HER MAJESTY'S MAILS.

By the Author of "Her Majesty's Ministers," etc.

ER Majesty's mails delivered throughout the United Kingdom last year more letters, post-cards, and book-packets than there were human beings then in the world. The latest estimate of the population of the globe puts the number at one thousand four hundred and fifty-five millions, nine hundred and twenty-three thousand, five hundred; and the Postmaster-General's last report shows that communication of all these 1,586,000,000, and he will begin to wonder how it can be possible for such a prodigious task to be accomplished as it is in such a wonderfully perfect manner. Clearly, the work could not be done at all without organisation of the most complete kind; and it may be said without fear of contradiction that the British Post-Office is not only the most gigantic establishment in the world, but it is the most elaborately organised. It makes comparatively little use of machinery, and yet it does its work with all the regularity and precision of the most ingeniously constructed machine. It employs (in the postal department) about 35,000 officers of all grades, and every man in the great army has his work to do at a certain hour every day and in a certain way, and he does it. There is rarely any failure: the vast human machine but seldom "goes wrong," so nicely are all its parts adjusted, so systematically are all its manifold operations directed by those who are responsible for its proper working.

It is well known, of course, that the plans upon which the Post-Office is worked are not the product of any one mind. The Post-Office is a growth—a very marvellous growth, too; and many busy brains have been employed in developing the system and bringing it to its present all but faultless state.

Sir Rowland Hill's great idea of a uniform "penny postage," as soon as it was adopted, necessitated great changes in the mode of carrying on the business of the Post-Office, as, instead of 824 millions, it had 169 millions of letters to deliver during the first year of "penny postage." All these changes were worked out by him to their utmost details with an amount of patience, forethought, and perseverance which few can fully appreciate, but which all must admire.

There were postal reformers, however, before Rowland Hill, who effected improvements in the conveyance of Her Majesty's mails, without which even his great schemes must have proved comparatively failures. There was Ralph Allen, immortalised by Pope in the lines—

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

He was the originator of the system of cross-posts between Exeter and Chester, going by way of Bristol, Gloucester, and Worcester, thus connecting the West of England with the Lancashire districts. The Government gave him a lease of the cross-posts for life, at a fixed rental of £6,000 per year. The service was from time to time extended, much to the public advantage, and not a little to Allen's benefit too, he himself estimating the net profits of his contract at £10,000 a year. At his death therefore, in 1794, the Post-Office found cross-posts established in all parts of the country, the whole of which were then brought
under the control of the Postmaster-General. It may be said, in passing, that Allen made generous use of his wealth, as he spent a large part of his income in supporting and encouraging deserving literary men.

More than half a century before the days of "penny postage," a great improvement was effected in the working of the mails by the establishment of what were long known and widely famed as Palmer's mail-coaches. Palmer's scheme was the substitution of mail-coaches for the solitary "mail-cart" or "post-horse" upon which the Department had hitherto relied for the conveyance of letters. The advantages of sending the mails by coaches which would also convey passengers, and would besides be well guarded, were obvious; and Pitt, to whom the scheme was submitted, having sanctioned it, Palmer was forthwith installed as Controller-General of the Mails. The rates of postage were slightly raised, but the number of letters rapidly increased, owing to the greater safety, regularity, and speed which Palmer's mail-coaches insured, and many of the principal towns petitioned the authorities to establish mail-coaches in their districts.

Palmer's plans were so successful that the revenue of the Post-Office rose in twenty years from a quarter of a million and a half; the mails not only travelled more quickly, but were greatly increased in number: 980 towns which had formerly only three deliveries a week, had a daily delivery before the end of the century. In 1836 there were fifty-four four-horse mail-coaches running in England, but although some use had been made of the then existing railways, it was not until the years 1836 and 1839 that Acts of Parliament were passed to provide for the conveyance of the mails by the railway companies. Since that date the Post-Office has used the railway system of the country to the fullest possible extent, but the "missing links" of connections between many towns and villages are still supplied by means of mail-carts and coaches.

The sweeping changes proposed by Sir Rowland (then Mr.) Hill were stoutly resisted by the Post-Office authorities. Colonel Maberley, who had just been appointed Secretary to the Post-Office, not only predicted that if the penny rate were adopted the revenue of the Department would not recover itself within forty or fifty years, but openly declared that the whole scheme was an absurdity and an impossibility. Fortunately the Government of that day was moreenterprising than some of its own servants, and had as great a contempt for impossibilities as had the great Pitt when he was told his orders could not be executed because they were impossible. Returning the orders to the messenger, he exclaimed, "Tell your chief that these orders are given by one who tread upon impossibilities." In this spirit the Lords of the Treasury sanctioned the new scheme, and it was immediately brought into operation. For a few months the metropolis alone had the benefit of the reduction, but at the beginning of 1840 a penny postage for the whole of Great Britain and Ireland became an established fact. The immediate result of the changes introduced was an enormous increase in the amount of correspondence, but for some years there was an actual deficit in the revenues of the Post-Office. Sir Rowland Hill anticipated that ultimately the net revenue would recover itself within £300,000 of the amount realised by the higher rates which had hitherto prevailed, and that his system would produce a five-fold increase of letters. We have already shown how far his expectations have been surpassed as to the increase in the number of letters; and as to the financial results, it will be seen that even he was not so sanguine as he might have been, when we state that last year the gross revenue of the Post-Office (reckoning postage and money-order commission only) was £6,500,730, as against £5,346,000 in 1839, and that the net revenue (or profit) was £2,497,587, as against £1,660,000 in the last year of the old system. Comparing the two years 1839 and 1879, it appears that the Post-Office delivered in the latter year nearly eighteen times the number of letters, &c., that it delivered forty years ago, and though the postage is less than one-ninth of the average charge then made, the national exchequer is richer by £800,000 per annum.

According to the latest returns, the number of post-offices open in the United Kingdom on the 31st of March, 1880, was 14,212, of which 912 were head offices and 13,300 sub-offices. Besides these, there were 12,541 letter-boxes and pillar-posts in streets, roads, &c., making a total of 26,753 places at which letters may be posted, 2,012 of these places being in London. The staff of the Post-Office (not reckoning those engaged exclusively on telegraph duties) consists of 15,882 postmasters, 3,803 clerks, 16,893 letter-carriers, sorters, &c., 28 mail-guards and porters, besides the secretaries and superior officers, who number 44, and the Postmaster-General. The service of the three kingdoms is managed—of course, under the direction of the Postmaster-General and the Secretary—in their respective capitals, at each of which there is a chief office, with a secretarial and other departmental staffs; and the working arrangements of each office are the same, on a smaller scale, as those adopted at the General Post-Office in London.

Of the several Departments into which the Office is divided, one of the most important, undoubtedly, is the Mail-Office, which deals with all matters relating to the transmission of the mails. There are 617 mails daily between London and other post-towns in England and Wales; 250 towns have two mails from London daily, 162 towns have three, 96 have four, 63 have five, and 20 towns have actually six mails every day. The work of making up and forwarding these mails is done as follows:—After all letters received at the General Post-Office have been placed address uppermost and stamped, they are sorted into twenty great divisions, letters intended for a particular series of roads forming one division; they are then classified according to separate roads or districts, and finally according to different post-towns. The bags are then made up and sealed, and at the appointed time they are conveyed by mail-carts and omnibuses to the railway stations, where they are taken charge of by the officers of the
WHAT TO WEAR.

CHIT-CHAT ON DRESS. BY OUR PARIS CORRESPONDENT.

There is quite a revolution in dress-making. The waists of bodices are short—certainly in the front—and the change is not a becoming one, for there is generally a wide waist-band formed of cross-cut folds, which thickens the waist. Below the waist several of the new skirts are gathered to a depth of half a yard, and then comes a scarf tunic; indeed, many have the entire front gathered, and it is scarcely possible to introduce too many gatherings in any dress to be quite in the fashion. These gaugings appear on the trimmings, on the sleeves, and also on the collar-piece now so fashionable. Frillings are going out, and box-plaitings have taken their place where plaitings are worn at all; but box-plaited and kilt-plaited flounces or bouillonnés are newer. These have the upper edge plaited, the lower one gathered; and in stripes great pains are taken to prevent the colour being hidden, and to show the stripes with regularity. Unfortunately these puffs or bouillonné flounces soon get out of order.

Short skirts are de rigueur for daily wear, but long trains, well supported by a balayette, for evening and full dress. Much gold braid and gold embroidery are applied to dresses; but steel is the particular fashion, and steel and jet, and steel passementerie alone. Steel run net, steel fringes, and steel laces find their place on the best dresses; and some of the richest evening dresses have black net over-skirts embroidered with steel bugles. Large upstanding ruffs, worked in silk, steel, or gold, are also worn and supported by wire—these are mostly for dinner dresses.

Fewer seams are introduced on the bodices; and for young figures many are cut on the cross so that there is no seam on the shoulders. The sleeves are tight, and the bodices themselves much trimmed about the throat, or in draperies about the bodice. Long coat bodices are by no means gone out, and generally when the bodice is short in front there is a deep basque at the back.

Black will be fashionable all the summer; but the flounces, plaitings, puffings, and bows are lined with...