

The Silver Greyhound.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE QUEEN'S FOREIGN MESSENGER SERVICE.

BY J. HOLT SCHOOLING.



THE silver greyhound has been from time immemorial the badge set apart for the Queen's (or King's) Foreign Service Messengers. Most of us know that such persons exist, but there is only a very hazy notion of who Queen's Messengers are, and, beyond the fact that "they carry the despatches," very little is generally known about these gentlemen and their duties.

Catching a Queen's messenger is not the easiest thing in the world, as there are only nine of them, and, moreover, they are kept fairly actively employed—fifty to sixty thousand miles per annum is the average "mileage" of a Royal Courier. However, I have been finding out all I can about a very interesting and out-of-the-way bit of Foreign Office work, and I am now going to condense the results of my inquiries and interviews into a short account of the Queen's Foreign Messenger Service.

A "Q.F.S.M." is not to be had by any system of competitive examination as yet known to the official torturers of candidates for Government service. The very nature of their duties makes it imperative that these messengers should be men of good social position, and of whom something is known; for they carry the actual despatches sent to and fro our Foreign Office and the Embassies abroad, which are not in cipher, and which, on occasions, are big with the fate of nations. A slip in diplomacy, a single card prematurely played, or accidentally shown to an opposing Power, and—Poof! There might be a European war before the unlucky messenger could get back to Downing Street. The Turkey - Armenia - Venezuela - United-States-Transvaal-Germanic difficulty of last January showed us how very thin the diplo-

matic ice sometimes becomes, and how delicate are these little matters of International controversy.

But there *is* an examination to be passed before a man can be appointed Queen's Foreign Service Messenger: after a candidate has been nominated by the Secretary of State, he must satisfy the Civil Service Commissioner that he is between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five; that he is a British subject; that he has a good knowledge of either French, German, or Italian; that he has such a knowledge of the first four rules of arithmetic as will enable him to make out his accounts in the simplest form; that he possesses sound bodily health [the physical examination is a very severe one]; and that he is able to ride and to perform journeys on horseback. The necessity for expert horsemanship is not, of course, so great now as it was before the extension of railways, when a Queen's Messenger would ride continuously for five or six days.

On one occasion, and in the depth of

winter, a Q.M., bearing very important despatches to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, covered the last 820 miles of his journey on horseback, in the record time of five days and eleven hours. However, and as one of these Royal Couriers told me just after his return from St. Petersburg, the continuous and prolonged railway travelling is very trying to even the strongest man: an average of one thousand miles per week, year in and year out, is travelling enough to glut the appetite of the most hardened traveller, and this fact may perhaps be one of the reasons why retired Queen's Messengers go and bury themselves in quiet, out-of-the-way country places.

The badge shown in No. 1 is a handsome piece of silver-gilt work, with a silver greyhound



No. 1.—The Badge always carried on the person by a Queen's Foreign Service Messenger when on duty.



No. 2.—A Foreign Office Despatch-bag, sealed, and addressed to the British Ambassador at Constantinople; ready for delivery to a Queen's Foreign Service Messenger.

hanging to it, and the whole thing is just over five inches long. At the back there is engraved the "No." of the Messenger who carries the badge, and "Foreign Office, V.R. 1876" (the date of the appointment). By the Foreign Office Regulations which apply to Queen's Messengers this badge is to be worn round the neck—a regulation more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Also by the Regulations, a special uniform ought to be worn when on duty—but it never is, except in war-time. The uniform consists of a dark blue cloth double-breasted frock-coat, with turn-down collar; blue single-breasted waistcoat, buttoned up to the throat, with edging of gold lace; trousers of Oxford mixture, with a scarlet cord down the side seams; gilt buttons embossed with the Royal Cipher, encircled by the Crown and Garter, and having a greyhound pendant; blue cloth cap with leather peak, band of black braid, and the Royal Cipher and Crown gilt in front.

The pay of a Queen's Messenger is £400 a year, with an allowance of £1 per day for subsistence whilst on actual duty, all travelling expenses being, of course, paid by Government. A messenger is engaged on actual service during rather less than one-half of the days in a year, for we must omit annual holidays and the intervals between each journey, so that he would thus receive about £150 + £400 = £550 per annum. There is also the advantage of a pension on retirement from the Service.

In No. 2 we have a picture of a bag of despatches sealed and addressed to Sir Philip Currie, Ambassador at Constantinople, and ready to be handed over to a Queen's Messenger. This bag was done up just at the time when the Turkish-Armenian trouble was at its height, and I dare say a good many bags similar to that shown here were handed to Queen's Messengers for safe bestowal in their large leather bag. This one is of fine white canvas, about eighteen inches long, and, like all these despatch-bags, it was tied and sealed by the Chief Clerk at the F.O., Henry A. W. Hervey, Esquire, whose courteous assistance was of great value in the preparation of this article.

I asked Mr. Hervey if a despatch-bag had ever been lost by a Queen's Messenger, and I learnt that there was no record of this having happened. Many years ago, when Mr. Hervey was, as a F.O. clerk, acting as substitute for a Royal Courier, his travelling carriage was upset in the snow near Berlin, and he and his despatches were temporarily separated—but the bag was found and the journey completed.

No. 3 shows the label attached to the bag in No. 2, and Lord Salisbury's signature can be read at the left hand, partly covered by the Royal Seal.

I have described the uniform that *ought* to be worn by these Royal Messengers, and in No. 4 there is a picture of Mr. Harry Taylor ready for a Russian journey with despatches



No. 3.—The Label on the Foreign Office Despatch-bag shown in No. 2.

—not much uniform, but the badge is in his pocket. Mr. Taylor told me that, with one exception, he and his comrades receive the utmost attention and civility on the European railways. The one exception is the Paris-Mediterranean line that runs south to the Riviera; and Mr. Taylor evidently has some cause to dislike the management of this line, for he asked me to mention the fact just stated.

Another thing which Mr. Taylor said ought to be known is the remarkable hospitality received by Queen's Messengers from the Ambassadors abroad, and, indeed, from society generally in all the European cities. So fêted are these gentlemen when they arrive in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, etc., and so onerous are their social duties, that one Q.M. is reputed to keep a new silk hat in every European capital ready to don when he gets rid of his travelling gear.

Queen's Messengers are largely recruited from officers in the Army, and this, with the very responsible nature of their duties, may go some way to account for the fact that, when on duty, they are very important personages. Perhaps some of my older readers who have chanced to be at Charing Cross Station when the outward Continental mail has been at the platform, have seen a great, big man marching down the platform, shouting "Room for Her Majesty's Despatches!" The late Cecil Johnstone had this idiosyncrasy, and he it was who, when in charge of despatches to the United States, was invited to visit Niagara, rooms in the hotel being reserved for him which had the best view of the Falls. The burly Q.M. marched into his room, followed by an attendant and by

two porters with his luggage. He strode up to the window overlooking the Falls, and then, turning to the obsequious attendant, exclaimed, "Does that d—d thing never stop?" as he pointed to the rushing water. History does not record the man's reply.

Three or four years ago, the Q.M. who told me this Niagara story was travelling on a French railway, and had reserved a compartment for himself and his despatches. The German Ambassador in Constantinople, Herr Von Radowitz, son-in-law of Prince

Bismarck, happened to be travelling along the same line, and, on the arrival of the train which contained our Queen's Messenger, the Ambassador was very anxious to secure a compartment. The station-master went along the train, and then reported to His Excellency's private secretary that there was only one reserved compartment, and only one occupant of it—"but he is a Queen's Messenger, something more than an Ambassador"; the actual words spoken to the discomfited German Ambassador by his private secretary being: "J'ai fait demander, M'sieur l'Ambassadeur, mais il paraît que sur ce train ci les Ambassadeurs et les Couriers de la Reine sont sur le même plan." (*I*

have made inquiry, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, but it seems that on this train Ambassadors and Queen's Messengers are on the same footing).

Just now, I referred to a journey with despatches to the United States. For a good many years, about fifteen, the Foreign Office has ceased to send Queen's Messengers to Washington: the despatches are now sent in the care of the captain of one of the liners, who hands them over to an official from the British Embassy.



No. 4.—HARRY A. TAYLOR, Esquire, ready for a St. Petersburg journey.
From a Photo. by C. Vandyk.

"Our orders are: 'Go the shortest way in the shortest time'"—said to me a Q.M. who once had to start for Constantinople in his dress clothes; and, in No. 5, I show a diagram of Europe which emphasizes this order, and which illustrates the lines of travel most often frequented by these "silver greyhounds."

Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Brussels, Constantinople, St. Petersburg, are the cities most frequently visited; there are occasional

list hold themselves in readiness to start at a moment's notice. Sometimes, of course, there is a run on all available Messengers, and, in this connection, I may relate an amusing incident that happened to one of them.

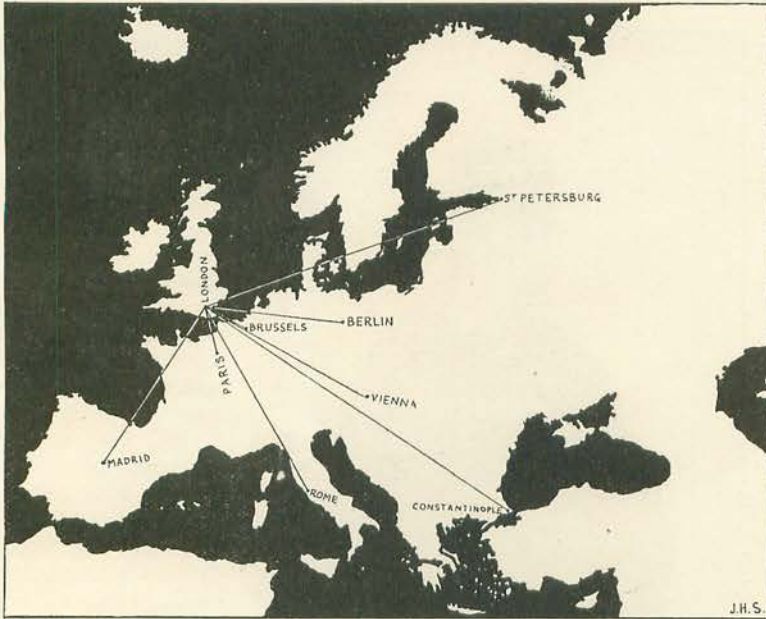
Captain A., having just returned from St. Petersburg, saw his name placed at the bottom of the list of Messengers ready for duty, and decided to spend his anticipated fortnight in the south of France. About a

week after his arrival at Monte Carlo, he was startled and annoyed by the receipt of the following strange and apparently impertinent telegram from head-quarters: "Chief Clerk, Foreign Office, to Captain A. You are fast and dirty. Return at once."

Having puzzled awhile over this enigma, it occurred to Captain A. that, whatever might be the explanation of the first sentence, the last was an order which his sense of duty compelled him to obey.

So he packed his traps and returned forthwith, to find on his arrival at Downing Street, that the telegram, as originally dispatched, ran as follows: "You are first on duty. Return at once."

The most famous Queen's Messenger now living is the gentleman whose portrait is shown in No. 6—Conway F. C. Seymour, Esquire. The most notable Q.M. of modern days, and who is no longer living, was the Cecil Johnstone about whom I have narrated the little Niagara story as it was told to me by a present member of this honourable corps. He was a man of immense physique, and his personal demeanour commanded the greatest respect and attention from officials of every class and nationality. To him the most difficult journey might be intrusted, with the certainty that he would turn up at the desired spot at any given moment, true to time. When at length the cruel hand of time brought about the moment



No. 5.—"Our orders are: 'Go the shortest way in the shortest time . . .'"

journeys to Madrid and Rome, and once a month a Q.M. sets out for Teheran. Messengers are dispatched every Wednesday to Brussels and Berlin, every alternate Wednesday to St. Petersburg, and every alternate Tuesday to Constantinople. There is a long list printed each month for use at the Foreign Office, which contains the details of every F.O. despatch-bag and Q.M. to be sent away during the month.

As a rule, the Queen's Messengers are not called upon to start so suddenly as was the gentleman who had to rush off to Constantinople without having time to change his clothes: each of them knows that, in ordinary circumstances, he will, on such and such a date, be due to start for one or other of the European centres, and as those messengers who have just returned are placed at the bottom of the list of future despatches to be sent away, only the two or three gentlemen whose names are at the top of the

for the gallant Q.M. to retire upon a pension, it is said that he was loth to quit his long familiar work, and that, seeking an interview with the Foreign Secretary, he said, "Well, my lord, if I must retire, I must; but all I can say is that I am willing to ride, swim, walk, or run with any man of my age in the three kingdoms for a thousand pounds!"—and there is little doubt that he would have won his wager.

I have already mentioned the answer I received at the Foreign Office to my inquiry about the loss of despatch-bags by Queen's Messengers, and, among the adventures of these trusty couriers, there is included the following incident, which went very near to being a most serious diplomatic "accident."

Once, when Great Britain was on the verge of a war with a great Continental Power, a certain Q.M. was intrusted with despatches of the highest importance, and was instructed to make the best of his way *via* Athens to Constantinople, in order to deliver them to the British Ambassador in the latter city. The route chosen was by Marseilles, and thence by sea to Athens, where, the messenger was told, an English man-of-war would be on the look out, and take him on to Constantinople. The Q.M. embarked in due time at Marseilles on board a vessel bound for Athens, and after a good voyage was approaching his destination. When, however, the vessel was just rounding the point of land some little distance before the harbour of the Piræus is reached, a man-of-war's boat, manned by sailors in the British uniform, and flying the British flag, was seen coming round the opposite point, and signalling the in-coming vessel. The

Queen's Messenger accordingly asked the captain to heave to, in order that he might be put on board the boat sent to fetch him. The captain at first demurred, saying it was an inconvenient spot to stop in, that the British man-of-war must be in the harbour of the Piræus, and that the Q.M. could more easily go on board of her there. Ultimately,

however, at the messenger's renewed request, the captain was about to stop his ship, when, from the opposite direction, was seen coming from the harbour a second British man-of-war's boat, rowing towards them at full speed, and signalling violently. Immediately this second boat came into view, the first boat turned round, and rowing quickly round the opposite point, disappeared from sight. The second boat on nearing the vessel was found to be in command of a British naval officer, and the Q.M. was soon safely deposited on board the British man-of-war in the harbour. Subsequent investigation is said to have made it evident that an attempt had been made to kidnap the Queen's Messenger with his important despatches, by means of a boat got up under false colours! I cannot, of course, personally vouch for the whole truth of this strange incident, but a



No. 6.—CONWAY F. C. SEYMOUR, Esquire, the *doyen* of Queen's Messengers.
By permission of the Editor of "Vanity Fair."

Q.M. of fifteen years' service told me that the authority responsible for it is someone behind the scenes of Foreign Office experience.

Ready wit, prompt courage, and quick resource in difficulty are some of the cardinal points of a good Messenger, and in this connection I may tell a little tale of one of our Queen's Messengers which, although it refers to events of many years ago, is yet a

sample of what might even nowadays be expected from a Q.M. in times of political disturbance and anxiety.

A burning political question had arisen at a certain European capital, in which question both Great Britain and another great Power were largely interested. Two messengers were dispatched from that capital one evening. One, an English Foreign Service Messenger, conveying despatches of a most pressing nature, regarding the pending controversy, to be delivered in Downing Street to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; the other, a courier of the great Power in question, charged with the conveyance of similar intelligence to his Ambassador in London. Both messengers were strictly enjoined not to lose a moment on the road, but to press on at the highest possible rate of speed. The Englishman, however, was privately informed that if he could by any means outstrip his colleague, or delay him on the way, so as to place the despatches in the hands of the Secretary of State before the Foreign Ambassador in London could have received the same information, the time thus gained would be of great advantage to England.

The two messengers fraternized on the journey to London, the Englishman all the while casting about for any scheme whereby he might delay his companion, or advance himself. No possible opening presented itself until Calais was reached, when fortune favoured his enterprise in the shape of a severe storm, which prevented the mail-boat from getting away from Calais harbour that night. The astute Q.M. at once saw and grasped his chance. Approaching his travelling companion, he proposed that, as the boat could not start that evening, they should at once seek quarters for the night at the neighbouring hotel. No sooner said than done; the foreign courier seeing no help for it, and easy in the thought that his English colleague was in the same plight as himself, willingly consented, in the circumstances, to take a night's rest, and the two speedily reached the hotel and engaged their beds. Directly, however, the English messenger had seen his foreign companion safe into his bedroom, he himself, instead of going to his room, quietly slipped out of the hotel. By dint of liberal offers of money he at length succeeded in persuading the owner of a lugger in port

to face the stormy passage to Dover. A start was soon made, and, after a very rough passage, this stout-hearted Queen's Messenger had the satisfaction to place his foot on British soil a good twelve hours ahead of his rival. He hurried up to London, and safely delivered his precious despatches. It is said that the Foreign Secretary gave this Q.M. an honorarium of 100 guineas, on the spot, as a token of his admiration for the pluck and resourceful energy displayed by the feat, the success of which enabled the Minister to deal with a critical International question as the sole possessor—for twelve hours—of most important information, and in such a way as to secure the best interests of this country.

This episode serves to illustrate the very important duties of these Royal couriers,

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*Wm. Robert Arthur Talbot Sackville Cecil,
Marquess of Salisbury, Earl of Salisbury,
Viscount Cranborne, Baron Cecil, a Peer of the
United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland, a Member of
Her Britannic Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council,
Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Her Majesty's
Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c. &c.*

*Request and require in the Name of
Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow*

*John Holt Schoaling (British Subject) travelling
on the Continent*

*to pass freely without let or hindrance, and to afford him every
assistance and protection of which he may stand in need.*

Given at the Foreign Office London, the 22 day of March 1895



Signature of the Bearer

John Holt Schoaling.



Salisbury

No. 7.—A Foreign Office Passport, nearly identical with that carried by a Queen's Messenger when carrying despatches.

[The black patch covers a stamp which cannot legally be shown here.]



No. 8.—Captain PHILIP H. M. WYNTER, Queen's Messenger.
From a Photo. by W. Forshaw, Oxford.

and if such incidents do not occur as part of the daily routine of a Queen's Messenger's life, the outbreak of war between European Powers may at any time render the Service one of danger, and expose the Messenger to hairbreadth escapes and to all the vicissitudes of war. During the Franco-German War, in 1870, Captain Robbins, when employed on Queen's Messenger Service, was as nearly as possible shot as a spy by the French. The badge he produced (see No. 1), and his passport (see No. 7), were totally disregarded as evidences of his official mission, and he was saved from death only by the friendly action of the landlord of his hotel, aided by a lucky chance.

The passport in No. 7 is not quite identical with that always carried by a Q.M. when he is on duty, but the difference is very slight. A Queen's Messenger's special passport has the Royal Arms in red instead of in black, as in No. 7, and the words "Courier's Passport" appear above the crown. In all other respects—so I am told by one of the messengers—these special passports for the Silver Greyhounds of the Foreign Office are identical with that facsimiled in No. 7. The coat of arms at the bottom, at the left of Lord Salisbury's signature, is that of the great House of Cecil, and Lord Salisbury's motto, which is seen on the scroll, *Sero sed Serio*, means *Late, but in earnest*. The black patch in the bottom left-hand corner of No. 7 covers the stamp, to show which, I am told, might entail the confiscation of the whole of the present issue of this Magazine, besides

being the possible cause of other calamities too dreadful to mention.

By the way, it may be useful to say that a passport is always worth taking abroad when one travels. We may not have occasion to use it, but if any difficulty arise [and in these days of amateur photographers and jealous French and German sentries, difficulties *do* arise] the possession of a passport goes a long way to smooth things down, and to prove to a suspicious military or police official that you are really an English tourist, and not a spy in the disguise of one.

In Nos. 8 and 9 are two more portraits of Queen's Messengers, Captain Philip H. M. Wynter and Captain the Hon. Hugh H. Hare. Inspection of these photographs suggests that neither of these gentlemen, and especially Captain Wynter, could be easily deterred or circumvented in the delivery of the despatches intrusted to them. Incidentally, I may say that the duties of a Q.M. are not entirely confined to the conveyance of the despatch-bags to and fro our Foreign Office in Downing Street and the British Embassies abroad. For example, when the Queen or the Secretary for Foreign Affairs is out of England, one or more of these "silver greyhounds" is constantly travelling to and fro with Royal and official despatches; similarly, when the Prince of Wales is travelling as the Prince of Wales [not when he travels as Count—] the duties of a Queen's Messenger extend to the conveyance of despatches to and from the Prince.



No. 9.—Captain the Hon. HUGH H. HARE, Queen's Messenger.

From a Photo. by Abdullah Frères, Constantinople.

The 8.15 p.m. Continental mail from Charing Cross is the train most used by Queen's Messengers for setting out on their journeys, and sometimes when political affairs are strained, and when there is a high degree of diplomatic pressure, as in January last, a scanty "grace" of ten minutes or so is allowed for the departing courier to catch this 8.15 train to the Continent. In the case of illness or accident interfering with the fulfilment of his duty by a Q.M., one of the Foreign Office clerks would be sent with the despatches if no other Queen's Messenger were immediately available; and a Park Lane physician is retained by the Foreign Office

the pleasure of paying for it ourselves." The late Major Byng Hall was no less famous as a collector of works of art and of curios than as a Queen's Messenger. His house at Petersham was stored with the fruits of his many travels, and, in No. 10, I show a picture of the gallant Major surrounded by his treasures.

As regards the future of this very interesting Queen's Foreign Message Service, it may be safely said that so long as we have diplomatists to look after our interests abroad, so long shall we have Queen's Messengers. But if a time should come when Ambassadors are improved out of existence, why then we



NO. 10.—The late Major H. BYNG HALL, Queen's Messenger, surrounded by the fruits of his many travels.

for special service in connection with the Queen's Foreign Messenger Service.

Some of the incidents I have narrated show that the bearers of these important despatches—which, as I have already stated, are not in cipher—must not only be well supplied with ready money for travelling expenses, but that they must have considerable latitude allowed to them as regards the mode of travelling, especially when on urgent business. I asked one of the Messengers if members of the corps were allowed by the Regulations to charter a special train or a special steamer, and his answer was: "Yes, if there's cause for it, but if we engage a special train without due necessity, we have

shall have no despatches to send to them. It may be that the Foreign Secretary of State will, at some future date, sit in his chair at Downing Street, surrounded by Continental telephone tubes, and, speaking an International volapuk, will personally settle with Foreign States all those affairs which are now handled by our Ambassadors abroad: meanwhile, and until this ideal state of things is realized, the "Silver Greyhounds" of the Foreign Office will continue to perform their many journeys, and to combine with the fulfilment of their duties the very important capacity of "being silent in five languages"—a gift of the highest value to a Queen's Messenger.