command something like that fame which was so often deserved by the Falmouth commanders, but so very seldom bestowed on them. The action of the "Windsor Castle" on October 1st, 1807, is, indeed, one of the three or four fights to which the world outside Falmouth paid some attention. It has found a niche in the naval histories, and is still remembered when almost every other action of the Packets, however glorious, is forgotten.

The "Windsor Castle" was commanded by Captain Sutton, but that officer had remained at home, and the ship was in charge of Mr. William Roger, the master. She sailed from Falmouth at the end of August, 1807, with mails for the Leeward Islands, and after a tedious voyage was nearing Barbados, in those waters which were a veritable cockpit of the Atlantic, when the look-out reported that a strange schooner, which came in sight a few

minutes earlier, had altered her course and appeared to be chasing the Packet.

Mr. Rogers at once caused every stitch of canvas to be set; but at the end of an hour there could be no doubt that the enemy had the heels of the "Windsor Castle," and that an action was inevitable. Perhaps Mr. Rogers and his crew, having obeyed their orders by attempting to escape, were not ill-pleased on finding that they could not do so. To the former, especially, who held only a temporary command, the chance of distinguishing himself was doubtless welcome, and he set about his preparations with a cheerful confidence which had an excellent effect upon his men.

About noon the strange schooner came within range, hoisted French colours, and opened fire. The Cornishmen replied by playing on the enemy with their stern-chasers, those long brass guns which in so many other fights had proved serviceable in delaying the advance of an enemy. On this occasion, however, they appear to have done little execution, for the schooner drew on rapidly, and, coming within hail, ordered Mr. Rogers, in what he termed "very opprobrious language," to strike his colours. On finding that he treated this demand as it deserved, the French opened a very heavy fire, both of cannon and musketry, which they maintained without intermission for more than an hour.

The Privateer carried three guns in her broadside, as did the "Windsor Castle" also, but they were

9-pounders, whereas the Packet's broadside guns were only 4-pounders, and her chasers 6-pounders. Moreover the Privateer had a long 18-pounder fixed on a swivel in the centre of the main-deck, and traversing on a circle, so that it could be brought to bear on any point with ease. The fire of this powerful gun could not fail to exercise a large effect on the action, and in fact great damage was done by it to the spars and rigging of the Packet. At last the French, believing the moment favourable, seized an opportunity of boarding, and grappled the "Windsor Castle" on the starboard quarter. A strong party leaped into the nettings of the Packet, slashing at them with swords, and hacking at the ridge-ropes with long poles armed with hooks of sharpened steel. But the nettings were lofty and well-secured, the Falmouth men understood the use of pikes and cutlasses, and in a few minutes several of the boarders were wounded and thrust into the sea, while the remainder leaped back to their own ship. On the failure of this attack, the French cut the grapplings, and would have sheered off, probably to resume their cannonade, but the mainyard of the Packet had locked itself in the rigging of the Privateer, and the wind having almost completely died away, the two vessels could not possibly separate. "Thereupon," says the account, written by a passenger on the "Windsor Castle," "our pikemen again flew to their muskets, pistols and blunderbusses, our gallant captain all the while

giving his orders with the most admirable coolness, and encouraging his crew by his speeches and example in such a way that there was no thought of yielding, although many of our heroes now lay stretched upon our deck in their blood. But then we saw the enemy's decks completely covered with their dead and wounded, and the fire from our great guns doing dreadful execution."

For more than two hours the Packet and the Privateer lay locked together, and during all that time the cannonade was furious, while the losses on both sides were very heavy. The French gunnery seems to have been defective, and though men were falling fast on the "Windsor Castle,"—out of eight-and-twenty men and boys three were killed and ten wounded—they were dropping infinitely faster on the Privateer. "At every discharge," says the account already quoted, "we began to hear them scream, which so inspired our gallant crew that many of the wounded returned to their quarters,"—a vivid touch of description, which helps one to realize the desperate character of this long day's fighting off the shore of Barbados.

At three o'clock this stage of the action terminated. The French, seeming to feel the necessity for some great effort, formed a second boarding party, mustering every available man for the attack. Happily Mr. Rogers detected their design, and bringing to bear on them one of his 6-pounders, "crammed with double grape, canister, and one hundred musket

balls," let fly this murderous charge into their midst at the very moment when they were grouped together for the assault. A great number fell, the rest made a dash under cover. They were becoming demoralized, and Mr. Rogers saw that the moment for which he was waiting was at hand. His men saw it too, and were growing eager, but there were only fifteen of them unwounded, and the French were still at the smallest computation, two to one. And so Mr. Rogers held his men back, and let the gunners have their way a little longer. At last, about a quarter-past three, he leapt upon the bulwarks, and, followed by five or six of his best men, sprang down, sword in hand, on the decks of the Privateer. There ensued a fierce scuffle, but it lasted only a few minutes. The French captain led his men on bravely, but he fell dead, and his men, dismayed at the loss of their commander, wavered, lost heart, and were driven below decks. A Packetsman exultingly hauled the French colours down, and the day was won.

Thus ended this long and memorable fight, a striking instance of the degree in which courage and skill could, in the old days, overcome a superiority of force and armament. Praises and rewards were unsparingly bestowed on Mr. Rogers and his brave crew. The former received, almost immediately, his commission as commander of a regular Packet, together with a complimentary letter from My Lords the Postmaster General, and a gratuity of a hundred

guineas; the inhabitants of Tortola presented him with a sword of honour and an illuminated address, and the city of London, on his return to England, conferred its freedom on him. Moreover, the value of the prize was paid over to the General Post-Office and divided among the officers and crew, for though the Packets were not licensed to take prizes, it was obvious to everybody on this occasion that the "Windsor Castle" had no alternative but to capture or be captured.

It appears that at the time of this action the "Windsor Castle" had no surgeon on board, a most unfortunate occurrence, which probably resulted in the unnecessary sacrifice of several lives. Many other Packets were in the same plight, for the Falmouth captains found it difficult to induce surgeons to offer themselves for the pay authorized, and it does not seem to have occurred to them to supplement that pay out of their own resources.

The navy offered better terms than the Post-Office, and so secured almost all the young surgeons who were willing to go to sea. In former times the difficulty had been met by stifling all curiosity about the qualifications of candidates for employment, but such an accommodating attitude naturally resulted in bringing into the service men of no qualifications at all, and a stricter rule was reluctantly adopted. It was not, however, until the year 1810 that the pay of surgeons in the Packet Service was increased to a point which attracted a sufficient

supply of competent men. The chief duty of the surgeon at ordinary times was, it may be added, to read prayers to the crew, he being regarded by My Lords as the most suitable person to perform that office; but the opportunity of officiating as chaplain does not seem to have added materially to the attractions of the post.

There were no other actions in 1807, but the following year was marked by two or three which deserve to be recorded. The fact is, however, that at this period the conduct of the Packets was so invariably distinguished by the highest courage and the most zealous sense of duty, that the narrative of events is perhaps open to the charge of monotony, and the inclination of the chronicler is to pass somewhat lightly over the details of many a fight which, if the balance of account were not already so much in favour of the Packets, would shine with considerable lustre. Yet it would be manifestly unjust to omit the mention of any considerable action, and such certainly was that in which the "Prince Ernest," Captain James Petre, was engaged in March, 1808.

Captain Petre had been a master in the navy. He bore an excellent reputation, and kept his men at such a point of training in the use of their arms as might have been anticipated from an officer of long experience in war. On March 19th, 1808, the "Prince Ernest," outward bound, had entered the belt of ocean patrolled by the Privateers of

Guadeloupe, and a most careful look-out was being maintained. At 8 A.M. a hail from the mast-head informed Captain Petre that a schooner of suspicious appearance had been sighted to the northward, and somewhat later a second schooner came in view some miles to the east. Both these strange vessels altered their course, and bearing down towards the Packet chased her all the morning.

Captain Petre, as he watched the two enemies crawling up, may well have felt doubtful of success in the coming fight. Most fortunately, however, one of the schooners abandoned the chase early in the afternoon, and by half-past two o'clock only one was in sight. That one was almost within range of shot, and Captain Petre, recognizing that there was no longer room for effort to avoid an action, shortened sail and waited for the enemy.

There was no long delay. At 3 P.M. the Privateer was within pistol shot, and opened a tremendous fire. She carried ten guns of which four were of very large calibre, together with over a hundred men, and in the first half-hour the "Prince Ernest" received so much damage in her sails and rigging that it was very difficult to handle her. Accordingly about 3.30 P.M. the French secured an opportunity of boarding. They were repulsed, however, with some loss, and the cannonade recommenced, continuing unabated for another hour. At 5 o'clock the enemy prepared themselves for a great effort. The great guns roared out with redoubled fury, the

musketeers planted in the tops of the Privateer sent a storm of balls on the deck of the Packet, and at the same moment the French captain laying his ship alongside the "Prince Ernest" hove his boarders into her in great numbers.

"My choice little crew," as Captain Petre called them, were perfectly prepared to receive their enemies, and harassed them with pikes and cutlasses as they struggled up the boarding nettings. The numbers of the French were so great, however, that they would doubtless have overpowered the Cornishmen in the end, had not Captain Petre, noticing that the enemy had omitted to cast out grapplings, so that nothing but the direction of the Privateer's helm kept the ships together, ordered his best marksman to shoot the steersman.

As the man fell, and the tiller swung round, another ran forward and jammed it into the necessary position, but he had hardly done so when he too fell across his comrade's body. There was a moment's hesitation before another man sprang to seize the helm, and in that moment the vessels parted.

It was then an easy matter to dispose of the few Frenchmen who had made good their footing on the Packet. As the Privateer sheered off, the Falmouth men clutched at the colours flying from her maingaff, and tore away the greater part of them. "I regret," said Captain Petre, with pardonable triumph, when on his return to England he forwarded this trophy to the Postmaster General,

"I regret that they had hold of nothing stronger." Perhaps he did, but looking at the relative force of the two vessels it can scarcely be supposed that My Lords with their higher responsibility shared his regret.

In September, Captain Anthony, whose successful actions in the "Cornwallis" have been described above, fought the Privateer "La Duquesne" of twelve guns for over two hours at close quarters, and beat her off at last with the loss of two men killed and two wounded; while in November, Captain John Bull had the misfortune to be captured, after a very gallant resistance, by "La Josephine," a French brigantine carrying fourteen 24-pounders and sixty-eight men.

CHAPTER X.

THE MUTINY AT FALMOUTH.

FOR some years My Lords the Postmaster General had found an ever growing source of satisfaction in the conduct of their Packets in face of the enemy. There was abundant credit to be had out of controlling a body of officers who went into action with the spirit of Captain Anthony, Captain Rogers, or Mr. James. The navy itself could have produced no better seamen or more gallant officers: yet, just as the navy was tainted here and there with mutiny, so the sailors of the Post-Office Service broke out occasionally in revolt, which was the more difficult to quell since the men were not subject to the provisions of the Mutiny Act.

The source of the disturbances, which occurred at Falmouth in the year 1810, is to be found in the suppression of the private trade, of which a description was given in a former chapter of this work. From that suppression the Lisbon Packets had been exempted; and this preferential treatment of that section of the Service which in other ways

enjoyed the greatest opportunities of profit, naturally increased the feeling of injustice which rankled in the minds of the men employed on the West India boats.

It was long before the sailors could believe that their little opportunities of making profit were at an end. "The Government has been obliged to prohibit trade," they argued among themselves, "but they will wink at it all the same." And so the men laid out their savings on boots and cheeses just as before, fancying that the "searcher," the newly appointed officer who was to examine every Packet before she proceeded to sea, would be conveniently blind, that the whole search was to be a farce, and that all they were asked to do was not to flourish their cheeses in the searcher's face, but bring them up the side disguised as bedding, or hidden in their sea-chests.

At first this answered well enough, for the searcher had to gain his experience, and some time elapsed before he was a match for the seamen in wiliness. At last, however, he gained ground upon them, and the following list of goods turned out of the "Townshend" will be read with admiration of the cunning which could bring so many and such bulky articles on board and secrete them in the face of the officers and in defiance of their commands: eleven loose cheeses; two baskets of cheese; three large bundles of dried ling; four hogsheads of potatoes; six bales of dry goods;

three boxes of the same; three bags of shoes; a large quantity of shoes secreted loose in different places. The major part of these articles was turned out of the sailor's hammocks, some few came out of the boatswain's cabin; but with one consent all the men professed the greatest astonishment on seeing them. The boatswain was confident that the sailors must have put them in his cabin; the sailors themselves could offer no explanation at all, but were indignant at the mere suspicion of having had any hand in the affair. The searcher was perplexed. The Inspector of Packets wanted to make each man declare on oath whether he had or had not brought the goods on board; but Lord Auckland, with his usual good sense, declined to "place a whole ship's company in the alternative between worldly ruin and a perjury," and so the affair remained one of those insoluble mysteries which occur in the experience of every public department.

The goods which were nobody's property were sent on shore before the "Townshend" sailed, and doubtless were reclaimed by their original owners, so that, though the seamen lost their chance of profit, they incurred no actual loss. Possibly this is the reason why the seizure made so small an impression on the Service. If the goods had been confiscated, the searcher's duties might have been less arduous; but, as it was, he found it necessary to report a few months later, that only four

Packets out of the entire number employed on the Falmouth Station had not been detected in breaking the rule. It seemed impossible to teach the men that the new rule was intended seriously; and many a brave fellow, who had fancied foolishly enough that he would be exempted, or that he could evade the searcher, had the mortification of seeing the boots and cheeses which he had bought out of his scanty savings swimming in the harbour, or tossed unceremoniously into the first boat which came alongside, to be landed on the quay, where they would be at the mercy of any chance *Autolycus*.

These things were hard to bear and not easily forgiven; while the blow was driven home on the arrival of the Packet at her destination, when the merchants' clerks would come down offering Jack famine prices for the very goods he had been robbed of—so he would naturally put it to himself—and the price of many a spree on shore, to say nothing of pretty things for the wife at home, would go back into the merchant's pocket instead of jingling in Jack's.

The wages were raised on the boats which were no longer allowed to trade, but the increase by no means compensated for the profits lost, and the seamen maintained that they were still lower than the current rate in the Merchant Service. If they were reminded that merchant sailors were exposed to the danger of the *pressgang*, while Packetmen

carried protections, they retorted that the protections were not always respected.

This was true enough. For when the pressgangs were sweeping the streets of Falmouth, bursting forcibly into sailors' drinking shops, and, half drunk themselves, giving chase to any sturdy fellow whom they met, it often happened that a Packetsman was seized and only laughed at, or knocked down and soundly cursed, when he claimed exemption. Sometimes his protection was torn in the scuffle. Sometimes it was fraudulently taken from him; and if then he lost his temper and became violent, he was told that his mutinous conduct had deprived him of any right to protection; and not even the intervention of the agent, or of the Postmaster General, could restore him to the Packet Service.

So the irritation at Falmouth went on, sometimes seeming to die away, but ever reasserting itself, and often threatening serious trouble. There needed but some natural occasion for an outbreak; and such an occasion was found in 1810.

In that year, for some unrecorded reason, the Lisbon Packets were brought into line with the West India boats, and private trade was henceforth forbidden on both. The Lisbon sailors resented the new rule fiercely; and the long-threatened tumult broke out at last in resentment over the somewhat excessive zeal with which the searchers and the Custom-House officers enforced it.

Before entering on the details of the curious

events which accompanied this outbreak, it will be well to refer to two actions fought about this time, not only because both were skilfully conducted and very gallantly fought; but even more because the crew of the "Duke of Marlborough," which was the Packet engaged, were ringleaders in the coming revolt, and the circumstances show that their discontent in no way affected the spirit in which they fought.

The first of these actions occurred on July 26th, 1810, when the "Duke of Marlborough" was on her homeward voyage from Lisbon, under the command of Mr. James, who had defended her so bravely in 1807. Her adversary was a French brig Privateer, carrying no less than eight guns (believed to be 18-pounders) on her broadside, in addition to one on the forecastle, with a very large complement of men; and the action was conducted at such close quarters that one of the French sailors, having fired his musket at Mr. James, and missed him, threw the weapon at him. It was well for the Falmouth men, outnumbered as they were, that this was so; for if the Privateer had chosen a more distant position, her heavy guns must in the end have given her the victory; whereas in meeting boarders the British sailor is in his element, and time after time as the French came on the Falmouth men met them cheerfully, and always drove them back.

For an hour and fifty minutes of almost ceaseless

fighting Mr. James and his brave crew maintained their dogged and obstinate resistance, until at last a well aimed shot brought down the Privateer's foretopmast, and she sheered off, leaving the "Duke of Marlborough" to pursue her voyage. It was not too soon, for there were several feet of water in the Packet's hold, and she would probably have sunk if the fight had lasted much longer. Mr. James had three men wounded, but fortunately none killed.

The second action was remarkable in this respect, that it occurred in full sight of home.

It was on October 1st, in the same year 1810. The "Duke of Marlborough" was once more homeward bound from Lisbon, and was approaching the coast of Cornwall on a thick, hazy morning, when she sighted a strange schooner, but almost at once lost her again in the mist. At 9 A.M. the Packet was within three leagues of the Lizard, and Pendennis Castle, which crowns the entrance to Falmouth Harbour was in sight, when the strange vessel reappeared suddenly, standing towards the Packet under a press of sail. Captain Bull made the private signal, but it remained unanswered; and though the English coast was so close that it appeared the height of audacity for an enemy to venture an attack, he judged it prudent to order the ship to be cleared for action. His orders were obeyed with alacrity; and having seen the boarding nettings triced up, the mail brought on deck and

shotted, and every other preparation made, he spoke a few encouraging words to his crew. He was a man of brief and pithy speech, and knew his crew too well to suppose that any but the plainest eloquence was needed. Therefore, pointing to the shore, which was then clearly visible, he simply said, "Now, my lads, there is Pendennis, there are your homes," and felt content, as well he might, that no man on board would forget that he was about to fight under the eyes of his friends, and in sight of his own cottage door.

The wind had almost dropped, and the sea was perfectly smooth, so that the vessels neared each other slowly, and in silence. There was a period of waiting. The schooner had hoisted no colours, and her nationality was still uncertain, when Mr. James, perhaps losing patience, fired a musket at her, whereon she ran up the French ensign, with a bloody flag, in token that she would give no quarter. This was quite enough for Captain Bull. He gave the word to his gunners, and a broadside of canister and musket balls roared out across the bay, doing great execution at the short distance which separated the vessels.

This was at 10 A.M., and the engagement at once became general. At 10.30 A.M. the Privateer ran down with the evident intention of boarding; and as the enemy were seen to be in great numbers it was judged prudent to sink the mail. It was unfortunate that this decision was not delayed a

few minutes longer ; for just as the two ships were grazing each other, and the boarding party were grouped together on the forecastle of the Privateer, they were discouraged by a gun crammed with canister which Captain Bull fired into their midst.

In the confusion following this slaughter, the Privateer fell away, and the opportunity of boarding was lost. The cannonade was then resumed, but without much spirit, and in half an hour more the Privateer got out her sweeps, and placed herself beyond the reach of her adversary's guns. It was indeed high time for her to be off : for Lieutenant James Cock, R.N., who was stationed at the signal post at Falmouth, put off from land with two boats full of men as soon as he heard the firing, and was now close at hand. The action was over however before he came on board, and there was nothing left but for him to congratulate the victors. Such was the conduct of the crew of the "Duke of Marlborough" in face of the enemy ; and it will be only fair to set this conduct to their credit as against the part they took in the events now to be related.

In August, 1810, Mr. Saverland, the Post-Office agent at Falmouth, reported to his chiefs in London that there was some "uneasiness" among the sailors of the Lisbon Packets. This restless and dissatisfied feeling originated of course in the sailors' standing grievance, namely the suppression of the private trade. But it had another basis also ; and they

were certainly on stronger ground when they pointed out that since the rate of their wages was fixed, a rate intended to include some compensation for the loss of trading profits, the prices of all commodities had risen so enormously as to render it a sheer impossibility for the men to support their families on their pay.

There seems little doubt that the rate of wages was too low. The agent certainly was of that opinion; and he stated that the seamen urged their complaint with great moderation and propriety. They assembled in great numbers outside the agent's office on August 15th, and selected two men from the crew of each Packet, whom they charged with the presentation of their memorial. This document contained a temperate statement of their case, and was in due course forwarded to London for consideration.

The Post-Office took the not unnatural view that the question of increasing the wages of the seamen was one for the consideration solely of the captains, who received a fixed yearly payment from the office, and might distribute it, within certain limits, as they pleased. There was, moreover, some intention of re-opening the question of the private trade, and of seeking legal sanction for it, on the condition that a certain portion of the profits should be appropriated by the Department. Both these considerations led to some delay in dealing with the memorial.

On August 24th the seamen returned in a large body to the agent's office, and inquired whether there were any answer to their memorial. On being told that none had been received they dispersed quietly, and Mr. Saverland, in reporting the matter to London, stated that he did not apprehend any disturbance, but thought that if the position of the men was not in some way improved, many of them would leave the Service. It was finally resolved to obtain the materials for a full comparison between the wages paid to the seamen serving on the Packets and those employed in the navy and the Revenue Service. With some care the comparison was made, and it resulted that the seamen on the Packets were somewhat better paid than those in the navy. It did not of course follow necessarily from this that the wages were fully adequate, but none could expect that a public department would pay more than the current rate.

It was early in October when this conclusion was reached; and though it was of course not acceptable to the sailors, it seems possible that a contented feeling might have sprung up again. At this moment, however, the smouldering discontent was blown up into a fierce fire by the action of the Customs officers.

The "Prince Adolphus," Captain Boulderson, was announced to sail on October 24th, for the Mediterranean, and at noon on that day her crew was mustered, the mails and passengers were on board,

and the Packet was ready to slip her moorings. The "Duke of Marlborough" was to sail in company with her for Lisbon. At the last moment the Customs officer came on board; and, not content with satisfying himself that no large quantity of goods was stored in either Packet, he caused the sailors' chests to be broken open, and confiscated the little private ventures which the men considered themselves entitled to retain. The crew of the "Prince Adolphus" at once refused to take the ship to sea; and after trying in vain to induce them to return to their duty, Captain Boulderson made the signal for the agent to come on board. Mr. Saverland lost no time in boarding the Packet, and reasoned with the crew, pointing out that by refusing to obey orders they forfeited their claim to protection against the Impress. He failed, however, to produce any effect; and was returning on shore to consult with Captain Slade, the senior naval officer then at Falmouth, when he was hailed by Captain Bull. On pulling alongside the "Duke of Marlborough," Mr. Saverland learned that the Customs officer was then on board that Packet, acting with the same violence which had provoked the sailors of the "Prince Adolphus," and that Captain Bull feared the same results would follow. Mr. Saverland was, however, powerless to interfere and returned on shore where he held a consultation with Captain Slade. They were quickly joined by Captain Bull, who stated that his crew had, as

he feared, refused to proceed to sea. He thought, however, that the personal influence of the agent might have a good effect, and it was noticed that the "Duke of Marlborough's" men did not return the cheers with which the crew of the "Prince Adolphus" announced what they probably considered a moral victory. Having arranged therefore that Captain Slade should forthwith board the "Prince Adolphus," and impress the mutineers, Mr. Saverland returned to the "Duke of Marlborough" where he remained for two hours, using every kind of argument, but in vain. Captain Bull therefore ordered the sails to be furled: and the mutinous seamen from his ship also were pressed. This was not done without some difficulty. Several of the older men resisted stoutly; and one drew his knife on Captain Slade, fortunately, however, without injuring him.

On the following morning a very large number of seamen assembled in the court-yard before the agent's office, loudly demanding the release of the men who had been pressed; and asserting that they would not return to their duty until this demand was complied with. It was unanimously resolved that no concessions could be made to the men while they remained mutinous; and the disturbance shortly became so great that the magistrates were sent for and the Riot Act read. The seamen thereupon retired, cheering as they went, but the aspect of affairs was so threatening

that the garrison was got under arms, and Mr. Saverland thought it prudent to acquaint Sir Robert Calder, who was then in command at Plymouth, with the facts of the case.

On the following day there was no improvement. The sailors assembled on the bowling green, on an eminence above the town. They had been joined by practically all the Packetmen who were in Falmouth at the time; and Mr. Saverland, visiting each Packet in succession, found only the officers and a few boys on board. The mutineers had now added to their demand for the release of the pressed men, a claim for additional pay. The next day the public crier went round the streets of Flushing calling on all Packetmen, lumpers, and riggers, to assemble that evening at the "Seven Stars" Tavern. The object of the meeting was to select two delegates who were to proceed to London, and lay the complaints of the men before the Postmaster General. Accordingly two men, Richard Pascoe and John Parker, were chosen; and started by the mail coach for London on the morning of the 28th.

The naval officers, who were acting in concert with Mr. Saverland, were strongly of opinion that the mutiny was the work of a few men, and would collapse if the ringleaders could be secured. They determined, therefore, to surround the "Seven Stars" while the meeting was in progress, and with this view a boat's crew entered Mylor Creek,

and was marched over the hill down into the town of Flushing. The mutineers kept good watch however, if, indeed, the suspicion entertained by the naval officers, that there was bad faith on the part of some of the magistrates acquainted with the scheme, was groundless, and the attacking party found the tavern empty.

By this time a certain friction was manifest between the mayor (Mr. Angove) and magistrates of Falmouth, and the naval officers with whom the agent acted. Mr. Saverland complained that the magistrates had shown no proper anxiety to secure the ringleaders; and there is little room for doubting that not only the magistrates, but the whole town of Falmouth, sympathized with the seamen; and, if they did not openly help them, were yet unwilling to take side against them. On the morning of the 28th Captain Slade urged the mayor to call in military aid, and to forcibly enter the houses of the ringleaders to secure their persons. At noon he left the mayor in the belief that both his proposals had been accepted; but the suggestion of search warrants was quietly dropped; and though a body of the West Essex Militia, then quartered in the neighbourhood, were summoned, they did not enter the town till six o'clock, while at four o'clock the sailors had marched in large parties, quite unmolested, into the open country.

In the meantime two cutters sent by Sir Robert Calder had arrived in the harbour, and were

placed under the command of Captain Slade. The West Essex Militia were quartered in the town, and a sergeant's guard was located in Flushing.

It is now necessary to return to the delegates chosen by the seamen to represent their grievances at the General Post-Office. Mr. Saverland had been careful to acquaint his chiefs with the fact of their departure; and had despatched an express for this purpose, which, out-stripping the coach, reached London on the morning of October 29th. A consultation was at once held as to how Pascoe and Parker should be received. It seemed to the strict disciplinarians of that day impossible to countenance an act of mutiny by parleying with these men. Whatever foundations of justice there might be in their complaints, it was essential that the sailors should return to their duty before any discussion could take place. It was therefore suggested to the Admiralty that Pascoe and Parker should be impressed as soon as they arrived; and having obtained the necessary instructions to the Regulating Officer at the Tower, and had the warrant backed by the Lord Mayor, whose authority was required before the men could be pressed within the limits of the city, the chiefs of the General Post-Office awaited the coming of the delegates with confidence. The men arrived late on the afternoon of the 29th, and were ushered into the room where the Secretary sat expecting them in company with the City Marshall. Their explana-

tions were cut short ; they were told that they had no claim to be heard ; and they were handed over without more ado to the City Marshall, who forthwith lodged them in the Poultry Compter.

It must be remembered, if this proceeding seems harsh, that Pascoe and Parker came to London as representatives of men who were in open and riotous mutiny, and whose conduct, by impeding the mails, was inflicting serious loss on the mercantile community, and possibly even hampering the movements of the commanders of our troops and fleets then engaged in active operations. Had these men come to London to present a memorial temperately urged by persons who were at the same time performing their duty, they would have been very differently received.

It appears, moreover, that the delegates had not been discreetly chosen. Pascoe, who was known in Falmouth by the nickname of "Sir Francis Burdett," had served as steward of the "Prince William Henry" Packet, and had afterwards been in the Excise, whence he was discharged for "seditious and treasonable expressions." Parker was an American. There is no doubt that both men were noisy demagogues.

It had been the intention to bring the men up for examination at the Mansion House on October 30th, but on the morning of that day it was discovered that the Lord Mayor had doubts about his powers of impressing, within the city, men whose offence, if any, had been committed at

Falmouth. A remand was accordingly granted in order that the matter might be reconsidered.

By this time the situation at Falmouth had materially changed. That firmness and zeal against the seamen which no entreaties or arguments used by the naval officers could arouse in the mayor and magistrates, was inspired in a moment by a happy thought of Mr. Saverland's. He commenced to throw out hints of an important decision which would be taken very shortly if the mutiny did not subside, and which would be regretted by the town for many a day. The seed thus sown sprang up in a few hours into a very promising crop of rumours and reports. People went about with an uncomfortable suspicion that something was about to happen, and Mr. Saverland's office was besieged by persons anxiously inquiring whether it was true that the Government had decided to remove the Packets to Plymouth. Mr. Saverland had received no hint of any such intention, but, seeing how great an effect the mere suggestion had produced, he dilated on the extreme probability of such a step, and protested that the conduct of the Falmouth seamen, and the almost avowed sympathy shown them by the constituted authorities of the town, had brought him, and his chiefs also, to the extreme limit of their patience.

The situation thus created was, as the mayor immediately felt, too serious to be ignored. The loss of the Packets would bring ruin on the town; and on October 30th, a meeting of the citizens was

hastily convened, and the whole situation was fully discussed.

There is perhaps some room for doubt whether the naval officers and the agent, on whom the chief burden of responsibility fell throughout these anxious days, did not overrate the extent to which the mayor and magistrates supported and encouraged the mutineers. It is certain, however, that on the very day on which the town's meeting was held the aspect of affairs began to improve, and that evening Mr. Saverland was able to report to London that some men were already returning to their duty. On the following day the upward tendency was more marked, and it was intimated to the agent that the greater part of the men would return if they could be assured that they would be well received, and would not be abandoned to the pressgang. Mr. Saverland at once caused a notice to be printed and distributed, promising protection to all men who would return except four or five who were specially named, and who had distinguished themselves by particularly riotous conduct. This notice had an excellent effect, and on the evening of the day on which it was issued there was a full muster of men on board all the Packets.

The mischief was, however, done. The threatening aspect of the mutiny, and the impossibility of despatching the mails, had caused an amount of anxiety and alarm which was not to be allayed by the simple announcement that the men had

returned to their ships. It was felt necessary to mark the occasion in some signal way, and the idea of removing the Packets to Plymouth, which had entered Mr. Saverland's mind on October 30th, occurred quite independently to the Secretary of the Treasury on the same day. It thus happened that the Secretary of the Post-Office, on repairing to Whitehall on October 31st, to suggest the adoption of this plan, found that it was already being favourably considered, and that very day instructions were sent to Sir Robert Calder to despatch forthwith to Falmouth a force sufficient to navigate the Packets round to Plymouth.

The news fell like a thunderbolt on Falmouth. It was received on November 2nd, and even Mr. Saverland was not prepared for it. The sailors had, as already stated, returned to their ships, and the step appeared so little necessary that the agent thought that his chiefs in London must have failed to comprehend how much the situation had improved, and he consequently sent off an express with a full report. The measure was, however, dictated by a strong feeling that it was necessary, once for all, to show the seamen and the inhabitants of Falmouth that they were not masters of the position. It was felt, not unjustly, that the danger and inconvenience of any interruption of the Postal Service was great enough to warrant the Department in giving a severe lesson, and the decision to remove the Packets was consequently persisted in.

On November 6th "H.M.S. North Star," accompanied by a frigate and two sloops of war, entered Falmouth Harbour, and set sail again for Plymouth in company with six Packets. On first reaching Plymouth the Packets lay in Hamoaze, while a temporary office was secured for the agent and his staff at the "Fountain Inn."

It was not long before agent, officers, and men, wished themselves heartily back at Falmouth. Writing to the Secretary of the Post-Office on November 13th Mr. Saverland says:

"I hope the Packets will not remain here as a fixed station. If they do, the establishment must be greatly increased and the correspondence delayed. Both the West India and American Mails were ready yesterday by about noon, but what with the passengers in different and distant inns, the Packets in different places, the cartage of the mails, the purchasing of their anchors in very deep water—pilotage not one man-of-war ever goes to sea without, so dangerous is the passage—that I see very clearly we shall not gain anything in getting to sea, though the mail arrives here in the morning. . . . In the late gale the 'Diana' parted her cable and was nearly on shore, and the 'Stately,' a 74, nearly ran on board the "Despatch," and would have sunk her if she had, but fortunately she ran on board a hulk, and just saved the Packet. . . . In Hamoaze and the Sound the water is so deep that if it blows a little the Packets cannot weigh their anchors, and anchors are so distributed about by ships cutting and slipping their cables that cables are worn out in a few hours. The "Elizabeth" cut a new cable which cost £140 nearly through last night, getting foul of some anchor or wreck. . . ."

Again a few days later he wrote:

"The Packets lie very badly here. . . . Unless moorings are laid down, and a separate place assigned, some of them will

be lost before the winter is over. The seamen are obliged to be victualled constantly on board, and stock of all kinds is dearer than at Falmouth, together with greater wear and tear, exclusive of risk. . . ."

These representations were of course not without effect, and were pressed home by the fact that on more than one occasion Packets which set sail from Plymouth in stormy weather were obliged to run for Falmouth for shelter. The Post-Office, moreover, was exposed at this time to strong pressure exerted by prominent persons in Cornwall, who used all their influence to secure the return of the Packets to Falmouth.

At that time forty-four members were returned to the House of Commons from Cornwall, and it was rightly foreseen that these members would act unanimously in the matter. A deputation of the inhabitants of Falmouth had, moreover, reached London early in November. It consisted of the mayor, Mr. James Bull, Mr. John Carne, and Mr. Robert W. Fox. These gentlemen had an interview with the Secretary of the Post-Office on November 10th, but received what was to them an unsatisfactory answer to their representations. The unyielding disposition shown to them was due not only to a conviction that it was much too soon to give way, but also to the difficulties arising from the case of Pascoe and Parker.

These two men were in a high state of exultation. The consultations held upon their case had led to

the conclusion that they could not legally be punished, and there was no alternative but to set them at liberty. It was not to be expected that under the circumstances they would let slip the opportunity of making capital out of their arrest, and they promptly commenced an action for false imprisonment against the Secretary of the Post-Office, laying the damages at the modest sum of £5000 each. In order to obtain the funds necessary for the preliminary steps in the matter they issued an appeal at Falmouth. It was headed, "To the Friends and Advocates of Justice," and described in feeling terms the sufferings endured by the delegates during their confinement of three days "in a dreadful gaol, having nothing to make use of, not even straw to lie on." It does not appear what response this appeal met with.

The mayor and his companions passed many days in London, and at last returned to Cornwall without having obtained any pledge concerning the return of the Packets to Falmouth. In fact, a strong effort was made at this time by persons interested in the port of Fowey to persuade the Post-Office that that harbour was better suited for a Packet station than Falmouth. There was never any great prospect that this contention would prevail, but it deserved consideration, and it was thought desirable to have a full report upon Fowey made by a competent engineer.

That report when received was unfavourable, and

by the end of the year there was no longer any doubt in the minds of the Government that no harbour existed which combined so many advantages for the purposes of a Packet station as Falmouth. It was not thought, however, that the town had been sufficiently punished, and only at the end of January, 1811, did the Treasury sanction the return of the Packets. Long before that time the action threatened by Pascoe and Parker had been dropped. Pressure was applied to them by the townspeople, who rightly judged that it was their interest to conciliate the Post-Office rather than to fight it. The first result of this pressure applied is shown in the following curious letter addressed apparently to the attorney who had charge of the case :—

“ Mr. Andrew Young,

“ Sir,

“ Having maturely considered our discourse this morning relative to the Packets, and being ever anxious and desirous, as far as lie in my power and compatable with the true feelings of a man, to render every assistance to mankind in general, but more particularly to our Friends, Relatives, and the Inhabitants of Falmouth, have well weighed and thereby fixed unalterably (like the Laws of the Medes and Persians) the Rule and Criterion whereon and whereby we fix the Basis on which we make this Declaration, and offer terms, which when we consider the damages we have laid, namely Five Thousand Pound each, are not nominal, but such as we have reason to expect will be allowed by Lord Ellingboro' and an Impartial Jury of our countrymen. By which means it will appear we are ready to sacrifice a large sum; and like Brutus and Manlius, altho' not offering up our children for a

total sacrifice, offer up that patrimony they for the unhappy moments have suffered thro' their fathers and only friends being unlawfully detained in a dreadful gaol, and which they are lawfully and justly entitled to. But to return to the Question, we are of opinion, and that not a vague one formed in a hasty moment, that the town of Falmouth is in a ruined state unless the Packets return ; and well knowing that the Inhabitants (those principal ones we mean) are deprived of their lucrative trade and great rents unless the Packets can be restored to their former channel, and which we learn and anticipate cannot be done without our sacrificing our private feelings, which although difficult to do, we will do provided we receive the pecuniary satisfaction we demand, which is when considered, a trivial sum, one thousand pounds each. Now, Sir, far be it from us to beg or desire a settlement of the Business in this way, but for the good of the town, and we leave you to make, according to your judgment, whatever use you think proper of this our Final determination.

“ RICHARD PASCOE.

“ JOHN PARKER.

“ Falmouth, Sunday, Nov. 25, 1810.”

This document breathes such an elevated spirit that it is painful to have to relate that the moderation of these two estimable men did not serve them. The action was not compromised on these or any other terms, but was dropped unconditionally.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE AMERICAN WAR.

THE contrast between the events detailed in the last few chapters on the one hand, and on the other those which occurred in the nine years preceding the Peace of Amiens, must strike the most casual reader very forcibly. Where, in those earlier years, was that splendid daring with which Captain Rogers led his men to victory, that dogged obstinacy which brought Captain Anthony successfully out of three fights against a heavy superiority of force within two years, that self-sacrificing zeal which animated Captain Dyneley in his great exploit at Dominica, enabling him to accept the whole burden of the risk which the merchants declined, and so to save a rich island for the British crown?

The evil days on the Falmouth Station had passed away like a dream, and if they are here recalled, it is but with the object of claiming for the Headquarter Staff, and for the officers themselves, full credit for the patient labours which had

destroyed the evil practices and created the better spirit. None but those who have shared in the labour of controlling a large body of subordinates can fully appreciate the difficulty of carrying out even such changes of practice as are generally accepted as necessary and reasonable. There is among every large body of men an inertia which only time and patience can overcome. The individual can be moved, but the mass as a whole declines to stir. So it is when rules not specially distasteful are enforced; but when the new regulation cuts at the root of ancient privilege, when it strikes off a profit which by long prescription is regarded as a right, then a number of forces come into opposition more powerfully than the dead weight just mentioned, and the administrator finds his judgment and discretion subjected to a heavy strain.

Therefore, to have enforced the new rules, and not only that, but to have evolved and called out a spirit so different from that which existed on the Falmouth Station ten years before, was an achievement of which the Postmaster General and the Secretary might well feel proud. The conduct of the Packets had been increasingly brilliant, and when the year 1812 began they were in a state of discipline and ardour which would have done credit to any naval force.

It was well that their condition was so good, for the time was at hand when they were to be put to a fiercer test than any which the French Privateers

had been able to apply. There were still old men at Falmouth who could remember how the Packets fared in the first American War, and who knew well that the Privateers of Boston or Newport were ten times more formidable than those of Nantes or of Bordeaux. The national belief in the superiority of British pluck to that of any other country would scarcely hold against sailors of our own race; and, as a matter of fact, it is well known that the American cruisers, both national and private, were largely manned with picked men from the British navy, driven by the somewhat harsh and inconsiderate treatment which was too prevalent in our ships to take service with a power which at least fed and paid them well, and treated them with reasonable consideration.

The temptations offered by the Americans to the trained sailors of English ships had always constituted one of the greatest difficulties of the Packet captains, any one of whom had lost at different times numbers of his best men by desertion. Probably many of the sailors who thus deserted their flag rejoined it on the outbreak of war; but it is certain that a great number remained in their adopted service, arguing, perhaps, in some confused way, that a war between two sections of the English race which only a generation ago were one united power was of the nature of a civil war, in which there was no question of treason, but every man might take sides according to his judgment.

Whether they salved their consciences with sophistries or not, yet there they were; and the knowledge of this fact was alone sufficient to convince My Lords the Postmaster General that an enemy very different from the French was at hand. It was indeed; but few even of the officers who formed this conclusion could have anticipated such desperate fighting as actually occurred, or could have looked to the little Packets for such splendid conduct as they showed, in what, if the truth must be admitted, was not the brightest period of British naval history.

The war broke out in June, 1812, but it was not until September that any one of the Packets was brought to action.

On the 15th of that month the "Princess Amelia," three days out from St. Thomas on her homeward voyage, was brought to action by the Privateer "Rossie" of Baltimore, Commodore Barney. The "Princess Amelia" was commanded by Captain Moorsom, a brave and energetic officer of a family well known in our naval annals, both then and since. The "Rossie" carried ten 12-pounders, in addition to a long 9-pounder mounted on a traverse. The "Princess Amelia" had but six guns—she should have carried eight; the cause of the deficiency is not explained—of which at least four were only 6-pounders, the others 9-pounders, and she carried twenty-eight men and boys as against ninety-five upon the Privateer.

There are but scanty details of the fight. The "Rossie," which had chased the Packet for several hours, and had not answered the private signal, came within range at 6 P.M. She was flying Spanish colours; but Captain Moorsom, suspecting her nationality, ordered a shot to be fired at her, whereupon she immediately hoisted the Stars and Stripes, crossed the Packet's stern, and fired a broadside as she did so. The action immediately became warm, and the first ten minutes proved that the Americans were masters of their weapons. Within the first half-hour four or five of Captain Moorsom's crew were hit. At half-past six the master, Mr. Nankivell, was shot through the head. Twenty minutes later Captain Moorsom himself was killed by a grape-shot which pierced his left breast. The command devolved on Mr. Ridgard, the mate, who was himself badly wounded; and on looking round he discovered that out of the complement of the "Princess Amelia," consisting only of twenty-eight hands, three were killed, and no less than eleven wounded, for the most part seriously, so that the crew was already reduced to half its number, while the enemy were as five to one. Mr. Ridgard reluctantly concluded that all had been done which was possible to save the Packet. Accordingly the mail was sunk, and at seven o'clock the "Princess Amelia" hauled down her colours.

Such was the first action fought by the Falmouth Packets during the American war, a rough forecast

of what was to come, justifying anxiety about the immediate future. For Captain Moorsom was one of the ablest of the Post-Office commanders. His ship and crew were in high condition; and yet the accounts of his last fight showed that the event was never doubtful, though his high courage led him to prefer dying on his own quarterdeck to surrendering his trust, even to a crushing superiority of force.

In November of the same year a fight upon a greater scale took place, one indeed which was perhaps the most memorable of all those in which the Packets were engaged. Many of the actions described in these pages are out of the common; but a few stand forth from among the rest, marked by quite exceptional circumstances of bravery and devotion. Among these few the action of Captain James Cock in the "Townshend" on November 22nd, 1812, stands first, though unsuccessful.

The "Townshend" was armed somewhat more heavily than the "Princess Amelia," having on board eight 9-pounder carronades, with a long gun of similar calibre used as a chaser. Her crew was also slightly larger, numbering twenty-eight men and four boys. She was within a few hours of dropping her anchor at Bridgetown, Barbados, when the first light of morning revealed two strange vessels cruising in company at no great distance.

These vessels proved to be two American Privateers, the "Tom," Captain Thomas Wilson,

and the "Bona," Captain Damaron. The former was armed with fourteen carronades, some 18 and some 12-pounders, as well as two long 9-pounders, and carried a hundred and thirty men. The latter had six 18-pounders, with a long 24-pounder mounted on a traverse, and a crew of ninety men. The forces on each side were therefore as follows, assuming that the "Tom" carried as many 18 as 12-pounders :—

	Weight of metal, in pounds.	Number of men.
Privateers, -	360	220
Packet, -	78	32 (besides four passengers, who seem to have rendered some assistance).

This enormous preponderance of force was greatly increased in effective power by being divided between two opponents. A single vessel might be crippled by a lucky shot; but if good fortune rid the "Townshend" of one antagonist in this way, there still remained the other to be reckoned with, more powerful in every way than herself.

If ever circumstances justified surrender after a short resistance, they were present in this case. It might even be thought that resistance was a useless sacrifice of life; but such was not Captain Cock's view. He held it to be his plain duty not only to keep the mails out of the hands of the enemy—which could be done effectually by sinking them at any moment—but to use every means in his power to preserve them for their proper owners,

and not to abandon hope of delivering them at the agent's office in Bridgetown until every chance of doing so was gone. Now there were still two chances in his favour; first, that he might hold out until the noise of firing attracted some of the British cruisers which were probably in the immediate neighbourhood, and if that chance failed, he might run the "Townshend" ashore on some shoal of the coast now in sight where the Privateers could not follow him. Both these chances were desperate enough; but Captain Cock saw his duty clear before him, and cared nothing for the consequences. All his preparations were quickly made, and every man was at his post before the Privateers came within range, which they did about 7 A.M.

At 7.30 A.M. the "Tom" had placed herself abeam of the Packet to larboard, while the "Bona" lay on the starboard quarter, and both their broadsides were crashing into the "Townshend" at pistol shot distance, all three vessels running before the wind. This lasted till eight o'clock. The Americans, as was usual with them, made great use of "dismantling shot," *i.e.* chain and bar shot; the effect of which upon the rigging of the "Townshend" was most disastrous. It was not long before her sails were hanging in ribbons, and her spars greatly damaged; and in some momentary confusion from this cause the "Tom" seized an opportunity of pouring in her boarders, while the "Bona" redoubled her fire,

both of great guns and of musketry, to cover their attack.

In what force the boarders came on this occasion we are not told, but as the crew of the "Tom" consisted of one hundred and thirty men there is no improbability in supposing that they numbered fifty or sixty. Captain Cock, moreover, having a foe on either quarter, could not bring the whole even of his handful of men to meet them, but must leave a sufficient number to work the guns, which were keeping the "Bona" at a respectful distance. He may perhaps have had twenty men at his back in this hand-to-hand fight; but each one of them acquitted himself so well that after a fierce tussle the Americans were driven back to their own ship. This success was only won by the loss of four of Captain Cock's best hands, who received disabling wounds in the fight.

Thereupon both Privateers resumed the cannonade, maintaining the positions which they had taken up at the commencement of the action, and for another hour the "Townshend" endured the fire of her enemies' heavy guns, the courage of her commander and crew remaining as high and stubborn as ever.

The Packet was now so much shattered that she could with difficulty be handled. Again and again the "Tom" bore down upon her, and hurled fresh boarders up her sides. Time after time Captain Cock led his wearied men to meet them, and each time drove them back.

In these repeated close fights the Cornishmen met with heavy losses, Mr. Sidgman, master of the "Townshend" being killed, and six more sailors, making ten in all, desperately wounded. His crew was now so reduced in numbers that it was with the greatest difficulty that Captain Cock could continue to serve the guns, and at the same time to collect sufficient men to meet the constantly recurring boarding attacks. It was plain that this situation of affairs could not last. There was no sign of succour on the sea, and when Captain Cock looked aloft, he could not but admit that in the crippled condition of his ship, all chance of running her ashore was gone. The "Townshend" was in fact a mere wreck. Her bowsprit was shot in pieces. Both jib-booms and head were carried away, as well as the wheel and ropes. Scarcely one shroud was left standing. The Packet lay like a log on the water, while the Privateers sailed round her, choosing their positions as they pleased, and raking her again and again.

Still Captain Cock held out. It was not until ten o'clock, when he had endured the attack of his two powerful enemies for nearly three hours, that he looked about him and recognized that the end had come. There were four feet of water in the hold, and the carpenter reported that it was rising rapidly. The Packet was in fact sinking. Nearly half the crew were in the hands of the surgeon. The rest, exhausted and hopeless of success, had

already fought more nobly than even he could have foreseen, and were now being uselessly sacrificed. Still Captain Cock's pride rebelled against surrender; and as he saw the colours he had defended so well drop down upon the deck, it is recorded that he burst into tears.

There lies before the writer a faded yellow scrap of paper on which one of the American captains recorded in generous terms his opinion of his foe. It runs as follows: "I do certify that Captain James Cock, of the Packet brig 'Townshend,' captured this day by the private armed schooners 'Tom' and 'Bona,' did defend his ship with courage and seamanship, and that he did not strike his colours until his vessel was perfectly unmanageable and in the act of sinking. Sd., Thomas Wilson, on board the 'Townshend,' November 22nd, 1812." Subjoined to this certificate is a statement of the force of the Privateers, as given above. The loss of the "Townshend" has already been indicated; that of the Privateers Captain Cock was allowed no opportunity of ascertaining. He believed, however, that it was heavy, and he mentions positively that the "Tom," the larger of the two, had received so much injury in her spars, sails, and rigging, that it was the intention of her captain to put back to port to refit.

When the Americans took possession of the "Townshend," they found her so literally a wreck that they could make no use of her; and they

therefore resolved to set her on fire, sending the crew, whom they did not wish to retain as prisoners, ashore in their own boats. Against this decision Captain Cock protested vehemently, pointing out the inhumanity of exposing so many wounded men to the perils of a voyage in boats which were so much shattered as to make it extremely doubtful whether they could reach the land. Finally, he was permitted, in exchange for a bill for £1200, to resume possession of his ship, after it had been plundered of everything of value. His unwounded men set to work with a will, plugged the shot holes, held the leaks in check, and at 7 P.M. the "Townshend" dropped her anchor in Carlisle Bay. There her injuries were repaired as far as the imperfect appliances of the dock-yard permitted, and shortly after the New Year she set sail for England, still in a rather crazy state.

On January 18th at 1 P.M. a large schooner came in sight, about four miles away on the larboard bow. When first seen, the schooner was laying-to; but she made sail in chase almost immediately, and at 2.30 P.M. hoisted English colours. At 3 P.M. the stranger was within half a mile; and was seen to be hauling down the English ensign and hoisting the Stars and Stripes. At the same time she fired a gun across the "Townshend's" bows, a summons to which Captain Cock replied with his full broadside, running up his own colours to the main-peak as he did so.

Half crippled as she was, the "Townshend" was in for it again.

The Privateer hung on the wake of the Packet, yawing every few minutes so as to deliver her broadside. Captain Cock on his part, not choosing to risk the loss of ground, kept a steady course, and confined himself to the use of his chasers, those long brass nine-pounders—"Post-Office" guns, as they are still called by the old sailors at Falmouth—which had so often served the Packets in good stead. With these two pieces he kept playing upon the following enemy with such good effect that at 3.30 P.M. he had the satisfaction of seeing her foreyard rattle down. There was some confusion on her decks in consequence of this disaster, and Captain Cock, seizing the opportunity to drive home the blow, gave the word to yaw, and delivered his full broadside of round and grape-shot with such precision as did great injury to the enemy's spars and rigging, then hauling to the wind again, resumed practice with his stern guns.

The excellence of the Cornish gunnery had done its work, and by 4 P.M. the Privateer was observed to be dropping fast astern. In another quarter of an hour a severe squall came on, and the vessels parted. When the enemy was last seen she was laying-to, her sails hanging in every direction, and her crew employed in knotting the shrouds and backstays and repairing the running rigging.

So, in a manner beyond all praise, ended this

cruise of the "Townshend," a glorious incitement and example to all the other Packets on the Falmouth Station.

Great as was the satisfaction at Lombard Street when Captain Cock's story became known, there was yet an admixture of less pleasurable feeling. It was already perfectly clear that the Packets were in greater danger than at any previous time, unless, indeed, in the first American war. Already two had been captured by squadrons of frigates, one by the famous Commodore Rogers, the other by the almost equally well-known Captain D. Porter, each of whom commanded a force against which it would have been madness to resist. And now two accounts were to hand of fights with Privateers; and in both, though the resistance of the Post-Office commanders was even desperately gallant, the force of the enemy had proved irresistible. However, where the spirit of the officers and men was so high, My Lords could not doubt that they would give a good account of themselves; and just at this time an incident occurred which, though not very important in itself, served to show that audacity was sometimes the safest of all policies.

The "Lady Mary Pelham," Captain Stevens, was on her voyage to Malta, when at daylight on October 15th a large brig was seen standing across the bows of the Packet. She was evidently a Privateer, and a powerful one. Captain Stevens felt no doubt that if it came to a fight his vessel would be over-matched,

and he resolved accordingly to play the game of bluff, relying, as he said "on the 'Pelham's' good looks." The "Lady Mary Pelham," though her force was no greater than that of any other Packet, had in a remarkable degree the appearance of an eighteen-gun brig, and this resemblance was increased by Captain Stevens' conduct. For instead of manifesting any desire to escape, he showed by all his actions the greatest readiness for a fight, and hauling up, waited to receive his enemy. The Privateer came on in doubt, and Captain Stevens, playing his part boldly, fired a gun across her bows as soon as she came within range, and ordered her to heave to. On this the enemy, convinced that she had encountered a British cruiser, hoisted English colours, and made all sail to escape. Captain Stevens desired nothing more than to let her go, and resumed his course without any effort to stop her. The very celerity with which he did this aroused suspicion on board the strange vessel, which hoisted French colours and fired several guns, whereupon Captain Stevens, with unabated impudence, hauled up and waited for her again. This second demonstration of readiness for action convinced the stranger, which went her ways and troubled the "Lady Mary Pelham" no more.

In the following month an important service was rendered to the colony of Demerara by Captain Kirkness, commanding the Packet "Queen Charlotte," a service recalling in some degree the patriotic

conduct of Captain Dyneley at Dominica six years before.

The "Queen Charlotte" was lying in Georgetown harbour in the month of November, waiting for her mails, and Captain Kirkness from the deck of his ship could see hanging about the entrance to the port a suspicious-looking vessel. He made his observations quietly, and, having satisfied himself about the matter, took his boat, went on shore, and demanding an audience of the governor, General Carmichael, informed him that an American Privateer was cruising outside the harbour.

It so happened that General Carmichael had that day received letters from Berbice, informing him, on the authority of a captured merchant captain, that the "Rattlesnake," a Privateer which had made herself extremely notorious since the outbreak of the war, was on her way to Demerara with the design of intercepting the Cork fleet, which was expected to arrive in Georgetown from day to day. He had, moreover, information of another powerful Privateer, which, a day or two before, had engaged a well-armed merchant vessel for three hours, and which had since captured several smaller craft within sight of the shore. Both these vessels were known to be heavily armed and manned. The "Rattlesnake" carried sixteen 9-pounder carronades, two long nines, and her "Long Tom," mounted on a traverse, was no less than a 42-pounder. If her consort carried an equal weight of metal, the two,

acting together, could easily scatter the Cork fleet.

General Carmichael stated these facts to Captain Kirkness, and appealed to him to do whatever might be in his power to hold the Privateers in check, and so provide for the safe arrival of the expected fleet, there being at the time no British ship of war at his disposal. Captain Kirkness undertook the adventure willingly. There was, indeed, no other course, unless he was prepared to stand by idly while the Privateers swooped down and worked their will on the coming merchantmen. He received on board a large party of troops, with some volunteers from the militia; and aided, as Captain Stevens had been, by his Packet's "good looks," sallied out to meet the fleet.

The two Privateers were sighted as soon as the "Queen Charlotte" left the harbour; but by some curious hesitation, a most unusual quality in Americans, they did not attack, but hung on the wake of the Packet, as if believing her too strong for them, until she met the fleet; and then, recognizing that their opportunity was lost, they bore away on another tack, and were not seen again.

The credit due to Captain Kirkness for this exploit is not lessened by the fact that the enemy hung back from action, for this was a stroke of luck on which he could not have calculated. He risked a fight against overwhelming odds—for the

“Rattlesnake” alone could have blown the “Queen Charlotte” out of the water—and by his courage and audacity saved the merchants of this country and of Demerara from very serious losses, which nothing but his interposition could possibly have averted.

Time has dealt hardly with the records of the Falmouth Service, and the historian, anxious to do justice to the memory of every officer whose conduct was distinguished, searches in vain among the brown and dusty papers for full reports of many a stubborn fight. Eighty years of neglect have broken frequent gaps in what might have been a continuous story. As a rule the Post-Office actions were not reported either in the Gazettes or in the public press; and thus it happens that when the original letters are not forthcoming, the details of the whole story are irretrievably lost.

Such is the case with Captain Hartney's fight in the “Montagu” on February 1st, 1813. Captain Hartney had on board no less than £16,000 in bullion, a fact of which the Privateer which attacked him may have got wind. At any rate she fought with great obstinacy. The battle raged for three hours within pistol-shot, till at last the Americans sheered off, in the very nick of time, for the Falmouth men had fired away the whole of their grape, canister, and double-headed shot, and had only a few round shot left. So ended triumphantly what was evidently a gallant fight, about which

we would gladly know more than the scanty record tells.

In June the "Duke of Montrose," Captain Blewitt, was in mid-Atlantic, outward bound for Halifax, when, on the 9th of that month, she encountered an American Privateer of superior force. The crew of the "Duke of Montrose" were in a high state of training, having succeeded, about five months previously, in beating off the assault of a similar craft, which they repulsed after an action of six hours, never having allowed her to close with them during the whole of that long period. The confidence in themselves and in their officers which they won on that occasion stood them in good stead now; and, as they watched the onset of their powerful adversary, every man was cool and confident of success.

At noon the schooner was closing fast on the Packet, and at 12.30 P.M. she fired three guns. Captain Blewitt, thinking that the enemy would shortly close, ordered the gunners to reserve their fire until it could be delivered with more effect; but the Privateer had no intention of coming to meet the broadside at short range, and Captain Blewitt, seeing that she hung back, bore up, gave her his stern guns, and then, hauling across the schooner's bows, raked her with his starboard guns, and wore again with the intention of closing, pouring in the fire of his larboard guns as they came to bear. Thus, while the "Duke of Montrose"

had received only a single broadside, every gun that she carried had been fired into the Privateer at short range, and the execution must have been deadly. At 1.45 P.M. the schooner ran down and endeavoured to grapple the Packet, but the fire of the Cornish gunners was too well directed, and she sheered off again to a safer distance. Half-an-hour later she ceased firing and tacked to the eastward, whereupon Captain Blewitt tacked to the westward and resumed his voyage in the best of spirits.

Unhappily his elation was short-lived, for on the following morning Commodore Rogers in the United States frigate "President" passed that way. Resistance against such a force as the "President" possessed was out of the question. The mails were sunk, and the "Duke of Montrose" surrendered.

Commodore Rogers treated his prisoners with very honourable forbearance and liberality. He would not permit them to be plundered of the least trifle, and informed Captain Blewitt that he proposed to send him, with all his crew and passengers, back to England in their own ship, on condition that they would enter into a contract to send the Packet back to America with an equal number of American prisoners in England. This agreement, drawn up in the most binding terms, was subscribed "upon our sacred honour" by all the persons concerned; and the "Duke of Montrose," having on board a single American officer, arrived

at Falmouth towards the end of June. It then appeared that in the view of the British Government the agreement was contrary to law; and as it had been notified to the American Government that exchanges of prisoners on the high seas would not be recognized as valid, the whole transaction was declared void; the "Duke of Montrose" was restored to the Post-Office, the officers and crew were told that they might resume their duties without being exchanged, and the American officer was sent back to his own country empty-handed.

The story is not a pleasant one; and while the action of the Government may have been strictly warranted by the notification made to the United States, yet the transaction smacks overmuch of the methods of a sharp attorney, and one cannot but regret that the generous confidence of Commodore Rogers was not met in the same spirit.

It is impossible to describe, even with the fulness of the official records, every action which took place during this war; and yet where all were gallant there is some injustice in making a selection. One would willingly linger over the story of how Captain Elphinstone in the "Manchester" fought the "York Town" through a whole day, and did not surrender till his last round of ammunition had been fired; of how Captain White in the "Princess Charlotte" beat off an unknown American vessel in three separate actions extending over four days, during the whole of which time the enemy kept in

company; or of Captain Caddy's plucky conduct when the "Governor Tompkins," a Privateer of ten long 9-pounders, a long 24-pounder on a traverse, and ninety-nine men, captured his Packet, the "Mary Anne," after a fight in which the latter was reduced to a mere wreck.

These fine stories must be summarized; but one fight which occurred about this time takes rank among the greater actions of the Falmouth Service, and deserves a fuller description.

The "Express," Captain John Quick, sailed from Rio de Janeiro on March 23rd, 1813, having on board, in addition to the mails and despatches, about £20,000 in specie. There seems to have been something in the smell of specie which attracted Privateers, for the "Express," which had made her outward voyage without sighting any suspicious vessel, encountered near the Cape Verde Islands the "Anaconda," an American Privateer, carrying sixteen long 9-pounders, and a hundred and twenty men. This formidable adversary chased the "Express," and, after a long pursuit, brought her to action.

Unfortunately no account has been preserved of the details of the fight. We are told that it lasted for an hour at close quarters, and it is clear that the cannonade during that hour must have been very fierce, for the record says that "the Packet's sails were cut in pieces fore and aft, the main and foremast very badly wounded, the main-topmast shot away, the fore-topsail yard shot away, the foreyard

badly wounded, the main and forestay shot away, the main and fore-rigging very badly cut, the braces fore and aft and the topsail-sheets shot away, all the rigging fore and aft in a most shattered condition, four of the starboard guns dismantled (the 'Express' carried only eight), several shot between wind and water, three feet and a half of water in the hold, and the Packet actually sinking." To such a condition had Captain Quick's ship been reduced before he judged it consistent with his honour to surrender. And this in face of a Post-Office regulation, never yet repealed, which instructed him that "the idea of resistance, except against Privateers of the smallest class, must be abandoned." So far from abandoning resistance, this gallant captain fought his ship till she was sinking under him, and would certainly have gone down carrying her brave defenders with her had the surrender been delayed a few minutes longer.

Such is the spirit in which the Falmouth men fought their losing battles, earning glory if they could not reach success.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMERICAN WAR.

THE number of Packets stationed at Falmouth was not as large as to enable My Lords, or their Secretary, Mr. Freeling, to contemplate the ravages of the American Privateers without dismay. The mere fact that so many Packets were either in the hands of the enemy or undergoing repairs which must necessarily be lengthy, was enough to create much embarrassment in the present, while the outlook for the immediate future was gloomy and depressing. The difficulties were exasperated by the total loss of the "Hinchinbrooke" in a hurricane in the West Indies, while, as if to show that Fortune had turned her back on the Post-Office, the news of this disaster was quickly followed by the report that the "Lady Emily" had been wrecked on a reef of rocks near Bermuda.

Even these misfortunes did not exhaust the run of ill-luck. A violent outbreak of plague occurred at Malta. Every Packet arriving from the Mediterranean must perform quarantine at Sandgate Creek

on the Kentish coast, and the delay and inconvenience thus caused proved a well-nigh intolerable addition to the perplexities of the administrators at Lombard Street.

The West India merchants, moreover, who had held their peace of recent years, as well they might, seeing with what courage and devotion their interests were guarded, were once more complaining of the loss of mails, and demanded that every Packet should have twenty guns and sixty men. My Lords, however, in the gallantry of their officers and men, were fortified with arguments which they had not possessed in former discussions with these critics. Twenty guns, they pointed out, would not have saved the "Duke of Montrose" from Commodore Rogers, and though Captain Cock in the "Townshend" had achieved so much with his scanty armament that it was difficult to say what he might not have done with an increased force, yet My Lords claimed, not unjustly, that such a case was too far removed from ordinary experience to serve as the basis of an argument.

Yet the prayer of the merchants was not altogether set aside; and when in July the brig "Morgiana" was tendered for service as a temporary Packet, Mr. Freeling noted that, being of 260 tons, considerably larger than any other vessel on the station, she ought to carry forty men and sixteen guns, and expressed the hope that this larger armament would restore some confidence in the city. The sequel is

now to be related. It is curious to notice how some malignant influence mocked at all these efforts to arm the Packets more heavily, and rendered them all in turn equally vain.

For some unexplained reason the "Morgiana" was not provided on her first voyage with the sixteen guns which Mr. Freeling had declared to be proper to her size; but was armed with eight 9-pounders, which were perhaps all that could be procured in the short space of time available for fitting her out. She received, however, the complement of men which the Secretary had indicated; and thus equipped, she sailed from Falmouth at the end of August, bound for Surinam, under the command of Captain James Cunninghame, who had been Lord St. Vincent's sailing master in the action of February 14th, 1797. Early in the morning of September 26th, the "Morgiana" being then off the coast of Surinam, a large hermaphrodite brig hove in sight, which, on perceiving the "Morgiana," at once crowded all sail in chase. The wind was very light, and at seven o'clock it was observed that the stranger vessel had got out her sweeps, and was gaining fast on the Packet.

About 10 A.M. the sea breeze made partially, and the Privateer, receiving it first, was enabled to decrease the distance between the two vessels so materially as to render it shortly obvious that there would be no escape by sailing. At half-past twelve Captain Cunninghame gave orders to pipe

to dinner, conceiving that by the time his crew had dined, the enemy would be within range of shot. What followed should be told in his own vivid words:—

“In this interval I cautiously inspected every article of preparation we had made, and confess that I felt a great satisfaction, and no small share of confidence at the arrangements. At 1.30 P.M. the hands were turned up, and, calling them aft, I addressed them to the following effect: ‘That they had witnessed my endeavours to elude engaging an enemy who to all appearance was much superior to ourselves, but that the chances of action, if supported with steadiness and courage, might not only give us an opportunity to beat him off, but also to capture; that they were aware that, besides my holding a commission to command the Packet, I had passed the great proportion of my life as an officer in His Majesty’s Naval Service; that I had been frequently engaged with the enemy, consequently a battle was no new thing to me; and that, independent of our characters as Englishmen, we were bound by our duty to the service now employed on to defend the mails with all possible obstinacy; that it was my own determination not to give the ship away till I was no longer able to defend her, and hinted that should any of them feel unwilling to support me in my resolution, they had my full liberty to go below, and that I would endeavour to fight the ship with the braver part of the crew who would remain to second me.’

“With much pleasure I have to acknowledge that one sentiment of determination pervaded all; all were unanimously anxious to engage, and showed a disposition to cheer, which I checked. At 2 P.M., the enemy being within range of shot, I took in the studding sails, ordered the jolly boat to be cut adrift, and opened a fire on him from our stern guns, which evidently disconcerted him, the first shot having carried away some of his standing rigging. He then yawed, and gave us his whole broadside, which did no other injury than a shot

or two through the topgallant sails. We continued to play the stern guns on him, and he to give us an occasional charge from his foremost guns, when he could get them to bear without losing ground ; but finding himself exposed to a raking fire, which he stood well, he endeavoured to gain our starboard quarter, and his superior sailing soon placed him in a situation in which our after guns could be used with effect. Anxious to profit by this event, and with the hope that our broadside would deter him from closing with us altogether, we gave him the fire from our starboard guns, then bore up till the stern guns could again act ; but after five or six discharges from them I had the mortification to see that the ringbolts had drawn out from both sides the stern, and these guns, which had as yet been our principal defence, rendered of no more use in that point. The disposition of the enemy was now evidently directed to boarding us on the larboard quarter, and he accordingly ranged up with that intent ; but our fire was too heavy to be despised. He therefore gave up the idea of boarding, and, manning his guns, returned our broadsides with vigour.

“The action was now something hot, and was supported by both sides with an equal degree of spirit for about an hour and twenty minutes, both vessels running before the wind, within pistol distance of each other, and at times not more than a few fathoms apart.

“The tops of the Privateer were filled with men armed with blunderbusses and muskets who gave us great annoyance, and his fire of grape was sharp and galling, wounding several of our men. In this part of the action I found that a grape shot had grazed my left leg, and stuck in the opposite side of the ship. It was not, however, of very serious consequence, and, tying it up with a handkerchief, I was enabled to resume my station. A short time after a musket ball struck my left wrist, which made but a slight wound, and at the same instant I saw the sailmaker, who was stationed at the wheel, fall, he having received a mortal wound from a charge of grape.

“In consequence of the helm being left the ship took a

sheer, by which the sides of the two vessels came into contact, and the enemy, exasperated at finding himself so long disappointed of his prize by such a handful of men, and with a hope of ending the contest, took this opportunity of heaving his boarders into us. I ran to the wheel, and put the helm apart, which caused us to separate, and his people, many of whom had established themselves in the main rigging, with some on the poop, now thought of nothing but securing a retreat, which we endeavoured to cut off. We pressed them warmly—some gained their vessel, others jumped overboard to escape our pikes; and one man, who had reached the top of our boarding netting, with whom I had been personally engaged, now begged for quarter, which of course I granted. In this conflict I received a severe cutlass wound on the head from the man alluded to above, who in a state of desperation from his pistol aim having missed, hove his cutlass at me with an extraordinary violence which levelled me with the deck, from which position I prepared to fire at him when he sued for mercy and obtained it.

“Our firing again commenced, but finding the strength of the enemy much too powerful for us, and with some apprehension of defeat should he still attempt to carry us by boarding, I took the first opportunity of tearing up my private signal sheet, and hove it overboard together with my instructions, and gave the master fresh injunctions respecting the destruction of the mail in case of necessity.

“Our sails and rigging being now rendered nearly useless, and the ship unmanageable, the enemy was enabled to pursue his resolve to carry us by heaving the bulk of his crew on board, and accordingly closed with us on the larboard bow, which I found it impossible to prevent. With an anxious desire to make every practicable resistance, I was in the act of running forward to the threatened part of the ship when I was struck by a musket ball in the upper part of the right thigh, by which the bone was shattered, and which brought me once more to the deck. In this state, with a third part of my crew either killed or wounded, and those my best men, I consequently gave up all hope of further success in a

contest so very unequally maintained; and waving to the master to sink the mail, felt a secret relief when I saw that object accomplished. At the same time one of the people asked me if he should haul down the ensign, to which I reluctantly assented. The crew of the Privateer had gained complete possession of the fore-castle and fore-rigging, and the remainder of the 'Morgiana's' men fled for shelter. Further resistance was now out of the question, for more than seventy men had gained a footing in the Packet, the two vessels lying yard-locked with each other. I was much weakened with the loss of blood, which was flowing fast from four wounds, but had strength to intimate to the first that approached me that 'we had struck,' but this did not appear to satisfy the fury of a few, who rushed at me with uplifted cutlasses, evidently to despatch me altogether, had it not been for the man to whom I had given quarter. He advanced to check their rage, begging them to spare my life for having given him his when I could easily have taken it, and to his timely interference I am certainly indebted for my existence. . . . I was now carried below to have my wounds staunched and examined, when I felt extreme grief to see so many in the same state. I requested the surgeon to give me his candid opinion of my thigh, when I was informed that he feared the wound would be of mortal consequence. I then asked to be put into my cot, and carried to the upper cabin, which was done, and from thence I exultingly surveyed the shattered state of both vessels. Scarce a sail was left to the yards, every standing or running rope either wounded or carried away, the sides and spars studded with shot, and everything a wreck; and I learned from the prize-master that His Majesty's Packet, armed with eight 9-lb. carronades, and manned with only thirty-nine persons altogether, which had only been one month in commission, had been thus contending for two hours with an enemy carrying sixteen long carriage guns (chiefly 12-pounders), a powerful train of small-arms, and a crew of one hundred and thirty-six picked seamen. . . .

"The captain of the Privateer confessed that we had fought him bravely, nay, desperately, and added (though with no

idea of complimenting me) that I had fought him too long with so weak a crew."

The Privateer was the "Saratoga" of New York, Captain Thomas Adderton. That gentleman, in his letter to the owners (published in a New York paper of October 23rd, 1813), assigned to the "Morgiana" eighteen guns, presuming perhaps on the fact that, as was probably the case, she was pierced for that number of cannon. He did not, however, attempt to conceal the desperate character of the resistance which he encountered. "The 'Saratoga,'" says the letter, "as well as her prize were made almost wrecks—stays, shrouds, etc., almost all cut away, and more than a hundred shot-holes in our mainsail, many in our masts, spars, hull, etc. . . . They fought desperately, and even beyond what prudence would dictate." From other sources it appears that eighteen were killed or wounded on the Privateer.

The "Morgiana" was conveyed to Newport, Rhode Island, where Captain Cunninghame was landed on October 19th. From a letter written by him in the following March it appears that his wounds still confined him to bed, and that his recovery was even then uncertain. He did, however, eventually recover; and was not without friends who could alleviate his sufferings; for he states that he received much kindness from a Mr. Baring, nephew of Sir Francis Baring, as well as from other persons in Newport.

In August, 1814, he was able to appear before

a Court of Inquiry held at Falmouth to investigate the circumstances connected with the loss of the "Morgiana." The court found, "That the conduct of Captain Cunninghame on this occasion was that of a most brave and experienced officer, . . . and do therefore most strongly recommend him to their Lordships as highly deserving of their attention." This recommendation was not neglected; though indeed Captain Cunninghame would have obtained a permanent appointment in the Falmouth Service even if the approval of the Court of Inquiry had been less strongly expressed. Mr. Freeling needed no prompting when it was a question of rewarding bravery, or of securing gallant officers for the service of the Department.

The "Morgiana" had three men killed and nine wounded; a heavy loss out of a crew of thirty-nine men. That loss was, however, exceeded in the next action, which indeed presents a heavier list of casualties than any other recounted in these pages. The fighting was not perhaps more desperate; but it would be an ungracious task to measure against each other the conduct of the crews of the "Townshend," the "Morgiana," and the "Montagu."

This action, fought by the "Montagu" in company with the "Lady Mary Pelham," was one attended with circumstances which roused an extraordinary degree of heated feeling not only in Falmouth, but far beyond; and which involved the Post-Office in a controversy more troublesome and difficult than

any other arising out of the Packet Service within the period dealt with in this work.

The "Lady Mary Pelham" Packet was under orders to sail for Brazil, when her commander, Captain Stevens, received the news of his promotion to the Holyhead station. He was naturally anxious to take up his new appointment as soon as possible; and as the voyage on which his ship was ordered would occupy five months, he cast about for some person who would be willing to act as his substitute. The proper person to select would have been the master, Mr. Carter, an excellent officer, who served as acting first lieutenant of the "Thunderer" at Trafalgar, and had been present in nearly every important engagement of the war. A better choice could not have been made; but Mr. Carter had only recently entered the Packet Service, and Captain Stevens, seized with an unaccountable scruple, declined to entrust his property to an officer of whom he knew so little, save by repute.

It was the practice of the Post-Office to defer as much as possible to the wishes of the commanders on the rare occasions when it was necessary to choose a substitute, and Mr. Saverland, the agent, felt that he could not urge that Mr. Carter should be appointed in opposition to the captain's wish, especially as the latter had selected a person whom he preferred. This person, to whom the command of a Packet on an Atlantic voyage in time of war was to be entrusted, was not even a trained seaman.

He was a retired lawyer, living at Falmouth, who occupied his leisure a good deal in yachting.

Mr. Saverland demurred to this proposal. It was, however, six o'clock in the evening when the interview took place, and the "Lady Mary Pelham" was to sail on the following morning. There was not time to make any other arrangements; and Mr. Saverland, recollecting that at least the master of the vessel was a brave and experienced officer, gave way and signed the appointment—a piece of complaisance which he long regretted.

The "Lady Mary Pelham" thus sailed from Falmouth on October 13th under the command of a retired lawyer, whose knowledge of the sea had been entirely gained upon a yacht. Six days later the "Montagu" sailed from Falmouth upon the same voyage, commanded by Captain John Arthur Norway, R.N.

Of the crew of the "Montagu," the reader has already heard. Their gallant conduct, earlier in the year, under Captain Hartney had gained them reputation. Their present commander was making his first voyage in the service of the Post-Office; and it will not be irrelevant to state very briefly what his career had been.

Captain Norway entered the navy as midshipman in 1785. In January, 1793, when Captain Edward Pellew (afterwards Sir Edward, and finally Lord Exmouth) was appointed to the "Nympe" frigate, Norway joined as mate, and was promoted to

lieutenant for gallantry in the well-known action with the "Cléopâtre" frigate, in which he was wounded. He served with Pellew in all his actions until the year 1799, and was second lieutenant of the "Indefatigable" on that January night in 1797, when, in company with the "Amazon," she fell in with the "Droits de l'Homme," the last remnant of Hoche's scattered expedition, labouring homeward full of troops. The circumstances of the action which ensued will hardly be forgotten by any one who has read the story in James' work; and for his conduct in that most memorable fight, Norway was appointed first lieutenant of his own ship. In this capacity he served until 1798, when he was invalided home, but was shortly afterwards appointed to command a cutter on the Irish station. And when war broke out afresh he obtained a command at Portsmouth. He had been made commander in 1802, and in 1806, in consequence of broken health, was placed on half pay. On recovering he found his applications for employment disregarded, in common with those of many other good officers who lacked interest; and after having spent several years fruitlessly in importuning the Admiralty he resolved to enter the Packet Service, which he accordingly did, with the advantage of testimonials of the highest kind.

The "Montagu" made a better passage than the "Pelham," and at 1.30 P.M. on November 1st she landed her mails at Funchal. Captain Norway

did not anchor, but stood off and on, waiting for the mails to be brought on board. Early in the evening he saw the "Lady Mary Pelham" to windward, and made the night signal, but received no answer. Shortly before 2 A.M. a strange schooner hove in sight. The crew were called to quarters; and at 5 A.M. the schooner ran down alongside the "Montagu," poured in her broadside, received one in return, and sheered off without much damage on either side.

The officers of the "Lady Mary Pelham" lying to under the land heard the firing, which appeared to them to be coming off shore, but at daybreak they sighted the "Montagu," whereupon Mr. Carter, the master, boarded her, and learned what had occurred. The schooner, which was evidently a Privateer, lay to all day in sight of the land, obviously waiting for the Packets, and it was apparent to everyone that there was going to be a fight.

Both Packets received their mails between 7 and 8 in the evening, and set sail in company without delay. Nothing was seen of the schooner during the night, but on the following morning, November 2nd, she appeared in chase, though at some distance. The crew of the "Montagu" exercised their great guns, and both Packets were cleared for action.

The wind was moderate, blowing from the east or north-east; and at 2 P.M. the Privateer was coming up fast astern under studding sails. Captain

Norway, having ordered the "Lady Mary Pelham" to take up a position ahead of the "Montagu" on the starboard bow, and within hail, hoisted his colours, and the crew of both Packets gave three cheers.

At 2.50 P.M. the "Montagu" opened fire with her stern chaser (a long 9-pounder), to which the Privateer replied with her bow guns. This cannonade caused little damage on either side; and the enemy, continuing to come up quickly with the "Montagu," was upon her starboard quarter shortly after 3 o'clock.

A close engagement ensued within half pistol-shot distance, which was vigorously supported on both sides. It had lasted only a short time when the jib-boom of the Privateer ran into the "Montagu's" main rigging, and a party of twenty boarders came swarming out along it, dropping from it on the deck of the Packet. A desperate struggle followed, and the schooner, having brought an 18-pounder swivel to bear, sent repeated charges of grape and chain-shot among the Cornishmen. A great number of the latter were hit. Captain Norway was wounded severely in the leg, but refused to go below, though the enemy were by this time retreating, and the Packetsmen drove them back upon the main-boom, along which they had come. At this moment by some wrench of the vessels the main-boom was unshipped, and ten of the retreating Americans fell into the sea. The rest were either

killed or piked overboard. None of them regained their own ship.

The affair lasted only a few minutes. Just before it ended a chain-shot struck Captain Norway in the body, cutting him almost in two. The surgeon, Mr. Ure, who saw the captain stagger, ran up to catch him, but as he held his commander in his arms his own head was shattered by a round shot, and the two men fell to the deck together. Two seamen were killed in this sharp encounter, and four wounded, so that the force of the "Montagu" was now reduced to twenty-four men and boys, while the Americans were still nearly a hundred.

When the captain fell the command devolved on Mr. Watkins, the master. The Privateer probably perceived that her true tactics were to remain at close quarters with one of her antagonists, in which her great superiority in men gave her an enormous advantage, and at all hazards to avoid placing herself in a position in which both could manœuvre round her. Up to this moment, moreover, the "Lady Mary Pelham" had taken no part in the fight. Had she, too, closed with the Privateer the case of the Americans would have been desperate; and they, well knowing this, resolved to make a final effort to carry the "Montagu" before her consort had plucked up courage to assist.

Accordingly, the Privateer sheered over on the larboard quarter of the "Montagu," and prepared to board in overwhelming numbers. The musketry

fire from her tops was very galling, and to this the "Montagu" could make hardly any effectual reply, having scarcely more men left than were needed to work the guns. Those few were dropping fast. Mr. Watkin's left hand was shattered by a ball, and almost immediately afterwards he was shot through the body, and carried below incapable of giving any further orders. The mate and the carpenter were both severely wounded, and the gunner, Mr. Hensell, was called up from below to take the command, and do what he could with the ship. The colours were shot away, but were immediately re-hoisted. The pendant remained flying throughout the action.

When the gunner came on deck, seeing nearly half the crew killed or disabled, and the Americans preparing to board in great numbers, he judged it prudent to sink the mail. This was scarcely done before the enemy were upon them once more, and the handful of men remaining were summoned to repulse them. There was a second desperate scuffle. Four only of the enemy set foot on the deck of the "Montagu." One was killed as he reached it. Another was recognized as a Packetsman who had deserted at New York, and for such as he there was no quarter. The other two, of whom one was the first lieutenant of the Privateer, were made prisoners and sent below.

In this second fight the cook was mortally wounded, and the total number of casualties brought

up to eighteen—a heavy loss out of a complement of thirty-two.

It is now necessary to turn to the “Lady Mary Pelham,” which vessel had, it will be remembered, been ordered by Captain Norway to take up her station ahead of the “Montagu,” on the starboard bow. From this position an easy manœuvre would have laid her also alongside the Privateer.

At this crisis, however, the incompetence of her lawyer commander began to exhibit itself. His orders betrayed so absolute an ignorance of the management of a ship in action that after some precious minutes had been wasted Mr. Carter and Mr. Pocock, the master and the mate, jointly represented to him the propriety of deputing to the former the conduct of the fight. They understood that he had done so; but at the moment when the seamanship of Mr. Carter was about to repair the follies of the commander, the helm was suddenly shifted, and the “Lady Mary Pelham” sheered away from the fight.

Mr. Carter attributed this alteration of the ship's course to cowardice on the part of the steersman; and knowing only one punishment for such an action in presence of the enemy, he ran towards him, drawing a pistol as he did so, when the man cried out, “Don't kill me, sir, it was the captain's order.” The proper position of the Packet could not be regained until all the fighting which has been described had occurred. The “Lady Mary

Pelham" then, however, intervened, and maintained a cannonade for some time. She was not engaged close alongside; she sustained very slight damages; her captain received a ball through his thigh, and one seaman was slightly hurt. There were no other casualties.

The Privateer sheered off soon after four o'clock. She was evidently much damaged; and both the Packets chased her, but she outsailed them.

The official papers from which the foregoing account is taken are very bulky. They contain many positive declarations of irreconcilable facts, with accusations and insinuations, which, as Mr. Freeling said in deprecating their publication, would inevitably lead to one or more duels if they should become known. The present writer has desired to record only those facts which are not open to dispute, and he believes that the story as told above is demonstrably true.

The lawyer, whom an unkind destiny had placed temporarily in a position for which he was utterly unfit, made many charges against most of the persons concerned in this affair. His conduct was emphatically condemned by his own officers, and needs no further comment.

Of Captain Norway, Mr. Freeling, who was certainly better qualified than any other person to form an impartial opinion, wrote in the following terms to the Postmaster General on receiving news of the action: "Your Lordship's Service, distinguished

as it is, cannot boast a more gallant officer, a better seaman, or a more honourable man." Two years later, when the commander of the "Lady Mary Pelham" thought fit to have his case brought up in Parliament, and a member speaking in his interest had used some words depreciating Captain Norway's seamanship, Mr. Freeling observed: "The reputation of Captain Norway stands too high to be assailed by anything which the partizans of Mr.— can say. In conduct and in character he was alike irreproachable." About the same time a merchant who had been in the Canary Islands at the time when the Privateer put in there to refit after the action, and had availed himself of opportunities of hearing the story from the American officers, wrote to Mr. Freeling a letter which is still extant, and which remarkably confirms the account of the affair which has just been given.

The Privateer was the "Globe" of Baltimore, Captain Moon. The total loss was not ascertained, but it was known that out of thirty-nine men engaged in the two boarding assaults on the "Montagu" not one had escaped. The crew of the "Montagu" had, therefore, disposed of considerably more than man for man of their number.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AMERICAN WAR.

IT is now necessary to revert briefly to the state of the postal communications with northern Europe, which, when the subject was last mentioned in the ninth chapter of this work, were stated to depend on the chances of a system of smuggling organized from the newly acquired island of Heligoland. Within two years from that time (1807) the contraband trade had increased along the whole coast of the North Sea and the Baltic in an astonishing degree. Bourrienne, who was still at Hamburg, and who did not love the continental system, on which his master relied for striking his "mortal blow" at England, remarks with a half-sympathetic amusement how very little difference that system made in postal and commercial arrangements when once the smugglers had become expert. "The continental system," he observes, "had made the smuggler's trade a necessity, so that a great part of the population depended on it for subsistence." Moreover, not goods alone, but news also circulated pretty freely

from England in 1809, and correspondence addressed to merchants in the German towns was posted by agents despatched from Heligoland to Embden, Knipphausen, Varel, and other towns.

In truth, the great barricade proved little better than a trellis, penetrable anywhere by those who possessed the necessary courage and audacity. A good supply of those qualities was of course needed, for the trade was risky; and yet the disposition of the country people, which was strongly hostile to the French Customs officers, did much to rob it of its dangers. So determined were the people to obtain the English goods that they did not hesitate to take arms against the over-zealous Customs agents; and at Brinksham, in July, 1809, when the officers had seized no less than eighteen wagons loaded with English goods, the peasantry rose in force, recaptured the wagons, and escorted the goods to their destination.

To keep apart, on the one hand, a people so resolute to trade, and, on the other, a nation whose prosperity, if not its existence, depended on maintaining its commercial supremacy, something more was needed than a paper decree and a staff of Customs officers. "The trade with Oldenburgh," writes Bourrienne, "was carried on as uninterruptedly as in time of peace. English letters and newspapers arrived on the continent, and those of the continent found their way into Great Britain, as if France and England had been united by ties of the firmest friendship."

Such was the testimony of the man who of all others was best qualified to appreciate the enterprise and skill with which the operations of the Post-Office were conducted in these troublous days. It may, no doubt, be true that the credit of this success is to be divided between the Post-Office and private persons; for the merchants, in their constant communications with the smugglers, doubtless entrusted to them a considerable number of letters which had not passed through the British Post-Office. When all deductions are made, however, one cannot fairly refuse to Mr. Freeling and his colleagues the praise due to success in a perilous and difficult undertaking.

Circumstances which had already turned the peaceful officials of the Post-Office into arbiters of battles, had now made them smugglers, controllers of a series of operations as wild, as dangerous, and as picturesque as any which have been conducted within the limits of history. They took up their new parts with a happy adaptability, and played them with a degree of skill and resource which must always be remembered as constituting one of the greatest achievements in the past history of the Post-Office. When to this success is added the credit of having evolved out of the chaos of disorder and misrule which existed at Falmouth when he entered on office, a Service which could boast of such triumphs as those which have been described in this book, one is inclined to credit

Mr. Freeling with capacities for administration which have not often been surpassed.

Only once after 1803 did any Packet surrender to the enemy without a resistance which was obviously the utmost that she could offer. In that single instance a captain of old service and of honourable record, both won by himself and inherited from his father, was cashiered for cowardice in the face of the enemy. Such incidents will happen occasionally in every body of men trained to war; and, even if it could be proved that the officer was rightly punished, there would be no occasion to make much of a solitary exception. The justice of his treatment was, however, very strongly questioned; and as all, or nearly all, the official papers which contain the evidence have been lost, the facts can never now be fully stated.

There was no other commander whose conduct was even doubtful, and as report followed report, each bringing the news of some fresh feat of gallantry against great odds, the satisfaction and pride of My Lords and Mr. Freeling mounted very high.

Early in November, 1813, the "Lapwing" sailed from Falmouth for Barbados, under command of Captain Furze. The "Lapwing" had been captured earlier in the year, and stripped of her guns. When she came to be refitted at Falmouth, it happened, unfortunately, that the store-keeper could not supply the long brass 9-pounders, "Post-Office guns," which

the Atlantic Packets used as chasers, and which had done them yeomen's service in many a hard fight. Captain Furze would have willingly given any other three guns in exchange for the "Post-Office guns" which he lacked. However, he could obtain only one long 6-pounder to serve as a chaser, and six 6-pounder carronades—a scanty weight of metal with which to run the gauntlet of the most heavily armed Privateers yet seen on the seas.

All went well until the voyage was nearly over; but on November 22nd, when the coast of Barbados was in sight, the "Lapwing" was chased by an American Privateer, the "Fox," which brought her to action towards evening about three miles from shore.

It was now that Captain Furze had reason to lament the want of his two brass guns, by the aid of which he felt confident that he could have crippled his enemy. At any rate, the lack of all effective means of attacking her rigging before she closed took away his only chance of success; for the result of an action alongside could not have been doubtful to the least experienced sailor. The "Fox," it is true, mounted only five guns, but three of these were long 12-pounders, and two were heavy carronades, while all five were mounted on circular platforms amidships, so that they could be directed with ease on any point, thus giving them a united power much greater than their weight. The

“Lapwing’s” guns, on the other hand, could be fired only through her ports, which meant that in a close fight, only three could be in action at one time. Moreover, the “Fox” carried a hundred and seven men, of whom no less than seventy were in her tops armed with muskets, and these marksmen kept up a constant fire throughout the action, doing great execution. The “Lapwing,” out of a crew of thirty-two men and boys, could spare but few from the handling of the ship and the service of the guns.

However, in a fight so close to port, there was always the chance that the sound of cannon might attract some friendly cruiser; and Captain Furze answered the summoning gun with a broadside. The American immediately ran down and closed. A desperate fight followed. After the cannonade had lasted some considerable time, the American captain seized a favourable opportunity, and hurled his boarders into the Packet. They were bravely met with pike and musket, and in the end repulsed with loss. A second time the stormers came swarming up the “Lapwing’s” nettings, and again they were driven back. But by this second success the small numbers of the Post-Office men were sensibly diminished, while the musketry fire from the enemy’s tops made itself severely felt. Four of Captain Furze’s men lay dead, eight more were in the hands of the surgeon, and others were falling fast. Mr. Henry Senior, an ensign in the 60th

Regiment, who was on board as a passenger, was shot through the thigh. A musket ball broke Captain Furze's arm, and he had barely gone below to have his hurt tended, when Mr. Hodge, the master, who had been left in command on deck, was brought down, shot through both thighs. The resistance had lasted three hours. Half the crew of the Packet were disabled, and, near as the coast of Barbados was, there appeared no sign of succour. Captain Furze reluctantly concluded that it was hopeless to prolong the struggle, and he ordered the mails to be sunk, and the colours to be struck.

Unfortunate as the result of this action was, Captain Furze received considerable credit for the gallant resistance he had made, and there can be no doubt that this credit was fully earned.

Very early in the new year the Falmouth Service sustained a heavy loss by the capture of the "Townshend," which had been so nobly defended by Captain Cock hardly more than a year before. She was on her way to Lisbon, when she fell in with the French frigate "La Clorinde," an ancient enemy of the Packets, which had certainly captured one at least before, and had not improbably been detached to cruise in their track, in the hope of intercepting despatches. That this was her object on the present occasion admitted of little doubt, for when "La Clorinde" overhauled the "Townshend," she concealed her nationality, though no resistance was offered, ran up Portuguese colours, and sent off a boat.

Some officers might have been deceived, but Captain Cock was too experienced to be entrapped by so artless a device. He had caused the mails to be brought on deck as soon as the chase began. The bags, heavily shotted, lay beside an open port-hole, and a sailor was told off to throw them overboard the moment the captain gave the signal. The boat drew nearer, and Captain Cock, while it was yet at a safe distance, hailed in Portuguese, which he spoke fluently. The halting accent of the answer told him he had no Portuguese to deal with. He raised his hand. The mails slid into the water; and before the angry Frenchman came on board, despatches and commercial letters were safely delivered at the bottom of the sea.

The disappointed tricksters revenged themselves by scuttling the "Townshend," and Captain Cock had the grief of seeing the ship, which he had fought so bravely, sunk ingloriously in mid-ocean. He and his crew were taken on board "La Clorinde," where for ten days they were allowed a good deal of freedom, and enjoyed an excellent opportunity of studying the internal discipline of a French ship of war. They were not favourably impressed with what they saw; and the near prospect of a French prison made them gloomy enough. It is easy, therefore, to imagine their feelings when on the tenth day, an English 38-gun frigate, the "Eurotas," commanded by Captain Phillimore, hove in sight.

Captain Cock was convinced from what he had observed on the French ship that however suitable she might be for capturing Packets, she was by no means a match for any English frigate of her own size and class, and he begged to be allowed to remain on deck to witness the action. This was not permitted. He and his brave crew were conducted down into the hold, where they remained listening with exultation to the roar of cannon and the din of musketry. For a long time they had no means of discovering which way fortune was inclining, until Captain Cock, wearied of pacing up and down, threw himself back against the mizzen mast, and felt it tremble. He listened attentively, and a moment later he heard the crash of its fall. He sprang up and placed his ear to the mainmast. In a very short time that also began "to beat, tremble, and shake," and ere long a second crash announced its fall. With what impatient eagerness the prisoners heard these evidences of their countrymen's success may be imagined. They could scarcely believe that "La Clorinde" was not captured, and every moment they hoped to be released. But to their intense disappointment the noise of battle died away, and no tidings reached them.

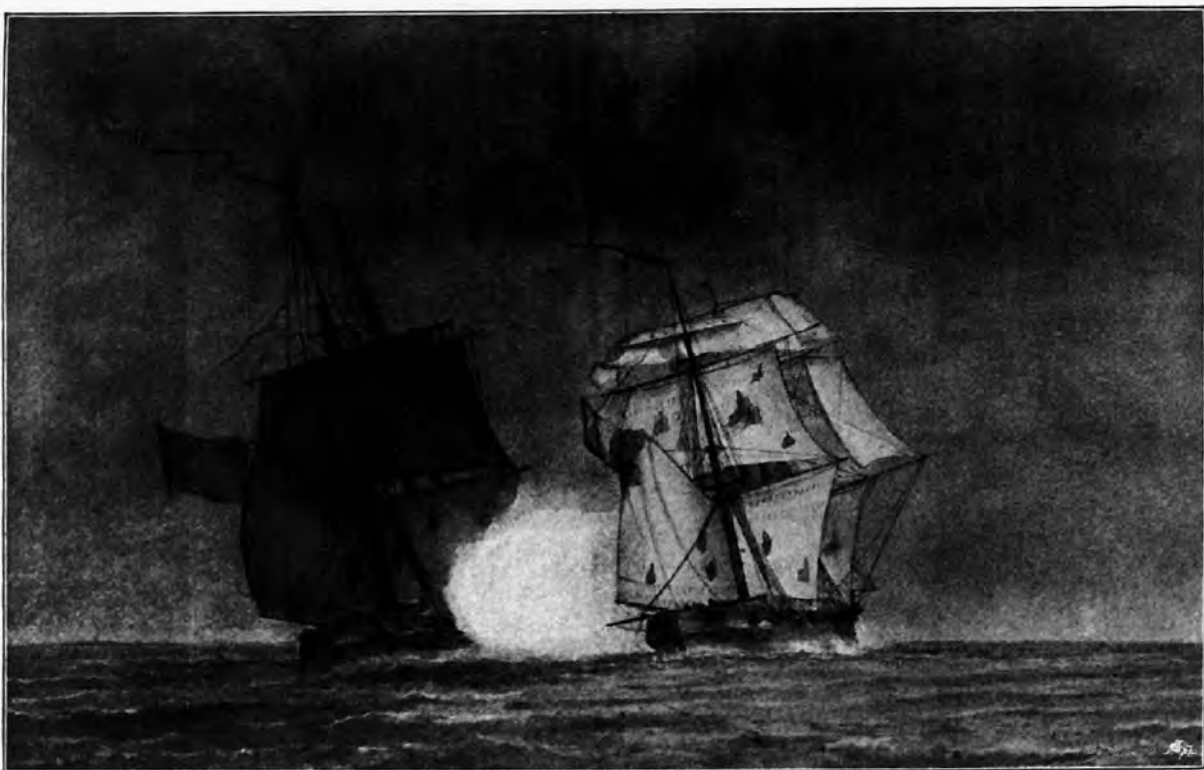
At last Captain Cock was summoned on deck. He found the ship had suffered terribly in the action, though her English antagonist could claim little advantage over her in this respect, being

likewise dismasted, and lying a mile or two away. Night had fallen. The "Eurotas" appeared in a blaze of light. Lanterns were hung all over her; blue lights were being burnt, and from time to time a rocket shot up into the sky. The French captain consulted Captain Cock as to the meaning of this illumination. Were the lanterns signals of distress? Did Captain Cock think the "Eurotas" was sinking, and, if so, could they offer any assistance? Captain Cock had formed a shrewd guess as to why Captain Phillimore wanted all this light, but he was discreet enough to hold his tongue, and professed an entire inability to divine what was going on. In the morning the mystery was cleared up; for the dawn revealed to the astonished Frenchmen their crippled foe of the previous evening coming up in the handsomest style at the rate of seven knots under jury masts, which her crew had worked throughout the night in rigging up, while another English cruiser, the "Dryad," attracted by the rockets, was standing down, and would evidently come into action before the "Eurotas," which during the night had drifted to a considerable distance. "La Clorinde," in her shattered state could make only two knots, and was incapable of defending herself adequately against a perfectly fresh antagonist. Captain Phillimore had thus the mortification of seeing the work which he had begun taken out of his hands, and all the great exertions of the night rendered fruitless.

Captain Cock, who by this fortunate turn of affairs regained his liberty, did not live to fight more battles for the Post-Office. Worn out by hardships, he died a few months later. Shortly before his death he received from the Prince Regent of Portugal, who understood better than his own government how to acknowledge faithful and devoted public service, a gold medal of honour and the military Order of the Sword; but Whitehall had no distinctions for officers of the Packet Service.

The circumstances of the action next to be narrated are very singular.

On the 12th March the "Duke of Marlborough," under the command of Captain John Bull in person, was off Cape Finisterre on her passage to Lisbon. At one o'clock in the afternoon a strange brig was seen from the masthead, laying to with her head to the eastward. At three o'clock this vessel hoisted her mainsail and bore down on the "Marlborough," which accordingly altered her course and made all sail to avoid an encounter. At the same time Captain Bull made the private signal, and kept it flying. The signal was not answered; and without further delay the crew of the "Marlborough" were called to quarters, the boarding nettings were got up, and stuffed with spare sails, hammocks, and mattresses; the topsail-sheets were stoppered; and a spare topsail-yard was slung across the stern for a boarding boom. At four o'clock the brig hoisted



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PRIMROSE—MARLBOROUGH : COMMENCEMENT.

a blue ensign, yawed, and fired two guns to leeward, and shortly afterwards hauled down the blue ensign, and hoisted another which Captain Bull and his officers believed to be American, but which they could not distinguish clearly. These details have an important bearing on the event.

Thereupon, since an action appeared to be inevitable, the "Marlborough's" private signal was hauled down, and her colours hoisted. It was then growing dark, and Captain Bull made the private night signal, consisting of two blue lights, one on each quarter. This signal also remained unanswered; and as he was in the act of making it, Captain Bull plainly saw in the gathering darkness a match put to a gun on the forecastle of the approaching vessel, which was then full in view right astern of the Packet.

By this time the round shot from the brig were going over the "Marlborough." Captain Bull cut away his boat so as to free the stern guns, and fired each of them twice. He then hoisted a lantern at the mizzenpeak, and waited for the enemy to come up. The strange vessel soon came up abreast of the Packet and poured in her starboard broadside with round and grape shot at half pistol-shot distance. The "Duke of Marlborough" was not slow in replying; and the action was continued hotly for an hour and a quarter, when the enemy bore down and attempted to board the "Duke of Marlborough" on the starboard quarter. On coming

up, however, his bow struck the boarding boom, which Captain Bull's forethought had provided, and compelled him to sheer off. The Falmouth men improved this advantage by firing their two brass guns and several muskets right into their enemy; and, as the two vessels were almost grazing each other at the time, they doubtless did, as they supposed, great execution.

The enemy thereupon hauled off to repair damages; and Captain Bull, examining the injury which his own ship had received, found that a 32-pound shot had passed between wind and water, that there were already three feet and a half of water in the hold, and that the leak was increasing fast. The carpenter was sent below to endeavour to stop it, and the pumps were being actively worked, when, at nine o'clock, the enemy ran down and renewed the action at close quarters. The fire of her heavy guns had by this time reduced the "Duke of Marlborough" to a mere wreck. The running and standing rigging was cut and torn in every direction; the Packet was almost unmanageable, and in a half-sinking state. Her lantern was twice shot away; but a fresh one was prepared, and for greater security lashed fast to the main-boom. No less than eleven of Captain Bull's men had been wounded; one of them had lost both arms, and several others were seriously hurt. Lieutenant Andrews, of the 60th Regiment, a passenger on his way to Lisbon, was killed after showing great



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PRIMROSE—MARLBOROUGH : CLOSE.

bravery throughout the action. Notwithstanding these losses, however, and the manifest superiority of the enemy, the Cornishmen were quite prepared to fight it out; and when, after another close contest of fifty minutes, resulting in no obvious advantage to either side, the enemy hailed them, asking, "What ship is that?" Captain Bull, not choosing to own his inferiority of force, replied, "His Majesty's brig 'Vixen,'" demanded the name of the other, and must have doubted his ears when he received the answer, "His Majesty's brig 'Primrose.'" There was a pause; then another hail was heard from the "Primrose," asking again with what ship she had been contending. To this question, there being now no object in evasion, Captain Bull replied by stating the name and service of his vessel; and was desired to make the private signal, which he did. It was at once answered; and the captain of the "Primrose" thereupon requested Captain Bull to come on board. Being informed that the "Duke of Marlborough's" boat had been cut away, he sent his own; but Captain Bull allowed no one except the lieutenant in command to come on deck until he had satisfied himself that the vessel he had to do with was really an English cruiser. When he was convinced of this he went on board the "Primrose"; and on returning to his own vessel found that five 32-pound shot had gone through her side close to the water's edge; so that he was obliged to get immediate assistance from the carpenters of his late antagonist.

That the "Duke of Marlborough" was much shattered in this action is not surprising. What is really extraordinary is that she was not blown out of the water at an early stage of the affair. The "Primrose" carried sixteen 32-pound carronades, one 12-pound carronade on the forecastle, and two long 6-pounders. Her crew consisted of one hundred and twenty-five men. The "Marlborough" carried twelve guns, mostly 6-pounders, and none heavier than nine, with thirty-two men and boys. She had also on board seven male passengers; but it is not stated that any of these took part in the action, except Lieutenant Andrews, who was unfortunately killed.

On the arrival of the "Duke of Marlborough" at Lisbon, the passengers, feeling grateful to Captain Bull not only for his gallantry, but also for his kind treatment of the ladies who were on board, presented him with a sword, and distributed four hundred dollars among the crew.

The account of this action given by James (*Naval History*, Vol. VI., page 278, ed. 1837) is not written with the evident desire to be fair which that historian usually evinced. The story as told by him suggests that Captain Bull was solely, or at least chiefly to blame; and as the Post-Office came to a totally different conclusion, while the Admiralty itself censured Captain Phillott, and made no complaint concerning Captain Bull, it cannot be presumptuous to question the accuracy of Mr. James' conclusion.

In an earlier edition of his history it appears that an account more favourable to Captain Bull appeared ; but in the edition of 1837 this account was revised ; and the author states that when the former one was written, he had not seen the minutes of the court-martial on Captain Phillott. As reference is thus pointedly made to the court-martial, it would have been more candid to notice the fact that the finding of that court imputed negligence to Captain Phillott. The sentence of the court, held at Plymouth on April 16th, 1814, was in the following words : " The Court is of opinion that the circumstance of the ' Duke of Marlborough ' being in moderate weather without any lower studding sails, and with her royal masts down, appears to have left the Prisoner, Captain Phillott, and the officers of the ' Primrose,' under an impression that she was a merchant vessel ; and the very small size of the flag and pendant used by the Packet in making the private signal, and the top-gallant sail being close up to the mast-head, may reasonably account for not seeing the signal ; and the night private signal made by the Packet, viz., two false fires, appears not to have been seen on board the ' Primrose.' But the Court is of opinion that when the Packet was found to be an armed vessel, by firing a stern chase gun, it was the duty of the Prisoner to have made the private signal. And the Court laments that the then near approach of the vessel induced Captain Phillott to prefer hailing the Packet ; and this Court

doth therefore judge the said Captain Phillott to be admonished to be more circumspect in future." This is the whole sentence, the preamble only being omitted. It will be observed that while the circumstances favourable to Captain Phillott are duly brought forward, no word is said in condemnation of Captain Bull. If anything had been elicited at the court-martial which cast blame on the Packet, the Admiralty, which was never very favourably disposed towards the Post-Office Service, would at once have forwarded a copy of the pleadings to the Postmaster General, with a request that Captain Bull might be punished. Nothing, however, was heard at the Post-Office of the result of the court-martial until ten days had passed, when Mr. Freeling wrote and asked for it. It was then sent to him, with a short covering letter, which contained absolutely no comment whatever.

Probably it is not necessary to go beyond these indisputable facts in defence of Captain Bull; but a few comments upon the account given by James may not be misplaced. His unfavourable verdict on the "Duke of Marlborough" appears to be based on four circumstances: (1) that she had no lower studding sails or royals set when the "Primrose" first sighted her; (2) that no one on board the Packet, except the gunner, knew the difference between a blue light and a false fire; (3) that whereas Captain Phillott hailed once, and his second lieutenant (who had a loud voice) twice,

the hail was answered only by a broadside; (4) that the flags used by the Packet were only half the established size. The first of these points was carefully investigated by the Court of Inquiry at Falmouth, which obtained from Captain Bull a written statement of his reasons for having his royal masts on deck. The explanation was perfectly natural and clear; and whereas it was admitted that Captain Phillott, not knowing the circumstances, might have been misled, Captain Bull pointed out that the square rig of the "Duke of Marlborough" ought to have shown that she was no merchantman. The second point is of no value. It is not probable that so experienced an officer as Captain Bull was ignorant of any detail connected with the private signals which were so important to the safety of his ship. Even Mr. James admits that the gunner had proper knowledge on the subject. If the night signal had been made in an improper manner, the court-martial would have adduced that fact in support of Captain Phillott. A signal was certainly made on the Packet, whether with blue lights or false fires. The officers of the "Primrose" alleged that they did not see it. That could scarcely be the case; since the vessels were so near at the time that Captain Bull, who assisted in making the signal, distinctly saw the match put to a gun on board the sloop of war. No hail was heard on board the Packet, until the action had lasted more than two

hours, as already described. It is difficult to believe that the "Primrose" really hailed three times before opening fire. There were upon the Packet many persons who had an interest in avoiding an engagement; there was not one who had the slightest motive for forcing one. Several passengers were on board; two of them were accompanied by their wives. If these gentlemen had heard English voices hailing them, can it be supposed that they would not have interfered, and done all in their power to stop the fight? So far, however, from showing the least dissatisfaction with Captain Bull's conduct, even when they learned with what vessel he had been contending, they united in an address of gratitude to him, in which they used the following terms: "No words which we can make use of can sufficiently convey to you an idea of our admiration of your conduct and that of your gallant crew. . . ." They marked this admiration by presenting the captain with a sword of honour. These were the persons chiefly injured by negligence on the part of Captain Bull, if any such charge could be sustained; and this is how they estimated his conduct, being in the best possible position for judging of it. As for the fourth point, the ensign and pendant were produced at the Court of Inquiry at Falmouth. The pendant was thirty feet long; the ensign was nine feet four inches by four feet six inches, and was larger than was usual in the Packet Service.

James remarks with some complacency that



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HINCHINBROOKE AND AMERICAN PRIVATEER.

“the damages received by the ‘Marlborough,’ as admitted by Captain Bull and his officers, were of a very serious nature.” No admission from anybody is needed to show that when a vessel carrying sixteen 32-pounders and three other guns (James does not count the 12-pounder at the forecastle) engages one armed with twelve 6 and 9-pounders, the latter must suffer very heavily. It is astonishing, and by no means creditable to the “Primrose,” that her heavier metal did not end the action at a very early stage. James admits that “owing to the manœuvres of the ‘Duke of Marlborough,’ the ‘Primrose’ found a difficulty in firing with any effect.” Very probably she did: Captain Bull was an excellent seaman, and could not be expected to heave to in order to present an easier mark to the gunners of the “Primrose.” The fair judgment upon his proceedings on this occasion is that he acted like a good sailor and a brave commander. This was certainly the opinion of Mr. Freeling, and few people were more competent to judge.

On May 1st, 1814, the “Hinchinbrooke,” to which Packet Captain James, so often distinguished as master of the “Duke of Marlborough,” had been promoted, was on her homeward passage from St. Thomas, and had reached the neighbourhood of the Azores—a favourite cruising ground of the American Privateers, and one on which their ravages were long unchecked by the presence of any British man-of-war—when the look-out at the masthead

reported a suspicious-looking vessel to the eastward. The strange sail drew rapidly nearer. At half-past four she hoisted American colours, and was drawing on fast. She fired no gun, nor was any hail heard; and as Captain James bade his men reserve their fire for closer quarters, the two ships neared each other in grim silence for the best part of an hour. At twenty minutes past five they lay within pistol shot distance, and, as if at a preconcerted signal, the two broadsides roared out in the same moment.

On this followed a tremendous cannonade. The American carried sixteen heavy guns, the calibre of which could not be ascertained. They were, however, certainly of greater weight than the "Hinchinbrooke's" 9-pounder carronades, and at the short range at which they were discharged, did great execution on the Packet's hull and rigging. This lasted for an hour; at the end of which time the Packet had suffered so much that Captain James was scarcely able, if he had wished it, to avoid the boarding attack which he saw the Americans were preparing. Indeed, confident in the strength of his nettings, and in the quality of his small handful of men, he may possibly have even welcomed the prospect of a hand-to-hand fight, wherein his men, who were doubtless growing restive under the long pounding of guns heavier than their own, might work off their suppressed fury, and perhaps gain an encouraging success. The assault was quickly upon them, delivered in great numbers, and with

all the impetuosity which the Americans evinced in these attacks. Had the nettings been one whit less lofty, or less firmly secured, the Privateersmen must have gained a footing on the Packet's deck. As it was, impassable though the nettings were, the small band of picked men led by Captain James to repulse them suffered heavily, one being slain outright, while three others, who could very ill be spared, received disabling wounds.

Relieved for the moment from the apprehension of boarders, Captain James could turn his attention to the state of his ship, which by this time had received serious injury. The Privateer had drawn off again to a little distance, and her heavy shot were crashing into the "Hinchinbrooke's" sides in a manner which justified anxiety. Already several shot had passed between wind and water. The carpenter was one of the men badly wounded in repelling the boarders; and as the ship was reported to be making water fast, Captain James sent the master below, ill as he could spare him from the deck, with instructions to search for the leaks and endeavour to stop them.

The master found that the ship was in danger of sinking; and, what was almost worse, that the water had already entered the magazine and was spoiling the powder. There was no time to be lost. He returned on deck and asked for a party of men to help him in removing it to the after cabin. It was a difficult matter for Captain James to find these

men. In the interval of the master's absence from deck five more men had been hit, and the number available for fighting the ship was now lamentably small. Two or three sailors were, however, told off for the purpose, while the Americans, observing that several men had left the deck, seized the moment, and cast their boarders a second time upon the sides of the "Hinchinbrooke" with more fury than before, covered by a tremendous fire of great guns and of small arms from her tops. Reduced in numbers as they were, the Falmouth men succeeded in beating back this second assault as they did the first, and then, quite suddenly, came Captain James' chance.

Throughout the action up to this point the Privateer had chosen her position as she pleased, being a much faster vessel than the Packet. But this very quality of speed now served her ill, for, when the ships separated, on the failure of the boarders, the American shot ahead. Instantly Captain James saw his opportunity, and, without a moment's loss of time he luffed under his opponent's stern, and raked her in succession with each of his three larboard guns, loaded with a treble charge. What execution he did by this manœuvre he could not judge, but it was probably deadly, for it shook off his enemy's hold. Very shortly after it occurred the Cornishmen had the satisfaction of seeing her haul her wind to the northward, and she gave them no more trouble.

Thus ended this brave and well-fought action, conducted against heavy odds with a courage beyond all praise. The exact force of the *Privateer* was not ascertained. She carried sixteen guns, which may probably have been 12-pounders, and was "full of men." It is scarcely likely that her crew numbered less than a hundred and twenty men; and, accepting that not excessive estimate, it must be allowed that for Captain James, with his eight 9-pounders and thirty-two men, to fight so strong a vessel for three hours, and to beat her in the end, was creditable to the last degree.

Captain Furze, who defended the "*Lapwing*" so gallantly at the end of 1813, was incapacitated by his severe wound from serving during the early part of the following year. On his recovery he was appointed to the "*Chesterfield*," and towards Christmas sailed once more out of Falmouth with mails for Surinam.

The voyage passed without incident until January 4th, when the "*Chesterfield*" had entered the cruising ground of the American Privateers. Early in the morning when Madeira was well in sight, a strange schooner was spied from the masthead, and ere long it was manifest that she was chasing the Packet, and gaining on her fast.

The morning wore away before Captain Furze had convinced himself that escape was impossible, but being at last fully satisfied of the necessity of fighting, he took in his studding-sails and awaited

the attack. The schooner, as she came nearer, was seen to be a formidable antagonist, mounting sixteen guns, and having her decks literally crowded with men. She was flying American colours, which fact of itself was enough to show the Packetsmen that if they were to save their vessel and their liberty, it would be no child's play that they had to face.

The unfortunate result of Captain Furze's former action in the "Lapwing" was attributed, as will be remembered, to the fact that he had been obliged to sail from Falmouth without the two long brass 9-pounders which the Atlantic Packets used as chasers, and with which he believed he could have kept the enemy at a respectful distance. On the present occasion he had his guns; but, as if some destiny were resolved to equalize the conditions of the two fights, the slide of one of the 9-pounders broke at the second discharge, and the gun was thenceforth useless. The remaining one was served with redoubled vigour, but it was not enough to keep off a determined enemy, and about one o'clock the action was in full progress.

At half-past one the enemy came close up under the larboard quarter of the "Chesterfield," with the evident intention of boarding; whereupon Captain Furze put the helm hard a-starboard, and gave him the larboard broadside. The guns were skilfully pointed, and must have done great damage, for the American sheered off in some confusion, and

resumed her cannonade at pistol-shot distance, pouring in also a fire of musketry, which, from whatever reason, did less execution on the Packet than was usual on such occasions. One man was killed about two o'clock, and shortly afterwards two others were severely wounded. But these casualties, which were the only ones throughout the action, were not in proportion to the number of the enemy's sharpshooters, and were insufficient to discourage the Packetsmen.

A more serious misfortune was that a round shot dismounted one of the "Chesterfield's" guns, thus reducing her broadside to two guns. By dint of great exertions, however, two guns were brought over from the starboard side (the Packets were always pierced for more guns than they carried), and the lost ground was quickly recovered. Indeed, the fire of the Cornish gunners was so steady and continuous that the Americans seem to have had no further opportunity of attempting to board, and confined themselves to endeavouring to cripple their plucky little opponent. At this game the Cornishmen were as good as their enemies; and after the action had lasted for three hours, Captain Furze had the gratification of seeing that the fire of the Privateer was gradually lessening. About four o'clock she hoisted her squaresail, and made off, apparently much damaged; though had she persisted a little longer, she might possibly have been rewarded by success, for the "Chesterfield" was

left in a sorry plight. Her mainmast was very badly wounded, not a single brace or bowline left intact. Her sails were hanging torn in every direction, and the number of shot lodged in her hull testified plainly enough to the severity of the struggle. However, the ship was still quite seaworthy, and after such repairs as the stores on board enabled Captain Furze to make, she resumed her voyage, and reached Surinam without further mishap.

In the course of this year, 1814, some fresh disturbances among the seamen at Falmouth revealed the fact that the lesson taught by the removal of the Packets to Plymouth in 1810 had already been in part forgotten.

On the 12th July, when the "Speedy" Packet had completed her complement of men, had taken her mails on board, and was about to slip her moorings, a number of her crew refused to join the vessel, and, headed by the gunner, went to the agent's office and demanded their discharge. Being asked for their reasons, they had nothing better to say than that they did not like the voyage, and that if they were to go upon it they must have more pay. The agent, willing to concede whatever was possible, paid them a month's wages in advance, whereupon they became more riotous and intractable than before. Seeing that they were quickly passing out of his control, being in fact in a state of excitement which made them for the time quite

inaccessible to reason, the agent sent a message to the captain of the *Guardship*; and in an hour two strong parties were scouring every alley and public-house in the town in search of the malingering seamen of the "*Speedy*," but could find no trace of them. Nor was this surprising, for the deserters were all Falmouth men, and the old town contained hiding-places which more careful searchers than the press-gangs might have failed to discover.

Meanwhile, Captain Sutherland, who commanded the "*Speedy*," had engaged other men at unusually high rates of pay, to take the place of the missing ones. But these new men were resolved not to fall short of the high example set before their eyes, and they too decamped as soon as they had secured a payment in advance.

It was impossible to allow the mails to suffer delay from conduct such as this, and in order to demonstrate that the Service could go on very well without the Falmouth sailors, the "*Speedy*" was sent round to Plymouth, where she completed her crew without difficulty. This reminder of the ease with which the prosperity of Falmouth, dependent as it was chiefly on the Packets, could be destroyed by their removal, had a very sobering effect. The sense of insecurity which outbreaks of this kind created in the minds of the authorities was, however, a grave misfortune for Falmouth, contributing, as it doubtless did, to the formation of the scheme which a few years later placed the Service under

Admiralty control, and ultimately removed it from Falmouth altogether.

It is scarcely possible within the limits of a work such as this to describe all the gallant fights of the Falmouth vessels in the period under consideration. The conditions of naval warfare in those days were simple, the incidents of one sea-fight resembled another, and the recital of them is apt to become wearisome, unless kept within narrow limits. There is one fortunate little action which may, however, be described before the subject is closed; a fight which is less remarkable for the desperate or bloody character of the fighting than for the breezy confidence with which the Falmouth commander took his ship into action, and the skill or good luck which brought him through it with absolute success.

The "Walsingham," under the temporary command of Mr. William Nicholls, was on her way to Barbados, and about a hundred miles distant from that island, when a sail was seen from the masthead standing towards the Packet. It was not long before the strange vessel was made out to be a schooner under easy sail, having her fore-topsail close reefed. In those seas any vessel of such a class was far more likely to be a privateer than a peaceful trader; and Mr. Nicholls, who was well aware of this, turned the hands to quarters and cleared the ship for action while the stranger was still hull down on the horizon.

A short time made it plain that the "Walsingham" was the inferior sailer, and that the other vessel was overhauling her fast, keeping her wind until she got upon the Packet's quarter, about two miles away, when she fired a gun, and hoisted a blue English ensign. This was a favourite trick with Privateers, the only object being to gain time and the choice of positions; but Mr. Nicholls had not sailed those waters from his boyhood without having learnt to distinguish the lines and rig of an American ship from an English one, and he calmly proceeded with his preparations, paying not the smallest attention to the blue ensign.

Seeing this, the enemy set her main-topsail and squaresail, let three reefs out of her fore-topsail, and bore up in chase. When she had gained a little more ground, Mr. Nicholls, who was busily engaged in getting the 9-pounder guns aft, suspended his labours for a few minutes in order to see the private signal properly made. It was kept up ten minutes, but no reply appeared. By that time the enemy was coming up very fast. Mr. Nicholls took in his studding-sails and awaited the approach of the Privateer.

He had not long to wait. The enemy was scarcely more than a mile away. The Cornishmen could see her decks completely covered with men; while from her sides projected twelve guns of unusual length, which Mr. Nicholls subsequently concluded to have been long 9-pounders.

The Privateersmen gave three cheers as they came into action, but reserved their fire; and from the circumstance that a large party of men was collected on the forecastle, Mr. Nicholls judged that the Americans intended to board at the very outset, and so, by their superior numbers, finish the action at one blow. He therefore began to play upon the advancing vessel with his stern chasers, in the hope of checking her onset; but though the range was already so short that the fire of the Cornish gunners must have done some execution among the dense masses of men on their adversary's decks, yet the Privateer did not alter her course, but kept on with a deadly persistency until considerably within musket shot, when, yawing suddenly, she poured in a raking broadside of round and grape from her starboard guns, accompanied by a rattling musketry fire.

By this impetuous assault the Americans had doubtless hoped to disable the "Walsingham," or, at least, in the confusion, to gain an opportunity of boarding. But the event was otherwise. There was no confusion, and very little damage; whilst on the other hand, the onrush of the Privateer brought her within pistol shot of the Packet's larboard guns.

This was an effective distance. The guns were crammed to the muzzles with double-headed shot, grape, and canister; and a well-directed fire swept over the enemy's decks, doing mischief enough to discourage his inclination to close with the

“Walsingham,” and to cause him to sheer off to a safer distance.

The Cornishmen, inspired by their advantage, served their guns eagerly; and for about half-an-hour the action went on very warmly, both vessels receiving much damage, while five men on board the Packet were wounded by musket balls. Mr. Nicholls, however, had the satisfaction of seeing that the fire from the Privateer was gradually lessening; and he thereupon called on his men to redouble their efforts. All the guns in action were double-shotted by his orders, most carefully levelled at the rigging of the enemy, and discharged simultaneously. As soon as the smoke cleared away it was seen that their broadside had been splendidly successful, for it had brought down the enemy's maingaff, cut his foresail through in the after leach, shot away his squaresail, and rendered his foretopsail nearly useless.

The Falmouth men, seeing prize-money before their eyes, attempted to close. But every brace on board had been shot away, and before the “Walsingham” could be got under management, the Americans had succeeded in reeving main halliards, got their mainsail up, and were sailing away from the Packet at such a speed that pursuit was useless. Mr. Nicholls and his crew were disappointed at the loss of a vessel which they believed they could have captured with ease.

In the early summer of 1814 the hired Packet,

“Little Catherine,” Captain Vivian, was captured by a French frigate, “Le Sultan.” The Packet was scuttled, her officers and crew were taken on board the frigate. There they remained, as Captain Vivian himself used to tell the story, amused spectators of the unsailorly conduct of the French crew, who were, in fact, not seamen at all, but landsmen swept together, in the course of Napoleon’s desperate efforts to create a powerful fleet, from every fortress in the country. The captain was a brave old officer, recalled from a long and honourable retirement by the necessities of the moment, and age had largely unfitted him for command. Upon the vessel thus manned a furious storm broke. The landsmen could do nothing with the ship. Half of them lay about in the scuppers, sea-sick and helpless; the rest were as incompetent as untrained men must be at sea.

In this emergency the French commander appealed to Captain Vivian, asking him to undertake with his own men the navigation of the ship, on the pledge of handing her back when the weather moderated. This offer Captain Vivian accepted, and kept most honourably; restraining his men when they pressed him almost to mutiny for permission to overpower their sea-sick enemies; and in the end handing back the vessel as he had received her. It had been part of the understanding that in exchange for his services he was to have the first prize captured by the French frigate. This happened

to be the Packet "Duke of Montrose," which was accordingly handed over to Captain Vivian, who embarked in her with all his crew, and returned safely to Falmouth. It is pleasant to dwell on the honourable temper in which this understanding was kept on both sides.

The American War, which had called forth so much gallantry among the Falmouth Packets, was now nearly over. The date was fixed for the cessation of hostilities, but before it arrived one more glorious memory was added to the records of the Packet Service.

Nearly eight years had passed since Mr. (at this time Captain) Rogers, in the "Windsor Castle," repulsed and captured the French Privateer, "Jeune Richard." It was this Packet, now commanded by Captain R. V. Sutton, which, four days before the close of the war, encountered the American Privateer "Roger." The weather was very hazy; and neither ship saw the other until they were scarcely more than a mile apart. The enemy hoisted English colours; but Captain Sutton, on making the private signal, found that it remained unanswered, and accordingly prepared for action.

At 7.15 P.M. the American was coming up fast, and the Falmouth men opened fire with their stern guns. The enemy replied with such guns as could be brought to bear, and very shortly ranged up alongside the "Windsor Castle," lying now on one now on the other quarter, and maintaining steadily

a very galling and destructive fire. This lasted for more than two hours; but shortly after 9.30 P.M. the fire from the "Roger" slackened, and she dropped astern. Captain Sutton availed himself of the opportunity to repair the rigging, which was much cut, so far as possible. Only one man was hit in this first action, namely the master, Mr. Foster, whose knee was smashed by a musket ball.

The attack was not renewed for some hours, but throughout the night the "Roger" ranged up frequently within musket shot, keeping the crew constantly at their quarters, and permitting no interval for rest. At daylight she hoisted American colours, on seeing which the Packetsmen opened fire, and a warm contest ensued for about half-an-hour, at the end of which time the "Roger" hauled off to repair damages. The damages of the "Windsor Castle" were by this time such as it was not possible to repair in the intervals of an action. Her eight 9-pounders were ill pitted against the metal carried by the enemy, which consisted of ten 12-pounder carronades, two long sixes, one long 18-pounder on a traverse, and one five and a half inch brass howitzer.

At half-past eight the "Roger" made sail again, and laid herself once more alongside the "Windsor Castle." It was obviously a final effort. The little crew of Packetsmen, who had been at their quarters for fourteen hours continuously, were greatly fatigued, but responded with the utmost spirit, and Mr. Foster,

though suffering great pain from his wounded knee, returned on deck and did his duty with the rest. Three men were wounded about this time, and as the surgeon, Mr. Krabbé, was below attending to their wounds an 18-pound shot entered the cabin where they lay, and caused a splinter which wounded him dangerously, breaking several of his ribs.

On deck Captain Sutton continued to defend his ship with a courage deserving of high praise. The two vessels lay within pistol shot of each other; and so long as it was possible to manœuvre Captain Sutton defeated all efforts on the part of his opponent to take up a raking position, or to board. At 9.45 A.M., however, the "Roger" bore down with the evident intention of boarding; and, on endeavouring to handle his ship, Captain Sutton found her quite unmanageable, and lying like a log upon the water. Not one brace or bow-line was left to the yards or sails; almost the whole of the running and standing rigging was shot away; while the after-yards swinging round brought the ship by the lee. This gave the Americans the opportunity to board on the larboard quarter; and as the boarding netting in that part of the ship was cut to pieces, there was no obstacle to their attack. At this moment Mr. Foster was again severely wounded, and obliged to quit the deck. The fire of musketry from the "Roger" redoubled, and Captain Sutton felt that he had no alternative but to sink the mails, and to surrender. The last of

the heavy portmanteaux was sunk before the colours were struck; and when Captain Sutton laid down his sword it could not be said that he had not done his duty to the last.

Captain Sutton, with his master, mate, carpenter, and a boy, were sent back to England on a merchant vessel. The remainder of the crew were sent in their own vessel to Norfolk, where the "Roger" was owned. The following extract from *The Norfolk Herald* of the 28th April, 1815, throws some light on their subsequent treatment.

"The following statement of an affair which took place in this harbour on Wednesday evening last, we have prepared from the evidence given before the inquest which was held on the bodies of the two unfortunate men who were killed. We have been more minute in stating the facts than the importance of the case should seem to demand; but we deem the detail necessary to prevent misrepresentations which might obtain credence, to the prejudice of that magnanimity and justice which the United States, in all their intercourse with England, have ever strictly adhered to. The crew of the 'Windsor Castle,' brought in by the Privateer 'Roger,' were on Wednesday last put on board a small schooner, and sent down to Craney Island in charge of Mr. Westbrook, an officer of the 'Roger,' with a guard of eight United States' soldiers. Owing to a low tide the schooner anchored some distance from the island, and the

prisoners had to be debarked in a row-boat. Mr. Westbrook took thirteen of the Englishmen, with four of the guard to row the boat, leaving eleven others in charge of four soldiers on board the schooner. Before his return to the schooner, the prisoners on board rose upon the guard, and endeavoured to disarm and throw them overboard, in which, owing to the suddenness of the assault, they had nearly succeeded. Mr. Westbrook got alongside the schooner while the soldiers were yet struggling with the superior numbers of their assailants, but they still held their arms. Desirous to quell the mutinous proceedings of the Englishmen he expostulated, entreated, and threatened, but to no purpose; and it was evident from their expressions that they were determined on taking possession of the schooner and making their escape in her. He then leaped on board and attempted to rescue one of the soldiers, when the fellow who held him, quitting his hold, seized the tiller and aimed a blow at Mr. Westbrook, who warded it off and ordered the released soldier to fire at him, which he did, and killed him. At the same time another soldier, having disengaged himself, shot his opponent dead. The mutineers, having the other two soldiers confined, exclaimed, 'Now is the time, boys! don't give them time to load again,' and were rushing forward to seize Mr. Westbrook, when he drew a pair of pistols and commanded the mutineers in a firm and determined tone to go below, de-

claring that he would shoot the first man who refused. This decisive conduct had the desired effect; they all immediately descended into the hold, where they were put in close confinement. The conduct of Mr. Westbrook was truly praiseworthy. His intrepidity certainly saved the lives of the soldiers, and prevented the conspirators from carrying off the schooner, an act which, it is said, they premeditated. The two unhappy wretches who threw away their lives in this affair are represented by the mate of the 'Windsor Castle' to have been habitually turbulent and mutinous. . . . The verdict of the jury of inquest entirely acquitted the two soldiers of any blame in taking their lives."

It may be added that Captain Sutton gave a very different character to the two sailors who perished in this bold attempt to escape, and that the Postmaster General, regarding their conduct as natural and praiseworthy, pensioned their relatives as if the men had been killed in action.

With this fight the battle-roll of the Post-Office Service ends. A few weeks later the guns were laid away in store, the pikes and cutlasses were sold. The crews were reduced to the numbers of a peace establishment, and the gunners were idle. The Packets came and went unnoticed by the Privateers. The fighting days were over, and from then until now Falmouth has never looked upon the once familiar sight of a vessel creeping in

beneath Pendennis Castle with her sides shattered by round shot.

It was a momentous change; the opening of a long peace after more than a century of almost ceaseless warfare. The first result at Falmouth was curious enough. A civil department had controlled the Packets as long as there was fighting to be done; when there was no longer any, a fighting department took them over.

The war had not been at an end more than three years when the Admiralty claimed the Packet Service as a training ground for seamen, and a means of providing for half-pay officers, whose applications for employment were in the highest degree embarrassing. The Post-Office protested, and fought to retain the service which had become distinguished under its control, but all in vain. By degrees the Admiralty expelled the ancient governors of the Packets, changed the regulations, altered the type of ship, and in the end Falmouth knew the Postal officers no more.

The details of these changes, if of any public interest, lie outside the scope of this work, which has aimed only at describing the Packet Service in its prime.

Three full generations have passed away since the last fight mentioned in these pages was fought, and in that long period nearly every detail, even of the bravest among them all, has been forgotten. At Falmouth, where there is still a considerable

interest in the ancient service of the Post-Office, no one has collected the facts or given any labour to preserve them from perishing. One by one, as the survivors of the Service died, their memories died with them. Captain Cock has passed out of recollection in the town of his adoption as completely as if he had never lived. Nobody remembers Captain James. The "Morgiana" and the "Montague" are forgotten as absolutely as if no remarkable events had been connected with their names. A few stories are known, half-a-dozen officers are named, but of precise information there is little indeed to be found where it might have been sought most confidently. The present writer, after wandering about the neighbourhood all day in search of recollections, found himself at last towards evening in the pleasant churchyard of Mylor. The ground slopes rapidly down to the beautiful harbour, the blue water and the white sails of a passing boat were clearly visible through the openings of the trees. Sitting on a low wall in the sunshine was the sexton of the church, an old man blind and bowed with age, who had crept out, supported on two sticks, to taste the evening freshness in a spot where every detail of the scene was clear before his mental sight, and whence he could hear the water lapping on the shore below.

Sitting here the old man pointed out that many of the graves lying round were those of Packet officers; and turning his memory back towards those

days of which few people, he complained, cared to talk, he brought forth many an anecdote of the Packets, told with an old man's relish in the times which are gone by. At last, warming to his subject, he plunged into the story of the "Antelope," telling with spirit and enthusiasm how Pasco, the boat-swain, had lashed the Packet to the Privateer, and boarding bravely, had won a noble victory. Not far away, across the harbour, was the little hamlet where Pasco lived. The sexton had known his children; and, when a child himself, had even seen the golden call which, as told in the third chapter of this work, was presented by the Postmaster General to the hero of the fight. It was a pity, the old man thought, that Pasco was forgotten. But all the others were forgotten too; many a statue had been put up in honour of people not so brave.

In this way the old man rambled on till the weariness of age overtook him, and he could draw forth no more recollections. He stayed there sitting in the sun until the child who led him returned to guide him home—a not unfitting symbol of the decay which has fallen on the Service for which his enthusiasm was reserved, and on the reputations of the officers who made it great.

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ERRATA.

- Page 47, line 6 from bottom, *for* "developed," *read* "devoled."
- Page 74, last line, *for* "did take," *read* "did not take."
- Page 114, line 1, *for* "King George," *read* "Prince of Orange."
- Page 212, last line, *for* "City Marshall," *read* "City Marshal."