

The G.F.O. Museum.

By FRAMLEY STEELCROFT.



HE high officials at the G.P.O., from Mr. Lamb downwards, took an interest in the preparation of this article, and hence it is that the contents of the museum are now made public for the first time. Now, the Post Office records go back a long way; they even mention David's letter to Joab, the result of which was murder. It will serve our purpose, however, to commence with the bad old days of the last century, when

carried the mails between York and Selby was stopped by an armed footpad, who "collected" the whole of the mails. He also removed the bridle of the postboy's horse, and a few minutes later the animal galloped away with his helpless rider.

It seemed a pretty hopeless business. The postboy himself could give no detailed description of the robber. "He was dressed in a drab jacket, and had the appearance of being a hicklar"—not much of a clue, this.

A reward of £200 was offered for the apprehension of the highwayman, but he was never found—nor was the missing mail-bag, until nearly eighty years later. In 1876 an old wayside inn was being demolished at Churchill, near Selby, and in the rafters the workmen found a worn and rotten coat, a sou'-wester hat, and the long-lost mail-bag—the one seized by the highwayman in 1798 and reproduced in our illustration. In digging fresh foundations on the site of the old hostelry, a number of skeletons also came to light, telling of foul play at the old inn.

There was always some subtle affinity between inns and highwaymen. The accompanying notice (No. 2), delivered with every letter in that particular bag, tells its own tale. The Post Office thought it necessary to issue this notice by way of explaining the otherwise unaccountable delay in delivery.



NO. 1.—THE STOLEN MAIL-BAG.

mail robberies were common occurrences, and no one took life seriously.

The oil-canvas mail-bag here shown (No. 1) is an interesting relic. Here is its history, as given us by Mr. J. G. Hendy, the indefatigable curator of the museum. One evening in February, 1798, the postboy who

This Letter was enclosed in the NEWPORT Letter Bag, for LONDON, of 6th Nov. 1822, which had been stolen, and was found on the 17th Inst. concealed over a Hay-Loft at the New PASSAGE INN, with the Contents mutilated.

GENERAL POST-OFFICE,
21st July, 1824.

Printed by J. Harpell, Wine-Office-Court, Fleet Street,
for the Railway & Stationery Office.

NO. 2.—NOTICE ISSUED WITH RECOVERED LETTERS.

£1000 Reward.

STOLEN

FROM THE IPSWICH MAIL,
On its way from London, on the Night
of the 11th Sept. Inst. the following

COUNTRY BANK NOTES:

Ipswich Bank, 5, & 10l. Notes.

ALEXANDERS & Co. on HOARE & Co.

Woodbridge Bank, 1, 5, & 10l. Notes

ALEXANDERS & Co. on FRYS & CO.

Manningtree Bank, 1, 5, & 10l. Notes.

ALEXANDERS & Co. on FRYS & Co.

Hadleigh Bank 1, 5, & 10l. Notes.

ALEXANDERS & Co. on FRYS & Co.

Particulars of which will be furnished at the different Bankers.

Whoever will give Information, either at **ALEXANDERS and Co.** or at **FRYS and Co. St. Mildred's Court, Poultry**, so that the Parties may be apprehended, shall on his or their Conviction, and the Recovery of the Property, receive the above **REWARD**

Printed by S. COUCHMAN, 10, Throgmorton Street, London.

NO. 3.—REWARD BILL FOR APPREHENSION OF THE ROBBERS OF THE IPSWICH MAIL.

The startling poster next reproduced (No. 3) is one of the first things that attract the eye on entering the G.P.O. Museum. The Ipswich mail was "held up" in the most approved style on the night of September 11th, 1822. And it was well worth while, for the booty amounted to £31,199 in bank-notes. The reward was afterwards increased to £5,000, or £2,000 for the conviction of the highwaymen without recovering the notes. These latter were printed in black ink, but the banks interested began immediately to print their notes in red ink, and warned all whom it might concern not to accept the black-printed notes, save from people well known to them.

The curiosity next seen (No. 4) is the skin shed by a snake whilst detained at the Returned Letter Office. The undeliverable letters, packets, etc., at the R.L.O. contain a miscellaneous lot of things. Here is a list compiled from memory by one of the officials: Bank-notes, cash, jewellery, books, music, gloves, cheques, postal-orders, legal documents, false teeth, dress-improvers, puddings,

Vol. xiv.—28.

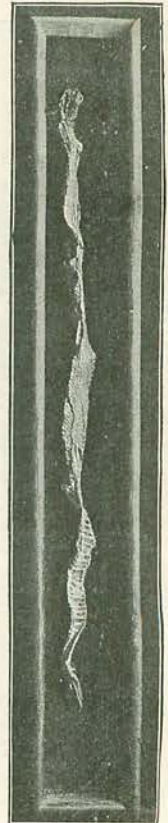
hats, bags, snakes, umbrellas, fishing tackle, boots, foods, etc.

The R.L.O. used to be called the Dead Letter Office. Frequently, however, the "dead" letters are found to be very much alive. Leeches, lizards, salamanders, frogs, tame rats and mice, tarantula spiders, weazels, young alligators, cats and dogs, tortoises, bees, pigeons—all these and many other live specimens have found their way to the Dead Letter Office. Once a dormouse turned up in a box. It was put aside until claimed. When the owner applied for it it was found to have escaped. Three months later the little animal was discovered by a clerk in the middle of a ball of string, enjoying its

winter sleep!

This leads one on to the narration of curious post-office incidents. A Portuguese once handed in this telegram: "Is ar 8." He had to be cross-examined in French and Spanish before it became clear that the message was meant for: "It is all right."

In connection with the many excellent stories set down herein, I may explain that the G.P.O. daily receives a vast number of official reports. From this stupendous mass of miscellaneous matter, curiosities and *facetie* are sometimes gleaned. Being absolutely true, the incidents and anecdotes are the more remarkable. Here, for instance, is a capital story: A few months ago there was



NO. 4.—SKIN OF SNAKE SENT IN LETTER.

no end of excitement among the foreign population of East London. They were popping in and out of the post-offices all day long, making anxious inquiries. What was the matter with them? Why, they had heard grave rumours about the *validity of Anglican orders*, and they were therefore anxious not to run undue risks in buying the paper money of the British Post Office!

A funny telegraphic misunderstanding: Mr. F. Litchfield, the well-known art dealer, exhibited some panels of old tapestry at the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition. Wanting one of these returned, he wired: "Please send panel 8 x 10—Venus and Adonis—Litchfield." The departmental head of the exhibition was away, and his clerk returned the message to the Post Office as "not understandable." The Post Office people, struck with a bright idea, then transmitted the telegram to the city of Lichfield, and received the following reply: "No such firm as Venus and Adonis known here. Try Manchester!"

The next illustration (No. 5) from the



NO. 5.—MAIL-BAG FROM WHICH BANK DRAFT FOR £420 WAS LOST.

IF THE
YOUTH
WHO
Left his
FRIENDS,

On the Night of **THURSDAY**,
the **26th of February**, will return
to them, he may be assured of
being **RECEIVED** with **EVERY**
KINDNESS.

March 3, 1818.

BILLS printed at the HOUSE'S Press, by W. GLINDON, RUFERT STREET, Haymarket, London.

NO. 6.—SPECIMEN OF THE OLD BILLS ISSUED BY THE
POST OFFICE.

G.P.O. Museum shows an old leather mail-bag, which was in circulation for many years between Limerick and Monasterevin. This was before 1836. This bag used to be slung outside the coach. It was an old bag, and the local officials had constantly applied, but in vain, for a new one. At last the crash came. A letter containing a bank draft for £420 was lost out of the hole in the bottom and never recovered. Then the bag was changed without delay.

Oh, the curiosities of those reports in the museum! A telegram was once sent to Thomas Brown, of Chapel Street, —. It couldn't be delivered, for the curious reason that everybody in that village was known by a nickname, and in the absence of Mr. Brown's nickname nobody knew anything about him. The record "poser" put to the Post Office would be hard to find, but this will do: "On what date and at what time should a telegram be handed in at Land's End in order to be delivered in Honolulu exactly at nine o'clock on Christmas morning? What would be the charge, and what the best route to send the message?"

It is an interesting fact that before the police organ, *Hue and Cry*, was established, the Post Office undertook the distribution of all kinds of inquiries, rewards, and police notices. The above reproduction (No. 6)

is merely one handbill out of thousands preserved in the museum. These handbills were distributed by the mail-coach guards among the country towns and villages. They referred to "horrid murders," absconding bankrupts, and missing property or friends.

Those were free and easy times. One letter in the Muniment-room, dated from Lombard Street, 3rd July, 1819, jogs the memory of the secretary (Mr. Freeling) on the subject of "two kegs of the finest Dutch herrings," which were to be sent direct to Carlton House for the Prince Regent. These breakfast delicacies were to be put under Post Office care and cover, presumably to save the expense of carriage! Talking of the mail-coach drivers and guards reminds us that those worthies offered strange excuses for unpunctuality. They used to declare that when they left London the Metropolis was on fire in several places, and that an armed and riotous mob had stopped the mails! This sort of thing so alarmed the country people in those days (when railways and telegraphs were non-existent) that the Postmaster-General was forced to issue reassuring proclamations. Subsequently the Department thought it advisable to become a sort of news agency. Here is one of its "specials":—

"Whitehall, 28th January, 1817.—His Royal Highness the Prince Regent was assaulted in his carriage as he returned in state to-day from the House of Lords, and his person endangered. The most effectual means are taken to preserve the public peace, and all is quiet in the Metropolis." But nothing illustrates the dearth of news better than the old

General Post Office,

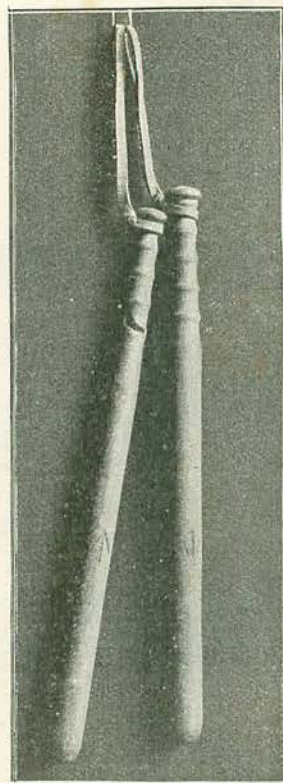
February 10, 1821.

Mr. FREELING requests the Postmaster to make Enquiries of the Master of any Ship arriving from JAMAICA, into the STATE of the DUKE of MANCHESTER'S HEALTH, and inform him of the result by the first Post.

NO. 7.—CURIOUS HANDBILL ISSUED BY THE POST OFFICE.

handbill here reproduced (No. 7). The Duke of Manchester, it should be explained, was Postmaster-General, and he had gone to Jamaica for the benefit of his health. No one can fail to be struck by the curious manner in which the secretary of the Post Office seeks to gain news of his absent chief.

Two of the identical staffs issued to the Post Office *employés* during the Chartist Riots of 1839 are next reproduced (No. 8). It was our own artist who photographed these, as well as



NO. 8.—TWO OF THE STAFFS ISSUED TO POSTMEN DURING THE CHARTIST RIOTS.

all the other relics and curios in the G.P.O. Museum. The Chartists, as everyone knows, took their name from the People's Charter, which contained six sweeping changes in the Constitution of the country. One of the first of the riots broke out at Newport, under John Frost. In those troubled days all ranks in the postal service, from the humblest clerk to his unapproachable "chief," were provided with these staffs in order that they might act as special constables when occasion arose.

A very interesting relic is the ancient tome which Mr. Hendy, the curator, rescued from destruction in a damp cellar at the G.P.O. It is a manuscript book, dated 1678, and it contains the accounts of the Post Office when that Department was the private perquisite of the Duke of York, brother to Charles II. Old brass-bound watches, which were formerly used by mail guards, and were regulated and locked at head-quarters to prevent tampering; thrilling records of the stirring fights of the Post Office packets; ponderous pistols that recalled the highwayman era; a "short" account of the revenues

of the Post Office in 1784 (a narrow parchment over 15ft. long); these and hundreds of other quaint objects are to be seen in this museum.

The letter here reproduced (No. 9) has a very interesting history. At 5.45 on the 19th of November, 1862, the P. and O. liner *Colombo* struck on a sharp reef at Minicay Island.



NO. 9.—LETTER RECOVERED FROM THE WRECK OF THE "COLOMBO."

The vessel was on her way to Aden from Point de Galle. She went to pieces very quickly. All lives were saved, but only part of the mails. Some months later, however, another attempt was made to recover the remaining mail-bags, and these were at length fished up from the bottom of the sea. Then came an extraordinary scene at the G.P.O. The mails from Australia and the East arrived in London in a deplorable condition—mostly pulp, in fact. For days, hundreds of the more recognisable letters were toasted on huge gridirons erected in front of enormous fires in the clerks' kitchens. The stench was intolerable and penetrated everywhere. Money and trinkets dropped from the letters as they were handled, but there was a general patching-up and sealing when the ill-fated missives were sufficiently baked. Eventually many went to their destinations specially stamped, "Saved from the wreck of the *Colombo*."

The letter reproduced above was one of these. It had been written upon a vessel on the Yang-tse-Kiang River, by a sailor, named Peterson, to his father in London. Peterson senior worked at Maudslay's, the great engineers, of Lambeth. Although the letter had been three months at the bottom of the sea, the writing was perfectly legible.

One learns that there are some very interesting Post Office curios scattered up

and down the country. Whenever possible these are acquired by the museum; but the Mail Coach Pillar, on the Brecon Road, is not exactly portable. This pillar is erected 2½ miles from Llandoverly, "as a caution to Mail-Coach Drivers to keep from intoxication." The inscription goes on to say that the pillar was erected in memory of

the Gloucester and Carmarthen Mail Coach, driven by Edward Jenkins, December 19th, 1833. Edward, unhappily, was drunk at the time. He drove the mail on the wrong side of the road, met a cart coming the other way, and then lost control over his leaders, who swerved violently. Next moment the whole concern went down over the precipice, 121ft.

"At the bottom, near the river, it came against an ash tree, when the coach was dashed into several pieces." The inscription gives the names of the outside passengers who were killed. Finally, we read on the pillar that it was "erected by John Bull, inspector of mail coaches, with the aid of £13 16s. 6d. received by him from forty-one subscribers, in the year 1841."

Obviously the Post Office is brought into contact with all sorts and conditions of people. Therefore are many of its stories delicious. Here is an incident related by an official: "A town post-office had been closed, as the receiver had been suspended. I was one day walking up from the station to speak to the postmaster, when on passing the closed office I saw two ladies reading, with evident amusement, a notice on the shutters. Here is that notice: 'This office is closed temporary, by order.'

"I tore the paper down and took it to the district head office. The postmaster there said it was 'a villainous exhibition, calculated to bring the Department into discredit.' He thought a little, and then sat down and wrote: 'This office is closed temporary.'

"To this also I objected, much to his amazement, and after a long argument he sent his daughter upstairs for a ponderous dictionary. Having consulted this he sat down and pro-

January 31st 1774

Sir,

I have received the commands of His Majesty's Postmaster-General to signify to you that they find it necessary to dismiss you from being any longer Their Deputy for America; you will therefore cause your accounts to be made up as soon as you can conveniently

Yours, Sir,

Wm. Franklin.

Your most humble servant
Arthur Todd Self

NO. 10.—LETTER DISMISSING BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FROM THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY POSTMASTER-GENERAL FOR AMERICA.

duced the following: 'This office is closed temporarily.'

Yet another capital story, saved from a local report. An old woman wanted to send a pair of trousers to her son, and she claimed to be able to send the parcel by book-post, as its contents came under the heading of "articles and packets *open at both ends!*" Strange and fearful suggestions are constantly being made to the Department. Here is one: "On payment of a small extra fee, telegrams relating to death, etc., might be inclosed in envelopes of distinctive hue, so as to avoid unnecessary shock to the recipients!"

Perhaps the most interesting of all the old letters in the museum records is the one here reproduced (No. 10). It notifies to Benjamin Franklin his dismissal from his office as Deputy Postmaster-General for America. Really, very few people seem to be aware that among the many distinguished servants of the Department Franklin must be numbered. The great statesman and scientist was appointed "Deputy Postmaster-General for the Colonies of North America" on August 12th, 1761. This warrant is signed by the Earl of Bessborough and Robert Hampden. Franklin (who is popularly remembered as the man who brought down the lightning from heaven by means of a kite) continued to hold his incongruous post until the outbreak of the War of Independence. After the date of the letter reproduced, he continued for some time to correspond with the Department about his

accounts. Some of that correspondence was peculiar.

On March 24th, 1776, he wrote to the British Postmaster-General in London. Then came the war. In 1783 the British Post Office replied to Franklin's seven-year-old letter, the reply stating apologetically that the writer "had been out of town for a few days!" Surely a unique specimen of official correspondence.

Mention of interesting Post Office officials reminds us (let it not be accounted unto us for a ludicrous *non sequitur*) of old postwomen. The delightful old lady whose portrait is here reproduced (No. 11) is Jane Smith, auxiliary rural postwoman at Holsworthy. Jane is the oldest postwoman in the service, being seventy-four years of age. And yet she trudges ten miles every day delivering her letters and parcels. She has served twenty years as postwoman. We are also able to present the portrait of a postwoman of the London district (No. 12).



NO. 11.—JANE SMITH, THE OLDEST POSTWOMAN IN THE SERVICE. [Photograph.]

This photograph was taken in 1862. The original came to the Controller's office one day, from Hounslow, to make inquiries about her pension. When matters were settled, she offered her portrait (taken in full official uniform) to the clerk, but he refused to accept it, thinking probably that he would have to send it along to the Treasury with the pension papers. Another official, however, ran after the old lady and begged her to give him the rejected portrait.

Talking of post-women, at Sahiwal, in India, a native woman has delivered letters for twenty years, with credit to herself and to the entire satisfaction of the inhabitants. She is absolutely illiterate, but her wonderful knowledge of the residents enables her to deliver letters infallibly, once the address has been read to her.

Many of the officers of the Department have acquired distinction in more or less curious ways. Some are poets. Mr. W. J. Antill, postmaster of Hordle, near Lymington, has a distinction of his own. He claims to be the only man ever born under the roof of Old Temple Bar, in its single chamber over the central arch. His mother was caretaker at Child's Bank.

Very primitive is the postal service in the wilder parts of even Great Britain. Not long ago a crofter, named McDonald, while working on the shore in North Uist, saw a buoy floating in the water quite close to him. Bringing it ashore, he read on it, "To be opened." The contents were found to consist of five letters and five pence in coppers, also a note with a request to the finder to post the letters at the nearest post-office. This was done. The letters were addressed to friends in Skye and in Glasgow. The little mail-box had been sent adrift from St. Kilda, and had reached the point of landing (sixty miles) in little over a week.

The G.P.O. Museum is the fountain-head

of postal curiosities, concrete and otherwise. For, apart from tangible relics, there are preserved thousands of delightful anecdotes and funny stories.

These, however, are buried away in records and reports. Here is a curious story: A seafaring man went into a telegraph office at a great London terminus. He told the clerk he wanted to send a telegram. "Very well," said the official, "go over there and write it," pointing to the little compartment where the forms and pencils were kept. The man had his head buried in one of those for three-quarters of an hour. Then he came back. "I done it," he said. "Done what?" "Writ the telegram." "Well, where's the form?" The man stared. "He was told," he grumbled, "to go over there and write it." Well, he had. He had written his telegram *on the wall*.

Often, however, the story is against the postal officials. A French lady complained of the loss of many newspapers. The sub-postmaster of the village was instructed to ask her the titles of the newspapers. He did, and reported their names as follows: "*Il me manque. Plusiers. Journaux.*"

One of the Post Office surveyors overheard the following in a country town: Little Boy: "Mamma, how do the messages get past the poles without being torn?" Mother (sapiently): "They are sent in a fluid state, my dear." Startlingly comic incidents like the following are happily rare in the service. A dignified old lady one day entered — post-office (we are asked to suppress the name of the village) and asked: "How long will this letter take to reach my friend in Italy?" Quick as thought came the reply *apparently* from the counter-clerk: "On Friday, ma'am, *unless he's out with his organ.*" It was a ventriloquial joke, rude but funny, on the part of a young man who stood writing a telegram near the door.

The photo. next reproduced (No. 13) was



NO. 12.—POSTWOMAN OF THE LONDON DISTRICT, 1862.
From a Photograph.

taken by the driver of the ill-fated mail-cart shown. Here are the details of the incident : The driver of the Newport to Brecon mail-coach left Newport as usual at 2.20 a.m. one Monday, and he should have arrived at Abergavenny by 4.40. Near Llanellen, however, he found that the river had overflowed the roadway. The water was about level with the axles, when the horses jibbed and backed the cart into the ditch. The frantic struggles of the horses, aided by the rapidly rising water, speedily carried the cart over the hedge into an adjacent field, and as the harness held the horses to the cart, they were both drowned. The water rose higher still, and the distracted driver had to climb on to the top of the vehicle, among the out-

finds that the culprit has probably taken an overdose of opium or drowned himself in a well !

At Blantyre, British Central Africa, we find the postmen clad in long frock-coats, knickers, and fez, but no boots or stockings. They carry Snider rifles, which they treasure above all things—even the mails. One of these native mail-carriers was once taking a supply of stamps to the postmaster of M'pimbi. Crossing a swollen stream he came nigh unto death. He lost his mail-bag, but saved his beloved Snider.

In the same district (between M'pimbi and Zomba) the mail-carriers are frequently stopped by lions, and have to take refuge in trees. Yes, the Imperial British Post Office

has many hindrances. A sparrow who nested in a church (above all places !) was found to have its nest lined with unused and stolen penny stamps ; and rats have been known to steal postal-orders and square yards of half-penny stamps—all of which had to be made good by the postmistress.

The museum records also speak of an American humorist who put certain "rules and regulations" on

the outside of his letters. He intended to have these rules published subsequently in a *Post Office Gued*. This was the kind of thing : "A pair of onions will go for two scents." "Alligators over roft. in length are not allowed to be transmitted by mail," etc.

No one has any scruple about economizing at the expense of the Post Office. Listen to this capital story about the late Archbishop of Canterbury. He travelled a good deal, and therefore often found his bill for telegrams too heavy. He hit upon a capital scheme for reducing expenses. One day his chaplain was astonished to receive the following cryptogrammatic telegram : "John's Epistle III., 13, 14." Completely mystified, he turned to the text indicated, and read as follows : "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee ;



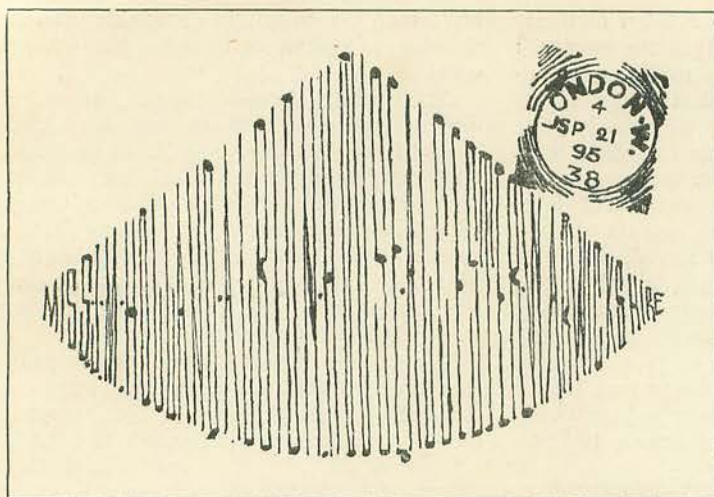
From a]

NO. 13.--THE ACCIDENT TO THE NEWPORT MAIL-CART.

[Photograph.

side parcels. Here he remained, shouting for help, till daylight. Even then his rescue was very difficult. The mail-bags and parcel-baskets were eventually reached and taken on to Abergavenny. Here the bags were opened by the postmistress, Miss Bigglestone, and the letters taken out and spread on trays in front of big fires. The practice of tying the letters tightly together in bundles saved them to a great extent, and in no case was the address wholly obliterated.

This reminds us of the difficulties with which this great Department of the public service frequently has to contend. The report of the Indian Post Office speaks of the stoppage of the mails by man-eating tigers and herds of wild elephants. The native postmaster's cash is occasionally deficient, and when the inspector comes round he



NO. 14.—A DIFFICULT ADDRESS.

but I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." The Primate, instead of investing in a costly code-book, had adopted the simple plan of using the Bible for the purpose of condensing into five words a communication which contained forty-five!

Then there are the people who laboriously prepare pictorial puzzle envelopes and addresses. We have selected a few of these for reproduction.

The accompanying envelope (No. 14) looks hopeless at first glance. It is a fair sample of the kind of thing which is specially invented to try the patience of the splendid staff of officials at the G.P.O. Hold it horizontally, on a level with the eyes, and you will read the address: "Miss J. M. Holland, Albion House, Alcester, Warwickshire."

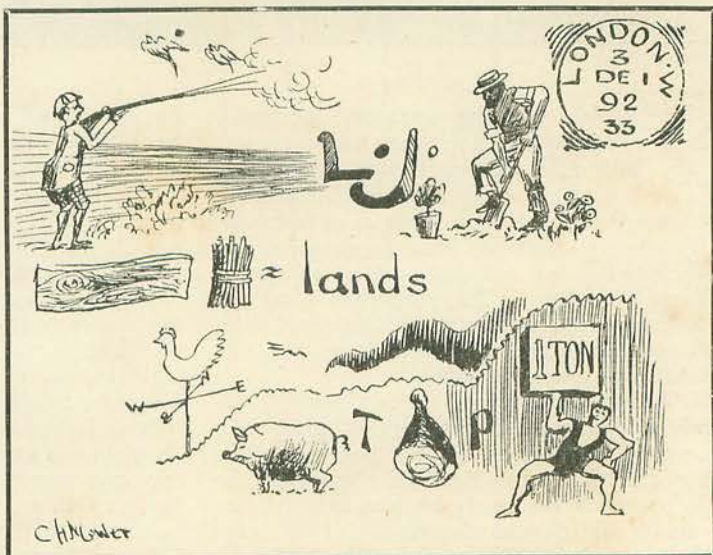
The next reproduction (No. 15), specially photographed from the Curious Address Books at the G.P.O. Museum, is even more typical of mis-directed ingenuity. This is a picture-puzzle, the address being: "Miss L. J. Gardner, Woodlands, West End, Southampton."

Of course letters inadvertently misdirected

are far from rare, and the pains taken with these at head-quarters is beyond all praise. There is a funny story in this connection. A lady staying at one of the newest hotels in Aix-les-Bains wanted to write to her servant in England, and used the hotel note-paper, which, however, was so full of the amenities of the establishment that the address was obscured. There was no reply. Later on the same lady, fearing that something was wrong, wrote to a friend, asking her to call

upon the servant. The latter was alarmed, too. She *had* replied to her mistress, but the letter was returned, "Not Known." She produced the envelope, which was addressed: "Miss—, Hôtel Britannique, Ouvert toute l'année, Ascenseur Hydraulique!"

It is impossible for the ordinary person to realize the difficulties which beset the British Post Office in various parts of the Empire. In certain districts of Persia, within our "sphere of influence," Turcomans utilize the telegraph poles as practice targets, and (worse still) as camp fires! On the section between Ispahan and Meshed-i-Moogab robbers molest the inspector and his workmen.



NO. 15.—A PICTORIAL ADDRESS.



NO. 16.—ENVELOPE OF LORD DENMAN'S LETTER.

is addressed: "The Right Hon. Sir James Fergusson, P.C., 25, Tedworth Square, S.W." The letter was written by his lordship from the Royal Hotel, Edinburgh. It commences:—

"DEAR SIR JAMES, — I hardly think of coming before 11th to London. I am afraid I might," etc.

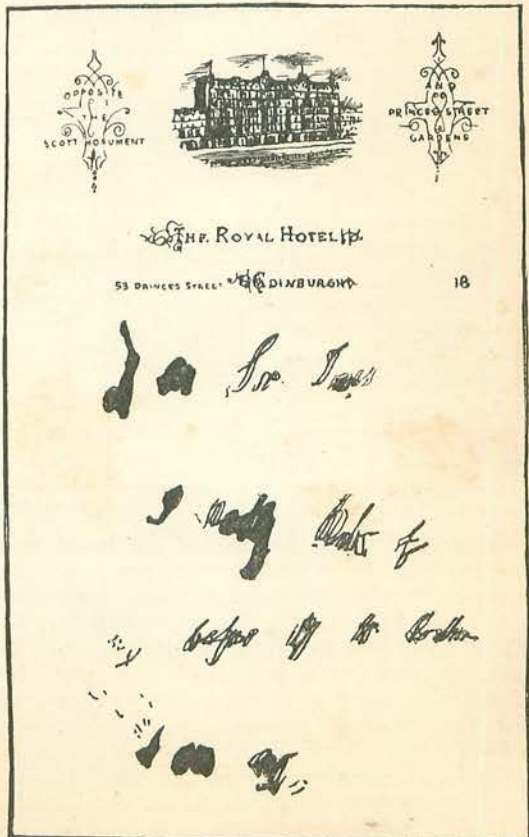
One great source of trouble is the extraordinary interpretations put upon

rules issued for the guidance of the public. "People should always take or retain the

Then, in the autumn, when the camels cast their coats, they rub up against and knock down the telegraph poles. So does the South African trek ox. Passing travellers help themselves to the wires in parts of Persia, and every year in the same region over 2,000 insulators are stolen for the sake of the wrought iron in the bolts.

Occasionally the staff themselves are a trial. An Irish official, who had absented himself on the first three days of the week, was asked for an explanation on the Thursday morning. He declared, feelingly, that he must have *overslept himself*! Another specimen of the queer questions put to the Post Office—this time, to the Cape Post Office: A man wrote from Arizona to know whether Cape Colony was "a suitable country for a poor man of my occupation, which is cow-punching."

The trials of the Post Office would indeed make an entertaining volume. Just look at this letter, whereof the envelope (No. 16) and first page (No. 17) are here reproduced. It stands out pre-eminent, even in the annals of the G.P.O. And yet it is from one distinguished man (the late Lord Denman) to another (Sir James Fergusson). The G.P.O. was enabled to retain the whole of this unique letter, simply because the addressee was Postmaster-General. The envelope



NO. 17.—FIRST PAGE OF LORD DENMAN'S LETTER.

numbers of postal-orders," seems a simple piece of advice. Yet persons have been known to take this too literally, and to cut out the number from the order itself—greatly to the disgust of the payee, who is refused payment on the ground of "mutilation."

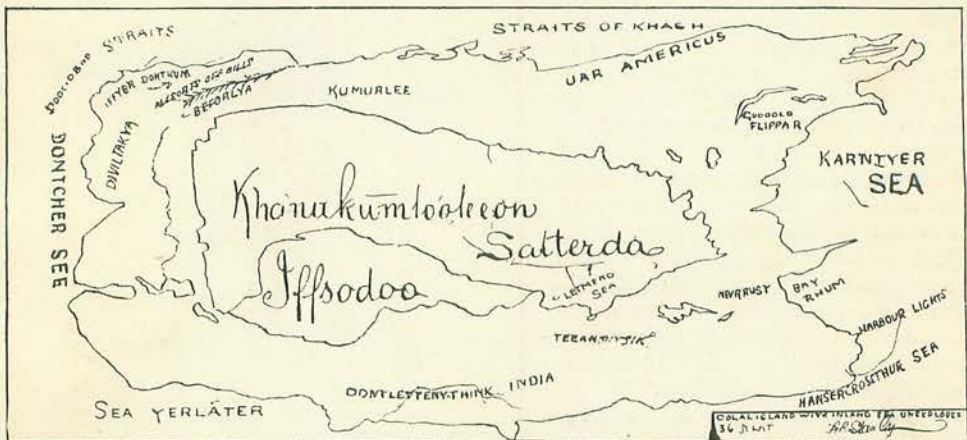
Fire, by the way, is responsible for the loss of many postal-orders. People take letters from their envelopes and then carelessly throw these latter on the fire, only to realize a moment later that a money-order has been destroyed. Boxes of charred fragments are often received at the Money Order Office with pathetic requests for payment. Even the poorer classes, it seems, are woefully careless about postal-orders. They leave them about so that their children or dogs get hold of them; and they will tell you at the museum of blanched orders that have been received after passing through the wash-tub.

The curator of the museum has his eye on the postal systems of every land; though, of course, he gives more attention to the postal services of our own Empire. He will tell you of bicycle posts, and elephant, camel, and reindeer posts. The Mashonaland mail, it seems, gave a lot of trouble owing to the

do." We leave the reader to discover the other funniosities for himself. One surmises that the cartographer must have been in the vicinity of "Doosidbad Straits" when he drew up this extraordinary map.

All sorts of intensely interesting facts are recorded in the G.P.O. Museum. How many people, we wonder, have heard of the fighting Post Office Packets? It seems that for over 150 years the Department maintained a fleet of armed ships, and there were stations for them at Dover, Harwich, Holyhead, Milford, and Yarmouth. Falmouth, however, was the head-quarters. From 1812 to 1815 no fewer than thirty-two fierce actions with American privateers were fought by the Falmouth packets, and of these engagements seventeen were entirely successful.

Just a few more stories. An old lady called at Banbury post-office, and asked the post-master, Mr. J. Davenport, for information about the marriage laws. Her daughter's husband was going to turn his wife out of doors. Could he do so legally? Mr. Davenport advised the old lady to consult the clergyman who married the couple. She had done so. Well, had she been to the



NO. 18.—AN ECCENTRIC POST-CARD.

horses dying through the bite of the tsetse fly. Well, it was found that zebras were "immune," and the result was that some were caught and broken in. They were terribly difficult to inspan, kicking and biting vigorously. However, the mail-coach may now be seen crossing the Limpopo River, near Fort Tuli, drawn in splendid style by eight brilliant zebras.

Here is an eccentric post-card (No. 18). It purports to be a map of a little-known district in Central Asia. It is really an invitation, "Can you come to tea on Saturday? If so,

superintendent registrar? Yes, she had been there, too. Then the applicant herself was struck with a bright idea. She would telegraph to Mr. Gladstone, the then Premier. She did, and got a reply saying that the right hon. gentleman was on the Continent. This was the last straw. The old lady complained bitterly about Mr. Gladstone's absence, and she flounced out of the post-office, saying that if he wanted to go gallivanting about Europe like this, he might at least leave someone to manage his business for him.

Is it possible for a postman to be a



NO. 19.—A LETTER WHICH COULD NOT BE DELIVERED.

matrimonial agent? Yes, it is. A high official recently said in evidence, given before a committee, that one of the postmen in the North of England produced a book a short time ago showing 200 marriages that he had brought about and taken part in celebrating!

Here is reproduced (No. 19) a comically-pathetic envelope, which is pasted in one of the Curious Address Books. The letter was addressed to plain Job David, at Llandough, near Cardiff. After some time it was returned, with an indorsement in red ink, evidently written by one of the villagers, "Job David is ded and berid."

The museum contains many pictures of interesting posts and postmen of the world. Of these we have selected a French postman for reproduction (No. 20). It will be seen that the man is mounted upon stilts. On these he goes his daily rounds through the low, swampy districts about Bordeaux. The low-lying country hereabouts gets parched in the summer, and then, when the rains come, floods are the order of the day. It is a queer spectacle, though, to see the postman wading through huge lakes with giant strides, examining the contents of his wallet as he goes.

One regrets that *all* the funniosities of the G.P.O. Museum cannot be given here. "Please send me an ominous form," writes someone to the Savings Bank Department. He meant a nomination form. Funnier still is the following: An application was received by the then Postmaster-General, Lord Wolverton, from three trustees of a Friendly Society. From certain erasures in the letter, it was evident that much discussion had arisen as to

the proper manner in which his lordship should be addressed in a letter signed by three persons. "My Lord" had obviously been considered incorrect, and the application was ultimately commenced "Our Lord!"

The Department, as we all know, takes extraordinary pains to deliver letters, no matter how addressed. If the thing *can* be done, it is done. Here is one of the most curious addresses on record: "Mrs.— Wearing a large Bear Boa, Violet flowers in

Bonnet, Promenade (mornings), Aberystwith." The letter was from the lady's son, who had mislaid his mother's seaside address. The letter was successfully delivered.

[In addition to Mr. J. C. Lamb, C.B., C.M.G., we desire gratefully to acknowledge courteous assistance rendered by Mr. Herbert Joyce, C.B.; Mr. J. Ardron; Mr. J. C. Badcock; and Mr. Sherwin Engall, of the *Post Office Magazine*.]



NO. 20.—A BORDEAUX POSTMAN.