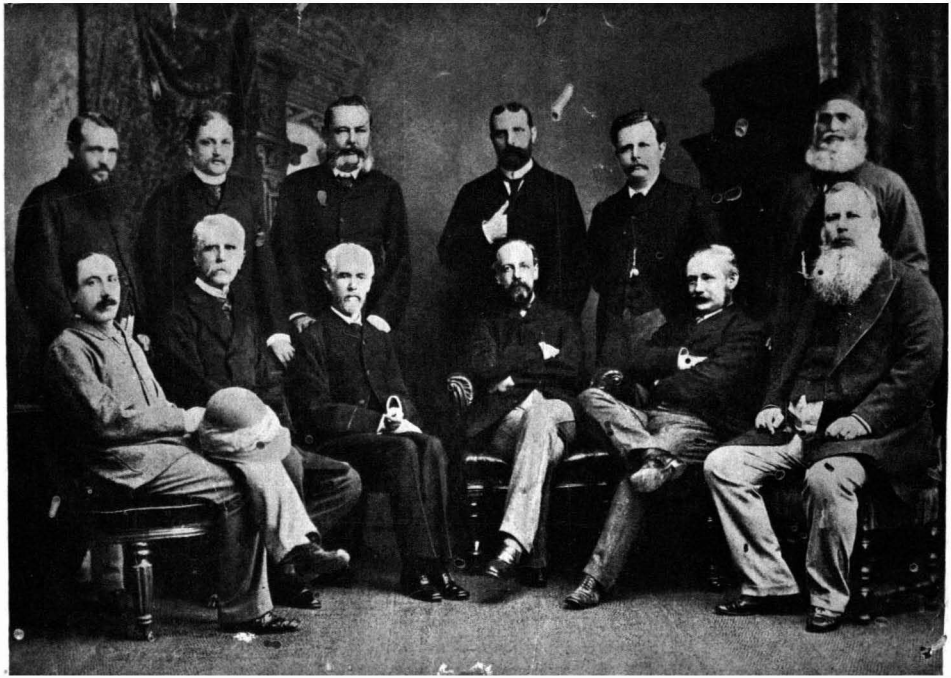
THE POST OFFICE OF INDIA



THE POST OFFICE OF INDIA AND ITS STORY

BY GEOFFREY CLARKE
INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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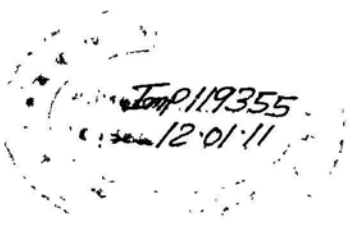

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PREFACE

WHEN I first decided to write a short account of the Post Office of India my intention was to close my story with the amalgamation of the Post Office and the Telegraph Department, which took place in 1913. Publication has been delayed for various reasons, chiefly owing to the outbreak of the war in 1914, and since then many strange things have happened. Consequently I have had to revise several chapters and felt compelled to write one upon the wonderful work done by the Indian Post Office in the Great War. I have also brought the statistical information up to the year 1918. Much of the matter referring to the early posts in India has already been given in Mr. Hamilton's book, *An Outline of Postal History and Practice*. This is only natural, as we have both drawn from the same sources—namely, the records of the Postal Directorate in Calcutta. I have tried to tell the story of the Post Office in such a way as to be interesting to the general reader as well as useful to the student. The ordinary routine of post office work is not exciting, but the effect of the work, the benefits it confers, the dependence of the public upon its proper execution, are themes to inspire the pen of a romantic writer. "The Romance of the Post Office" was the title of a delightful article in

Blackwood's Magazine by Sir Arthur Fanshawe, late Director-General of the Department, and to this article I must acknowledge my obligations for several passages in the book.

I am much indebted to Mr. R. W. Hanson and Mr. F. F. Shout, Assistant Directors-General of the Post Office of India, for their assistance in producing this work. Mr. Hanson is responsible for the chapter on "The Post Office in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf," and Mr. Shout for the chapter on "The Sea Post Office" and the paragraphs dealing with the District Post, as well as for the Index.

The chapter upon Indian stamps is based largely upon *The Postage and Telegraph Stamps of British India*, by Hausburg, Stewart-Wilson and Crofton, published by Messrs. Stanley Gibbons, and I am greatly indebted to Messrs. Stanley Gibbons for the loan of their blocks and for permission to use them in this book.

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THE POST OFFICE OF INDIA

in charge of four main branches of Post Office work. All the above officers have the title "General" attached to their designations in order to increase their self-respect, but I have omitted it to avoid an annoying reiteration. Of the three personal assistants, one has to be a walking encyclopædia since he is in personal attendance on the Director-General; the others are financial and technical experts. The office itself is under the immediate supervision of a titled Bengalee gentleman of considerable attainments, and his clerks are mostly Bengalee graduates whose abilities are supposed to vary with their alaries.

For the purposes of administration, the whole of India and Burma is divided into eight circles, corresponding with Presidencies and Provinces as far as possible. Each of these is under the control of a Postmaster-General, who is sometimes a member of the Indian Civil Service and sometimes an official of the Department. The powers of a Postmaster-General are great, his patronage is large and the working of the Post Office is dependent on his capacity for railway travelling at all seasons of the year. His circle is divided into divisions in charge of superintendents, who should be little understudies of himself.

The real business of the Department, however, is performed by post offices, and these are divided into head, sub and branch offices. The head office is the account and controlling office of one or more districts and is in charge of a postmaster, who in large towns ranks as a divisional officer. The sub-office is under the control of a head office for account purposes. It does all kinds of postal work and is always opened where there is a sufficiency of correspondence to justify its existence. The

branch office is only intended for villages and places where there is no need of a sub-office. It is really the pioneer of the Department for the purpose of opening up new areas to postal communications. In small places a branch office is put in charge of a schoolmaster, a shopkeeper or any other local resident who has sufficient education to keep the very simple accounts required, and by this means the Post Office is able to give the advantages of its great organization to villages which could never support a departmental office. A still cheaper agency is used for the outlying hamlets, which only receive and send a few letters a week. These are visited periodically by the village or rural postman, who is a kind of perambulating branch office. He delivers letters and money orders, and also receives articles for despatch. He sells stamps and quinine, and being a local man he has to face a certain amount of public opinion if he doesn't act fair and square towards the villagers in his beat. In some hill tracts he is provided with a bugle to announce his arrival, and to the inhabitants of these he brings news of the outside world; he writes their letters and explains to them his own conception of the mysteries of the money order system.

But what would be the use of all these offices and all this organization without lines of communication? The chief lines are, of course, the railways, but they form a separate organization and will be discussed in another chapter. For places off the railway there are motor lines and tonga services, such as that sung by Kipling between Kalka and Simla but now a thing of the past owing to the completion of the hill railway. The romance of the Post Office, however, must always lie in the mail runner, or hirkara as he is called in old books on India. The

number of tigers sated with his flesh is past count, the Himalayan snows have overwhelmed him, flooded rivers have carried him off and oozy swamps sucked him down. But in the face of all these dangers, has the runner ever failed to do his duty? According to the stories, never, and in real life perhaps not more than once or twice.

> Is the torrent in spate? He must ford it or swim.
> Has the rain wrecked the road? He must climb by the cliff.
> The service admits not a but, nor an if,
> While the breath's in his mouth, he must bear without fail
> In the name of the Emperor—the "Overland Mail."—KIPLING.

Postal runners are largely drawn from the less civilized races of India, many of whom are animists by religion. They will face wild beasts and wandering criminals, but will go miles to avoid an evil spirit in a tree. With them the mail bag is a kind of fetish which must be protected and got to its destination at all costs. Dishonesty among them is almost unknown and they are wonderfully true to their salt, which with them seldom exceeds twelve rupees a month. To prove that the old stories are not all myths, a case came before the Director-General recently in a rather peculiar manner. The Audit Office, that soulless machine which drives executive officers out of their minds, sent in an objection to a gratuity being given to the family of a runner who, when carrying the mails, had been eaten by a tiger. The objection was that gratuities were only given for death in special circumstances, for instance, when death occurred in the performance of some specially courageous action, and that, since carrying the mails was part of the man's ordinary duty, his family was not entitled to any consideration. The actual story of the runner's death, as told by the villagers and

the village watchman, is this: The runner's beat had been recently frequented by a man-eating tiger, and several of the country people had been carried off by him during the previous few days. On the afternoon in question the tiger was known to be in the neighbourhood, and when the mails arrived the villagers warned the runner not to go then, but to wait until next morning. Since the man-eater was an early feeder—that is to say, he killed his prey early in the afternoon, the runner waited until five o'clock and then persuaded the village watchman to accompany him. He hadn't gone more than two miles when out came the tiger and seized him. The watchman escaped and took the mails to the next stage, and the family of the man who nobly faced death in the execution of his duty was deprived of its wage-earner. This is a very bald account of a really heroic deed, and it is pleasing to learn that Mr. Levett Yeats, the Accountant-General of the Post Office at the time, who was the very soul of romance and chivalry, dealt with his objecting subordinate in a manner worthy of the heinous nature of his offence.

The road establishment of the Indian Post Office amounted to 18,160 persons out of a total staff of 198,324 on the 31st March, 1918, so there is some excuse for having devoted so much space to it. The postal staff had to deal with over 1200 millions of articles during the year, of which, according to the Annual Report of 1917–18, only ·22 per cent failed to reach their proper destination. When one considers that there are more than twenty written languages in India in common use, and that a large number of addresses are almost illegible and are mixed up with invocations to the Deity and many other high-sounding phrases, one can only say, "Bravo,

the Post Office! How do you do it?" With such a large correspondence a handsome revenue might be expected, even when the minimum rate for letters is a halfpenny; but the Indian is a frugal person and he does most of his correspondence on farthing postcards, on which he can cram a great deal of information by carefully using every available portion. Postcards were introduced in 1879 and now account for nearly half of the articles handled. The private card, with a figure of some favourite god or goddess, is competing strongly with the ordinary Government postcard, and wonderful ingenuity is employed to enable the writer to avail himself of more space than the regulations permit. The unpaid letter is also much in evidence in India. There is an idea that a letter on which postage has to be collected is much more certain to reach its destination than a prepaid one. This heretical doctrine has been strongly condemned in several pamphlets issued by the Director-General, but with little effect. And who knows? Perhaps there is a certain amount of truth in it, founded on bitter experience. Unpaid postcards had to be abolished recently, when it was discovered that they were universally read and then returned to the postmen as refused. The writer generally concealed his identity from the officials, with the result that it was useless to try and recover the postage due.

Among a suspicious and ignorant people any innovation is likely to be looked at askance, and this is especially the case in India, where the introduction of postcards was received with suspicion, although their low price ensured a ready sale. An extract from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, one of the foremost Indian papers, shows that they were not at first regarded as an unmixed blessing. The extract

is taken from the issue of the 18th July, 1879, and is as follows :—

"Postal cards are now a rage all over India. There are men who, to make the contents of the cards unintelligible, make them altogether illegible. Some express themselves in hints which are not only unintelligible to the postal clerk and peon, but to the person addressed also. Others have got a notion that all letters, to be sent either through the Post or through private harkaras, must be written on postcards, that being the hookum[1] of the Sirkar; and it is not unusual to see a fat and ignorant, though extremely loyal and law-abiding, zemindar[2] sending his letters to his steward written on half a score of postcards, one or two not sufficing to contain his great thoughts. There are others who write their thoughts on postcards and enclose them in an envelope, and attach a half-anna stamp before posting. These men have naturally raised a loud complaint against the unconscionable exactions of Government, and native papers given to writing sedition should not let slip this opportunity of indulging their profitable pastime. But the great difficulty is to teach the people on which side of the card the address is to be written, and we think it will be some years before they are enlightened in this respect. But really does it matter much if the address is written on the wrong side? We think that the people of India living under the enlightened rule of the British should have the privilege of writing the address on whichever side they like."

What a merry time the poor sorters would have if the sentiments expressed in the last sentence were given

[1] Order. [2] Landholder.

effect to! But doubtless the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, with its enlightened staff, its splendid circulation and carefully printed addresses would scarcely maintain the same opinions now.

The Post Office of India must be congratulated upon its good fortune in never having been regarded by Government as a revenue-producing Department, and as long as it paid its way with a small surplus the Powers were satisfied. Any excess was devoted to improvements in the service, and full advantage has been given to this concession in past years by the introduction of many reforms destined to meet the growing needs of the country. Recently, postage rates were reduced to such an extent that for a few years the Post Office worked at a loss, a most unsatisfactory state of affairs; however, a marked recovery is noticeable already and it is again a self-supporting institution, the gross revenue for the year ending the 31st March, 1918, being more than 416 lakhs[1] of rupees, which gave a net surplus of nearly 50 lakhs on the year's working.

From being merely an agency for the conveyance and distribution of letters and light articles, the Post Office has gradually undertaken an enormous amount of what may be called non-postal work. It deals with vast numbers of money orders, collects the price of goods for tradesmen, pays pensioners, sells quinine, deals in Government loans, and is the poor man's bank, all of which matters will be dealt with separately. It is to be hoped that no new line of business is going to be taken up in the near future, such as the sale of railway tickets, which was once seriously proposed, or else the principal duty of the Department may be forgotten in the turmoil of the side shows.

[1] One lakh = Rs. 100,000.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE POST OFFICE

THE Postal System of India, like that of other countries, had its origin in the necessity of maintaining communication throughout the various parts of a great Empire in order that the Emperor might be kept continuously informed of what was taking place and might be able to keep in constant touch with the officers in charge of Provinces at a distance from the Capital. When Ibn Batuta was travelling in India in the middle of the fourteenth century he found an organized system of couriers established throughout the country governed at that time by the great Mahomed Din Tughlak. The system seems to have been very similar to that which existed in the Roman Empire, and is thus described :

"There are in Hindustan two kinds of couriers, horse and foot ; these they generally term 'El Wolak.' The horse-courier, which is generally part of the Sultan's cavalry, is stationed at a distance of every four miles. As to the foot-couriers there will be one at the distance of every mile occupying stations which they call 'El Davah" and making on the whole three miles ; so that there is, at the distance of every three miles, an inhabited village, and without this, three sentry boxes where the couriers sit prepared for motion with their loins girded. In the hands of each is a whip about two cubits long,

and upon the head of this are small bells. Whenever, therefore, one of the couriers leaves any city he takes his despatches in one hand and the whip, which he keeps constantly shaking, in the other. In this manner he proceeds to the nearest foot-courier and, as he approaches, shakes his whip. Upon this out comes another who takes the despatches and so proceeds to the next. For this reason it is that the Sultan receives his despatches in so short a time."

Some of the oldest runners' lines in India were established for the purpose of conveying fruit and flowers to famous temples, and Colonel Broughton in his most interesting book, *Letters from a Mahratta Camp*, describes one such line between Udeypore and Pushkar in Rajputana. In his *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, Colonel Wilks tells us that among the earliest measures of Raja Chick Deo Raj of Mysore, who came to the throne in 1672, was the establishment of a regular post throughout his dominions. The Post Office in Mysore was not merely an ordinary instrument for conveying intelligence, but an extraordinary one for obtaining it. The postmasters were confidential agents of the Court and the inferior servants were professed spies, who made regular reports of the secret transactions of the districts in which they were stationed. This system, which was more fully developed by Hyder Ali, became a terrible instrument of despotism. The Moghul Emperors kept up a regular system of daks, and Ferishta tells us that Sher Shah, during his short reign of five years, 1541–1545, was the first who ever employed a mounted post in India. He constructed a road from Sonarung in Bengal to the banks of the Indus in Sind, a

distance of two thousand miles, and placed two horses on the road at every two miles. The Emperor Akbar had post houses built at stages ten miles apart on the principal roads and swift Turki horses were placed at each stage. One of these post houses can still be seen on the road between Agra and Sikandra.

The British do not appear to have found any established system of communication when they began to extend their dominion in India, and in the beginning of the eighteenth century it was a matter of no small difficulty to send a letter more than a distance of one hundred miles. A regular postal system was first introduced by Lord Clive in 1766, and the zemindars or landholders along the various routes were held responsible for the supply of runners to carry the mails. For this service a deduction was made in their rents in proportion to the number of runners supplied. The order recorded in the Minutes of Consultations of the 24th March is as follows :—

"For the Better Regulation of Dauks"

"Ordered that in future all letters be despatched from the Government House; the postmaster or his assistant attending every night to sort and see them sent off; that the letters to the different Inland Settlements be made up in separate bags, sealed with the Company's seal; that none may open the packets except the Chiefs at the different places, who are to open only their own respective packets; and

"Ordered that they be directed to observe the same rule with respect to the letters sent down to Calcutta."

The following is an extract from the Public Proceedings 7th July, 1766 :—

"As there have been of late frequent miscarriages of packets to and from Madras without possibility of tracing the cause, not knowing the stages where they do happen, as no advice is ever sent us by the neighbouring Residencies, and as this on any emergency may be attended with the worst of consequences, it is agreed to establish the following Rules and communicate them to the Presidency of Madras, recommending the same to be circulated to the factories and Residencies subordinate to them, as we shall do to those dependent on Bengal:—

"That the packets henceforward be numbered in regular succession for the present season from this time to the end of the year, and in future from the 1st January to the last of December.

"That the day and hour of despatch as well as the number be noted on the tickets affixed to the packets; that on every packet the number and date of the next preceding despatch be noted.

"That in order to have the earliest information of the loss of a packet at any time, the Resident or Chief of a factory shall regularly give advice of the receipt of each packet to the Resident of the stage from whence it came last.

"That when any packets are found to be missing the Chiefs or Residents at the two nearest stages shall immediately make it their business to examine the Dauks or Tappies very particularly, and punish them severely when they do not give a satisfactory account how the packets came to be lost, giving advice in the meantime to each Presidency.

"That the Postmaster at Calcutta and Residents at

Balasore, Cuttack and Ganjam do keep separate registers of despatches to and from Madras.

"That all packets be sealed with the Governor's as well as the Company's seal to prevent their being opened till they arrive at the destined place.

"And as we have reason to believe that by proper attention to the Tappies, the communication with Madras may be more expeditious, particularly between Vizagapatam and Bandermalanka, where making allowances for passing the Rivers, it is remarked they are very tardy, it is agreed to write to the gentlemen at Madras to mention this to their subordinate factories that they may fall upon proper measures to remedy it, and recommending small boats or saugarees to be stationed at the different rivers."

Under the administration of Warren Hastings the Post Office in India was placed on a better footing and steps were taken to make the posts which were established for official purposes more generally available for private communications. In January, 1774, the details of a regular system were laid down, which was brought into force on the 31st March, 1774. A Postmaster-General was appointed and postage was charged for the first time on private letters. The lowest rate of letter postage was two annas per hundred miles, and copper tickets of the value of two annas, to be used solely for postal purposes, were specially struck for public convenience.

In November, 1784, revised regulations for the Post Office were laid down which took effect in the province of Bengal from December of that year. In 1785 Madras followed suit upon proposals made by Mr. J. P. Burlton, a junior civilian in Government service. He suggested

the adoption of a regular postal system on the lines of Bengal, under which all letters except those on the public service should pay postage. In 1786 Mr. Archibald Campbell was made Postmaster-General, Madras, and arrangements were made for fortnightly services to Calcutta and Bombay. There was some dispute between the Court of Directors and the Madras Government regarding the appointment of a Postmaster-General. The former refused to accept Mr. Campbell and nominated Mr. Burlton; the latter objected to Mr. Burlton and appointed Mr. Legge Wilks, who was shortly afterwards succeeded by Mr. Oliver Colt.

For the next fifty years the history of the Post Office is obscure. The territory occupied by the East India Company in 1784 consisted of three isolated portions adjoining the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The Company obtained the administrative control of part of the Carnatic and the provinces known as the Northern Circars in 1761. The fiscal administration of the provinces of Bengal, Behar and Orissa was handed over by the Delhi Emperor in 1765, and by the Treaty of Salbai in 1782 the Bombay Government retained the islands of Elephanta and Salsette.

In 1798 Lord Wellesley arrived in India inspired by Imperial projects which were destined to change the map of the country. In 1799 Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, was defeated and slain at Seringapatam, and the Carnatic or south-eastern portion of India ruled by the Nawab of Arcot, as well as the principality of Tanjore, were placed under British rule. These territories constitute the greater part of the present Madras Presidency. In 1801 the whole of the tract between the Ganges and Jumna, known as the Doab, with Rohilkhand, were obtained by

purchase from the Nawab Vizir of Oudh. In 1803, after the second Mahratta War, Orissa was forfeited to the British and Berar to the Nizam of Hyderabad. In 1815 the Himalayan States were taken from the Nepalese, in 1817 the Pindaris were crushed in Central India and in 1818, after the third Mahratta War, the Bombay Presidency was formed. Assam was annexed in 1826, and Bharatpur taken in 1827.

The extension of postal services over this vast increase of territory can be traced only by scattered references in official documents. There was no general postal system in the country prior to 1837. A few main lines of couriers connecting the principal towns in the various provinces with the seat of Government had been established for the conveyance of Government letters and parcels, but the use of these mail services by private persons was conceded only as a privilege. The local posts in districts between police stations and head-quarters were maintained by the zemindars or landholders of each district, and their duties in this respect are laid down in Bengal Regulation XX of 1817. The postmasters of Presidency towns exercised the functions of a Postmaster-General in their own provinces up to 1785, and the Collectors or district officers were responsible for post office and mail lines within the limits of their own jurisdictions. There was no central authority to secure the co-operation of postal officials in different provinces or to maintain uniformity of procedure, and the charges for the conveyance of letters, which, in the absence of postage stamps, were levied in cash, varied according to weight and distance. Thus the cost of conveyance of a letter from Calcutta to Bombay was one rupee a tola (½ oz. approximately), and from Calcutta to Agra twelve annas a tola. As postal

officials were inclined to get as much as possible out of the public, private posts existed everywhere and were able to compete successfully with the Government services.

The letters of Victor Jacquemont, who travelled in India in 1830 as Naturalist to the Royal Museum of Natural History, Paris, throw some light on the working of the Post Office at the time. The post was carried altogether by runners, and the travellers' bungalows on the various routes were under the Post Office. According to Jacquemont, three servants were attached by the postal administration to each bungalow, to look after the comforts of travellers and to supply them with palanquin bearers. Letters seem to have had very uncertain careers. The usual time from France to Upper India was eight months. Jacquemont had no great faith in the post. On several occasions he trusts his letters to the Almighty to watch over during their travels.

Under the provisions of Act XVII of 1837 a public post was established and Government assumed the exclusive right to convey letters for hire in the territories of the East India Company. Uniformity was attempted by the issue to all post offices of elaborate polymetrical tables, which fixed the charges to be levied on the principal routes. The Act of 1837 caused a great deal of dissatisfaction owing to the abolition of many private and well-organized services which were not at once replaced, or else replaced very inefficiently, by Government services. The landholders had to pay a local cess to maintain the District Posts, and they felt it a distinct grievance that they should have to pay for the upkeep of these, as well as fees for their correspondence, while all official letters were carried free of charge. An inquiry made by Captain Taylor of the Bengal Establishment into the working of

the 1837 Act brought many of these grievances to light, and on his recommendation certain improvements were made in the interests of the landholders. Thus there grew up in India a dual system of posts—on the one hand, the Imperial Post, which controlled all main routes and large offices; on the other, the District Post, which was entirely local and controlled the rural services in each district. The establishments were quite separate, and where the two systems came in contact there was often a great deal of friction.

The principle on which the District Post was based was the liability of landholders to maintain communications for Government purposes between the executive head of a district and his subordinates in outlying places—a responsibility which in many instances they were glad to discharge by a money payment to the magistrate who undertook the organization of the requisite agency. The laws under which it was administered were framed with the object of levying a small cess in each district. This was used, at the discretion of the magistrate, for the payment of dak-runners and other persons who conveyed correspondence between police stations and district officials. This local post undoubtedly existed from ancient times, and its maintenance was a liability to which the landholders had been subject from a period long before the advent of British rule.

The District Post in India, which was an important, though not very efficient, auxiliary to the Imperial Post, thus owed its origin to the need for maintaining the means of official communication between the headquarters of each district and the revenue and police stations in the interior, where the general wants of the locality were not such as to call for the provision of

Imperial post-offices. It consisted of lines of communication connecting such stations, and was maintained primarily for the conveyance of official correspondence in accordance with the requirements of each district, but subsequently it was also made available for private correspondence.

In some parts of the country the cost of the District Post lines was met by local cesses specially levied for the purpose, and in other places it was met from Imperial or provincial grants as a charge on the general revenues of the country.

Originally the District Post in India was managed by district officers or other local officials quite independently of the Imperial Post, but, in order to increase the efficiency of the service, Local Governments and Administrations were asked to transfer the management to the officers of the Imperial Post Office. The North-Western Provinces (now United Provinces) Government was the first to accept the proposal, and the management of the District Post there was taken over by the Postmaster-General of the circle in the year 1864. This arrangement did not constitute an incorporation of the District Post with the Imperial Post, but merely a transfer of the management of the former to the officers of the latter, the financial control of the District Post remaining as before with the Local Government. As was anticipated, this measure led to rapid development of private correspondence, an acceleration of the speed at which the mails were carried and a marked improvement in the postal arrangements in the interior of districts. Consequently the objections which were at first raised in many quarters were silenced, and the other Local Governments and Administrations soon fell

into line, so that in the course of the next fourteen years the management of the whole of the District Post throughout India was gradually transferred to the Imperial Post Office.

As the number of Imperial post offices increased the primary object of the District Post became less important and its funds were devoted more and more to the extension of rural delivery and postal facilities in backward rural tracts. As these tracts developed and the postal traffic produced sufficient revenue to cover the expenditure the Imperial Post took them over, and the money thus set free was used to start offices, lines and rural messengers in country not yet opened. In this way the District Post acted the part of pioneer to the Imperial Post and greatly assisted its progress.

In 1903, in connection with the revision of the Provincial Settlements, the Government of India decided to abolish the exceptional arrangement under which, in some provinces, a portion of the revenue and expenditure in connection with the District Post was included in the Provincial accounts. It was ordered that from the commencement of the new settlements all such receipts and charges which were then Provincial would be made Imperial. In accordance with this decision all the District Post establishments in the Presidencies of Bengal and Madras and the Province of Assam, which were formerly paid from Provincial funds, were brought directly on the general establishment of the Imperial Post Office with effect from the 1st April, 1904. Two years later the Government of India decided to take over the remaining District Post charges in India, and the District Post was abolished entirely with effect from the 1st April, 1906. It was at the same time ordered that from that date

every postal charge would be an Imperial one and that no postal charges of any description whatsoever might be incurred from Provincial or Local funds.

In 1850 three Commissioners, Messrs. Courtney, Forbes and Beadon, were appointed by the Government of India to inquire into the methods for making the Post Office more efficient and more conducive to the convenience of the public than it had been hitherto.

In 1851 the Commissioners, after making exhaustive inquiries, presented a report which dealt with every phase of Post Office work, and on this report has been based the whole fabric of the present administration. The most important questions discussed were :

(1) The necessity for a uniform rate of postage irrespective of distance.
(2) The need for prepayment of postage by means of adhesive postage stamps.
(3) The fixing of a low initial rate of postage.
(4) The abolition of franking.
(5) The formation of the Post Office as an Imperial Department under a Director-General, with Postmasters-General in each province who would not be subject to the authority of the Local Government.
(6) The publication of Manual Rules for the use of postal officials.
(7) The establishment of sorting offices at suitable places.
(8) The introduction of money orders.
(9) The regulation of the Bhangy or Parcel Post.
(10) The introduction of cheap and uniform postage for newspapers, books, pamphlets, etc.
(11) The transfer of District Posts to the Imperial Post Office.

The report of the Commissioners is contained in a bulky volume of some six hundred pages, of which the preamble is most interesting and throws a great deal of light on the domestic history of India in the first half of the nineteenth century. The reforms are based throughout on the principle that the Post Office is to be maintained for the benefit of the people of India and not for the purposes of swelling the revenues, and it is greatly to the credit of the Government of India that in all times of stress and strain, as well as in times of prosperity, they have loyally observed this principle, although there have been many temptations to act contrary to it.

With the advance of postal administration in India in the last sixty years we can hardly realize the difficulties that had to be faced in 1851. One of the chief ones was the poverty of the great bulk of the population, many of whom could ill afford to spend even the smallest Indian coin, namely, one pie, a twelfth part of a penny, on anything that was not necessary for their own sustenance.

In dealing with this matter the following remarks of the Commissioners are very interesting :—

" In considering what plan of postage is best suited to the circumstances of India, and most likely to conduce to the convenience of the public, the social and commercial advancement of the country, and the ultimate financial advantage of the department, the difference between the circumstances of the European and native portion of the community must be distinctly borne in mind. It must be remembered that the former are very few in number, but, generally speaking, well educated and in affluent circumstances ; that they are accustomed and inclined to social correspondence, for which, from being collected at particular stations throughout the country, they have

great facilities; and are comparatively little hindered from indulging in it by the expense which it entails on them, being for the most part regardless of the pecuniary advantage which they might derive from a more careful attention to the weight of their letters. The natives, on the other hand, are incalculably more numerous than their European fellow-subjects. Upon the moderate assumption that there are two thousand natives for every European, and that not more than 1 per cent of the former can read and write, still there must be twenty natives for every European who can correspond by the post without assistance, provided that the means of paying postage are within their reach, and that the receipt and delivery of their letters are facilitated. But they are poor, and, though well inclined to correspond, greatly prevented from doing so by the present high rates of postage to distant stations, and still more by the distance which separates the mass of them from the nearest post office, and by the consequent trouble, expense, uncertainty and perhaps loss, which the receipt and despatch of their letters involve. The occupations in which large numbers of natives are engaged connected with the internal trade of the country are such as naturally to render their correspondence on matters of business far more extensive than that of Europeans, the greater part of the latter being engaged in the service of Government and not under the necessity of writing letters except on their own personal concerns or those of their friends. With the improvement of the means of communication, extension of trade and the gradual spread of knowledge throughout the country, the instructed and writing portion of the native community will continue to bear an increasing ratio both to the rest of their fellow-country-

men and to the European residents in India, but to the bulk even of these the amount they can afford to expend on the postage of their letters must ever be a matter of strict economical calculation. It may be regarded as certain that the utmost care will always be observed by the native community in keeping the weight of their letters within the minimum chargeable weight; and unless some considerable reduction is made in the existing rates of postage to distant places they will continue to resort to ingenious contrivances for the purpose of saving expenditure under that head, or avoiding it altogether."

The practice of "clubbing" or of enclosing a number of small letters in one cover addressed to a person who undertook to deliver them by hand was very common in India before 1850 and is not unknown at the present time. When the difference in cost between a single and double letter was considerable, this practice entailed a great loss of revenue to the Post Office, and in order to stop it the Commissioners proposed to make the unit of weight a quarter of a tola and to charge extra postage for each quarter tola of weight. The unit finally adopted was half a tola, as it was thought that Post Office clerks would have difficulty in detecting such small divisions of weight as a quarter of a tola. At the same time heavy penalties were imposed on clubbing, and the practice has gradually fallen into disuse.

Uniformity of postage irrespective of distance had many opponents at the time. It was recommended by the Commissioners on the ground of fairness, simplicity and the facilities it gave for the introduction of other improvements into the department. To use their own words: "Combined with a low rate of charge, it forms

the conspicuous and chief benefit which the monopoly of the carriage of letters enables Government to confer upon the whole body of its subjects, by almost annihilating distance and placing it within the power of every individual to communicate freely with all parts of the Empire. It makes the Post Office what under any other system it never can be—the unrestricted means of diffusing knowledge, extending commerce and promoting in every way the social and intellectual improvement of the people. It is no longer an experiment, having been introduced with eminent success into the United Kingdom as well as into the United States of America, France, Spain and Russia."

There was a strong body of opinion in favour of the compulsory prepayment of postage in all cases on the ground that in India it was most difficult to collect the postage due on bearing letters; in fact, the letters were usually sent open, read by the addresses and then refused, so that both the sender and recipient got all they wanted out of the Post Office for nothing. However, wiser counsels prevailed. It was recognized that compulsory prepayment might mean great hardship in many cases, and the English system of charging double postage on unpaid articles was adopted.

These few extracts are sufficient to show the fine spirit that pervaded the work of the Commissioners. They were true Imperialists and never took the petty view, but adhered to the maxim of the greatest benefit to the greatest number. Their names are forgotten, but the result of their labours has remained in the fine organization now known as the Post Office of India.

CHAPTER III

EARLY POSTAL REGULATIONS

ACT XVII of 1837, the earliest enactment establishing a proper postal system in India, repealed Bombay Regulation XI of 1830 which declared all private dawks within the Bombay Presidency to be illegal. It conferred the exclusive right of carrying post for hire on the Governor-General in Council and fixed the penalty for evasion of this order at Rs.50 for each letter. The Bhangy Post was opened to the public with the condition that letters exceeding 12 tolas must be sent by bhangy wherever such a line existed. The Governor-General in Council was authorized to frame a scale of distances, according to which the rates for inland postage should be calculated and also to fix the rates for steamer and ship postage. Strict regulations were laid down compelling commanders of vessels to deliver all letters on board to the post office at each port of call, also to receive all letters handed over to them by the post office at any port. The commander of the vessel received one anna for each letter delivered or received.

We find the origin of the Dead Letter Office in Sections 25 to 27 of the Act. Unclaimed letters after lying for three months at any post office were to be sent to the General Post Office of the Presidency, and at intervals, not exceeding three months, lists of such unclaimed

letters and packets were to be published in the Official Gazette. When letters and packets lay unclaimed for a period of eighteen months at the General Post Office, the Postmaster-General was authorized to open them and pay any valuable property found therein into the Government Treasury for the benefit of the party having a right to it. After a further period of twelve months unclaimed letters were to be destroyed.

The Governor-General in Council had the power to grant to any person the privilege of sending and receiving all letters and packets by letter post free of postage, and of sending and receiving letters and packets by bhangy on the public service free of postage. This privilege was granted to the following persons :—

His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State.
The President and Secretaries of the Board of Control.
The Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Directors of the East India Company.
The Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary at the East India House.
The Governor-General.
The Governors of Bengal, Madras and Bombay.
The Governor of Ceylon.
The Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces.
The Chief Justices of Bengal, Madras and Bombay.
The Bishops of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.
The Members of the Supreme Council.
The Members of Council of Madras and Bombay.
The Puisne Judges of the Supreme Courts of Bengal, Madras and Bombay.
The Recorder of Prince of Wales' Island, Singapore and Malacca.

The Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Naval Forces.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Army in India.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Army at Madras and Bombay.

Postage was charged for letters according to the following schedules :—

Distance in miles.	*Postage for a letter not exceeding 1 tola.*
20	1 anna.
50	2 annas.
100	3 „
150	4 „
200	5 „
250	6 „
300	7 „
400	8 „
500	9 „
600	10 „
700	11 „
800	12 „
900	13 „
1000	14 „
1200	15 „
1400	1 rupee.

Single postage to be added for each additional tola or part thereof.

Special rates for distance were also fixed for :

(1) Law papers, Accounts and Vouchers attested as such, with the full signature of the sender.

(2) Newspapers, Pamphlets and other printed or engrossed papers, packed in short covers open at each end, imported matter being charged at a cheaper rate than matter printed in India.

Parcels were limited to 600 tolas (15 lbs.) in weight, and the rate was 6 annas for 50 tolas (20 oz.) for 50 miles, then 3 annas for every additional 50 tolas or part thereof for every 50 miles up to 300 miles, after which 3 annas was charged for each 50 tolas for every additional 100 miles up to 1000 miles. For 1200 miles the rate was Rs.2 as.13 for every 50 tolas, and for 1400 miles and upwards Rs.3.

By Act XX of 1838 the weight of letters and packets which could be carried by a road on which there was no bhangy post was raised from 12 to 30 tolas, and the postmaster was allowed to use his discretion in forwarding packets exceeding 30 tolas. It was also enacted that " all fines incurred under Post Office Acts shall be demanded by notice from Postmasters-General or from any Postmaster, and if not paid shall be levied together with costs on goods and chattels. If no goods are forthcoming the offender may be committed to prison for twenty-two calendar months unless the fines, etc., are sooner paid." Postmasters were authorized to detain any letter in respect of which any party was liable to a fine.

Act XVII of 1839 empowered the Governor-General in Council to alter postage duties as fixed by Sections 6 and 14 of the Act, but not to increase them.

The fact that postage rates were fixed with respect to distances in 1837 is not a matter for surprise when the state of Indian roads at the time is considered. In 1833, Shore, in his *Notes on Indian Affairs*, describes the main road between Calcutta and Benares as no better than a cart-track, and says that the only road worthy of the name in India is that between Calcutta and Barrackpore. Nor was it until 1854, with the abolition of the old

Military Boards and the establishment of the Public Works Department, that the art of road-making began to improve. It will thus be understood that in 1837 the maintenance of postal lines was a real difficulty. All mail matter had to be conveyed by runners, and a slight extra weight entailed a considerable extra cost. With the introduction of railways in 1852 and good metalled roads, upon which light wheeled carriages could be used for the conveyance of mails and passengers over long distances, a complete change in postal administration was effected, and it was no longer necessary to vary the rates for letters according to distance.

With all the advance made in postal legislation and the regulation of rates there was not yet any Controlling Head. The Post Office was managed by Postmasters-General who were also postmasters in the Presidency-Towns, while Collectors of Districts had charge of post offices up-country. Receipts were still granted for every article received for despatch, and in the Bombay Presidency the addresses of all articles were entered in lists known as puttees; these were given to the postmen who brought back the addressees' signatures on them. The addresses upon all articles passing in transit through the Post Office were also recorded; bags were not used, only packets of paper or cloth.

The English Mail at this time was received once a month and, since not more than 200 lbs. weight of mails could be conveyed along the Bombay-Calcutta line in one day, a week was often required for its disposal. Originally the opium merchants had their own lines, and on these being stopped they used to send private expresses by the Government dawk, which was a great source of revenue to the Post Office.

Act XVII of 1854 marks the commencement of the organization of the Indian Post Office upon its present footing. According to its provisions the whole department was placed under the control of a Director-General; the office of Postmaster-General was separated from that of Presidency Postmaster; Postmasters-General were appointed for the direct administration and supervision of the postal services in the larger provinces and Deputy Postmasters-General, at first designated Chief Inspectors, were appointed to the less important provinces and the principal Political Agencies. Postage stamps were first introduced in 1854 and rates were fixed for the conveyance of letters irrespective of distance.[1]

In this Act the postal monopoly of the East India Company was again laid down, and the three exceptions to that monopoly were legalized, namely (1) letters sent by a private friend to be delivered on his way or journey to a person, without any hire or reward for such service; (2) letters solely concerning the affairs of the sender or receiver thereof sent by a messenger on purpose; (3) letters solely concerning goods or other property sent by land or sea, to be delivered with such goods or property without any hire or reward for carrying the same.

It was important to include these exceptions in the Act, as under the Post Office Act of 1837 there was nothing to prevent a man who sent a letter to his friend by messenger incurring a penalty of Rs.50, a fine to which both the messenger and recipient were equally liable.

[1] The first issue of postage stamps in India was actually made in 1852 by Sir Bartle Frere, Commissioner of Scinde. They were local stamps for use in Scinde only, and bore the inscription "Scinde District Dak."

The great advance made in 1854 was the introduction of postage stamps and the fixing of postage rates for letters irrespective of distance.

The rates were as follows :—

On every letter not exceeding ½ tola in weight, 6 pies.
On every letter exceeding ½ tola and not exceeding ½ tola in weight, 1 anna.
On every letter exceeding ½ tola and not exceeding 1 tola, 2 annas.
On every letter exceeding 1 tola and not exceeding 1½ tolas in weight, 3 annas.
On every letter exceeding 1½ tolas and not exceeding 2 tolas in weight, 4 annas.
And for every tola in weight above 2 tolas, 2 additional annas.

With respect to newspapers and engraved papers a distinction, similar to that laid down in the Act of 1837, was made between imported and locally produced matter. The former was charged with 2 annas for every 6 tolas or part thereof ; the latter was charged at the following rates :—

Two annas for a weight not exceeding 3½ tolas.
Four annas for a weight not exceeding 6 tolas, and 2 annas for every additional 3 tolas above 6 tolas.

This difference in postage encouraged the circulation of newspapers and printed matter imported from England, but the high internal rates must have greatly hampered the postal circulation of journals printed in India.

Reduced rates, but still varying with distance, were laid down for Bhangy Post according to the following scale :—

For Distances.	If not Exceeding in Weight.						
	20 tolas.	100 tolas.	200 tolas.	300 tolas.	400 tolas.	500 tolas.	600 tolas.
Miles.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.
Not exceeding 100	0 2	0 4	0 8	0 12	1 0	1 4	1 8
Not exceeding 300	0 6	0 12	1 8	2 4	3 0	3 12	4 8
Not exceeding 600	0 12	1 8	3 0	4 8	6 0	7 8	9 0
Not exceeding 900	1 2	2 4	4 8	6 12	9 0	11 4	13 8
Not exceeding 1200	1 8	3 0	6 0	9 0	12 0	15 0	18 0
Exceeding 1200	1 14	3 12	7 8	11 4	15 0	18 12	22 8

Books, pamphlets, packets of newspapers and of printed and engraved papers were charged at the following rates by bhangy post :—

Not exceeding 20 tolas . . . 1 anna
Exceeding 20 tolas and not exceeding 40 tolas . . . . . 2 annas
For every 20 tolas above 40 tolas . 1 anna
provided that the total weight must not exceed 120 tolas.

The postage on bhangy parcels was calculated by the most elaborate Polymetrical Tables which were supplied to all post offices in English and Vernacular. Many a grievous complaint was laid by members of the public against the strange methods employed by the Post Office in calculating the distance between two places. The sender of a parcel naturally considered that he should pay for the shortest distance between the place of despatch and the place of receipt, but not so the Post

Office. It decided that the "postal route," however circuitous, was the one by which postage should be calculated.

Letters were ordinarily limited to 12 tolas in weight, but by Act XX of 1838 the weight had been raised to 30 tolas upon lines where no bhangy post existed; this limit was now raised to 40 tolas (1 lb.) and, where both a bhangy and letter post were conveyed in the same carriage, a special prohibition was made that letters or packets of newspapers of less than 12 tolas weight must not be sent by bhangy post under penalty of a fine of Rs.50 for each offence. This clause was evidently introduced on account of the charge made by the railway companies for the carriage of bhangy parcels.

The 600 tola limit for parcels was continued except in special cases which were laid down by the Governor-General in Council, but in no circumstances was the weight of any parcel to exceed 2000 tolas (50 lbs.). Ship postage was levied on parcels, when conveyed by the East India Company's post by sea, at the rate of 8 annas for each 100 tolas. When any parcel had to be conveyed by bhangy as well as by sea, this postage was levied in addition to bhangy postage. Letters and newspapers for Ceylon or any place where no postal communication was established by the East India Company were dealt with as unclaimed, unless the full postage was prepaid by means of postage stamps.

With the introduction of postage stamps we now find the first regulations for encouraging the prepayment of postal articles. In Section 20 it is laid down that, where the East India Company have a postal communication, double postage shall be charged on unstamped letters at the time of delivery, and in the case of insufficiently

stamped letters double the deficiency. This rule did not apply to newspapers or other printed matter, but in order to compel the public to use the new postage stamps, post offices were forbidden to accept money in prepayment of any postal articles except parcels. Redirected letters were charged with postage at prepaid rates, and a penalty of Rs.200 was imposed for sending "any explosive or other dangerous material or substance by post."

Rules were drawn up for the use and sale of postage stamps, vendors were appointed, and heavy penalties were exacted from vendors who failed to comply with the regulations. Registration of any article was allowed upon payment of a fee of 4 annas which entitled the sender to a receipt, but, strange to say, the registration fee had to be paid in cash, stamps not being recognized in payment.

The clauses of Act XVII of 1837 regarding the obligations of commanders of vessels were renewed, and also the clauses dealing with unclaimed and refused articles. The privilege of free postage was entirely abolished, but the letters and packets sent on the public service by certain officials were still carried under frank. The postage due on such articles was charged to the several public departments concerned. This measure led to wanton extravagance in the matter of official postage, no care was taken to economize either in the number or the size of "public service" articles and various abuses of franking occurred. The list of officers authorized to frank became so large that the Post Office could not exercise any proper check, and the difficulty of accounting in connection with the postage due was enormous. The first restriction was placed on franking in 1866 when the use of service stamps was made com-

pulsory on all letters passing outside the Presidency towns or limits of the district in which they were posted, and in 1873 all franking privileges were abolished.

In Section 48 of the Act the duty of the Post Office to abide by the Customs regulations is insisted upon. Officers in charge of post offices were bound to detain articles suspected of containing anything contraband, and they could refuse to forward any parcel or packet addressed to a foreign post, unless it was accompanied by a Customs' House Pass. A long list of penalties, most of which exist at the present day, was drawn up for offences and misdemeanours committed by postal officials. Informers were encouraged by being allowed to receive half of every fine imposed, but no proceedings could be taken against any one under this Act without an order in writing from Government, the Director-General or a Postmaster-General.

In 1854 Mr. Riddell was appointed the first Director-General of the Post Office, and he compiled the first Manual of Rules to be observed by the whole Department. At this time there were 201 head-quarter offices and 451 minor offices in India, but every office kept its own accounts separately and submitted them direct to the Audit Office which was part of the Accountant General's Office. It was not until 1861 that postal accounts were removed from the Civil auditors and handed over to an officer known as the "Compiler of Post Office Accounts" and not until 1866–7 that the distinction between Head and Branch offices was made for account purposes.

The Manual of 1854 made no proper arrangement for sorting offices, it only provided for mails being received *en masse* and for their distribution afterwards to peons

and into the "thana" and forwarding boxes. Every post office upon a line had to make up a separate mail packet for every office in advance, and it received one from every office in rear, a most cumbersome proceeding, which was put a stop to in 1860, when long detentions were made at certain large stations upon the main routes for the purpose of sorting the mails. Paid letters were impressed with a red date-stamp to distinguish them from unpaid, which bore a black date-stamp. Letters for foreign countries were sent with steamer postage invoices (chalans) to the different Presidency towns. Prepayment of articles sent to England via Marseilles, for which Brindisi was substituted in 1870, was not possible, nor could letters for countries like the United States be prepaid.

It seems hardly credible that in 1854 one of the longest chapters of the Manual was devoted to an elaborate system of fining, under which different offices claimed fines from one another for bad work brought to light by them. The official who detected the finable offence was allowed to keep the amount of the fine subject to a deduction of 10 per cent, which was remitted to the Postmaster-General's office to cover the cost of printing Fine Statements, Bills, etc. A regular schedule of offences with the fine allotted for each was drawn up; for instance, the missending of a mail bag was assessed at Rs.3, while the missending of a parcel or packet cost 8 annas. Naturally there was great energy expended in detecting offences for which fines were imposed, and the result was an enormous amount of correspondence and bitter recrimination between offices. This vicious practice continued for many years and was not finally put a stop to until 1880.

CHAPTER IV

LATER POSTAL REGULATIONS

BY Act XIV of 1866 postage rates were still further reduced as follows :—

For letters not exceeding ¼ tola	6 pies.
Exceeding ¼ tola and not exceeding ½ tola	1 anna.
For every additional ½ tola	1 ,,
For newspapers not exceeding 10 tolas	1 ,,
For every additional 10 tolas	1 ,,

It will be noticed that the distinction in rates between imported and local newspapers was withdrawn.

Books, pamphlets, packets, etc.—

Not exceeding 10 tolas in weight	1 anna.
For every additional 10 tolas	1 ,,

Parcels were still charged according to the distance they had to be conveyed, but the rates were reduced. The following table gives the scale of charges :—

Distance in Miles.	Not Exceeding Tolas.													
	20 tolas.		50 tolas.		100 tolas.		200 tolas.		300 tolas.		400 tolas.		500 tolas.		600 tolas.	
	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.
Not exceeding 300	0	4	0	8	0	12	1	8	2	4	3	0	3	12	4	8
Not exceeding 600	0	8	1	0	1	8	3	0	4	8	6	0	7	8	9	0
Not exceeding 900	0	12	1	8	2	4	4	8	6	12	9	0	11	4	13	8
Not exceeding 1200	1	0	2	0	3	0	6	0	9	0	12	0	15	0	18	0
Exceeding 1200	1	4	2	8	3	12	7	8	11	4	15	0	18	12	22	8

It was now ordered that registration upon letters, the fee for which was still fixed at 4 annas, should be prepaid in postage stamps. The penal clauses relating to counterfeiting stamps had been included in the Indian Penal Code, Act XLV of 1860, and were therefore omitted from this Act. The other penal clauses were practically the same as those that existed in the Act of 1854, and the principle is again laid down of the non-responsibility of Government for any loss or damage which may occur in respect of anything entrusted to the Post Office for conveyance.

From 1866 the work of the Post Office began to develop enormously, and its functions had to be gradually extended to meet the growing needs of the public. In 1869 the charge on redirected letters was abolished and the letter postage rates were further reduced as follows:—

For letters not exceeding ½ tola . .	6 pies.
Exceeding ½ tola but not exceeding 1 tola	1 anna.
For every additional tola or fraction thereof	1 „

The antiquated system of making parcel post rates vary with distance could no longer be maintained, and in 1871 a system of rates which varied with weight, irrespective of distance, was introduced. A parcel post service was established between India and England in 1873, but the collection and distribution of parcels were at first effected through the agency of the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, and it was not until 1885 that the Post Offices of both countries undertook the management of the parcel post. In 1873 special

postage rates were introduced for official articles, namely:

Not exceeding ½ tola . . .	½ anna.
Not exceeding 10 tolas . . .	1 „
Not exceeding 20 tolas . . .	5 annas.
Not exceeding 30 tolas . . .	10 „
Every additional 10 tolas . . .	5 „

At the same time it was laid down that official covers from Government offices should be prepaid by means of service postage stamps.

Under the provision of the Act of Parliament (III–IV Vict. Cap. 69) soldiers and seamen were allowed the privilege of sending letters not exceeding half an ounce in weight at the rate of 1d. for each letter. This rate was introduced into India in 1854, and 8 pies was reckoned the equivalent of 1d. In 1874 the postage on such letters was fixed at 9 pies for half an ounce owing to the increase in the rate of exchange. In 1899 the Imperial Penny Postage scheme was introduced, by which the initial rate of postage to the United Kingdom and to certain British colonies and possessions was fixed at 1 anna for a letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight, so that the privilege enjoyed by soldiers and seamen was no longer of any advantage, and when in 1907 the initial rate under the Imperial Penny Postage Scheme was raised from half an ounce to 1 ounce there was no further object in retaining this special concession.

In 1877 the Value-Payable or Cash on Delivery system was introduced, and in 1878 the Post Office undertook the insurance of letters and parcels. At first there was no limit to the amount for which an article could be insured, until a claim for the contents of a parcel insured

for Rs.60,000 showed the enormous liabilities which the Department might incur under this system. Accordingly, in 1890 the limit was fixed at Rs.1000, but was raised in 1898 to Rs.2000, and the procedure was greatly simplified. The insurance fee was originally fixed at one-half per cent, which was subsequently reduced to a quarter, and in 1905 to one-eighth per cent.

Previous to 1880 the money order work of the country was carried on by the Government Treasuries, and the procedure was rather cumbersome; in that year it was handed over to the Post Office, with the result that in a few months the number of money orders issued and paid quadrupled. The extent to which money order business has increased may be gauged from the fact that the value of inland money orders in 1880–81 was 45 millions, and in 1917–18 it had increased to over 617 millions of rupees.

In 1870 Government Savings Banks were first established in India in connection with District Treasuries, and in 1882 permission was given to open savings bank accounts at post offices, but the management and control of the funds still remained with the Treasuries. In 1885 all savings banks at Treasuries were closed and the business was transferred entirely to the Post Office. The general development of this branch will be treated of in the chapter on Savings Banks, but, as an example of the growth of business, the figures of 1882–83 and of 1913–14 are remarkable. In 1882–83 there were 39,121 depositors with a balance of Rs.27,96,730; in 1913–14 there were 1,638,725 depositors with a balance of Rs.23,16,75,467.

In 1883 combined post and telegraph offices were introduced, and it is no exaggeration to say that these are

solely responsible for the extension of telegraph facilities to the smaller markets and rural tracts of India. In 1884 the sale of British postal orders was authorized, and the same year marks the introduction of Postal Life Insurance, a measure at first confined to servants of the Department but afterwards extended to all Government servants. In 1890, at the request of the military authorities, the Post Office undertook the payment of military pensioners in the Punjab.

In this way the Department has grown. From being a mere agency for the carriage of correspondence and parcels in 1866, the Post Office has now become the poor man's bank; it does an enormous value-payable and money order business; it is an important insurance agency and pension paymaster, and to such an extent have postage rates been reduced in India that it would be hard to find a man who could not afford to communicate by post with his friends.

Needless to say, the Post Office Act of 1866 was quite unsuited to modern needs, and Act VI of 1898 was framed to deal with the new requirements of postal work. The 1866 Act was amended by Act III of 1882, which authorized any officer of the Post Office empowered in this behalf by the Governor-General in Council to search for newspapers regarding which a notification had been published under the Sea Customs Act. By Act III of 1895 powers were provided in accordance with the general policy of the Postal Union for dealing with fictitious or previously used postage stamps of other countries found on articles received from abroad, and by Act XVI of 1896 the Post Office was authorized to collect Customs duty paid in advance in the same manner as postage under the Act.

Act VI of 1898 is to a great extent an Enabling Act which reserves to Government the power of dealing by rule with numerous questions of postal practice and procedure affecting the public. For the first time legal recognition was given to registered newspapers, and the Governor-General in Council was empowered to make rules for their registration in the offices of Postmasters-General. The acceptance of the official marks of the Post Office on postal articles as prima facie evidence that they have been refused, that the addressee cannot be found, or that any sum is due on them, was a principle taken from the English Law.

Section 20 of the Act was quite new and prohibits the sending by post of indecent or obscene articles, and the tendency of the age is shown by the first mention in this clause of the word "sedition" in connection with postal articles. "Articles having thereon or on the cover thereof any words, marks or designs of an indecent, obscene, seditious, defamatory or grossly offensive character" were prohibited from being sent by post. The wording of this section is interesting owing to the difficulty of interpreting the meaning of the word "thereon"; it would almost seem that the framers of the Act wished to wrap this clause in ambiguity. In Section 22 the important principle of the English Law is laid down that the Post Office is not bound to send parcels and packets along with the letter mail, but may detain them as long as is necessary. By Section 25 special power is given to search for goods notified under the Sea Customs Act, and in Section 26, the Public Emergency section, "The Governor-General in Council, or a Local Government, or any officer specially authorized in this behalf by the Governor-General in Council, may, by an order in writing, direct

that any postal article or class or description of postal articles in course of transmission by post shall be intercepted or detained." Had the framers of this Act any idea of the extent to which this power would have to be used they might have expressed themselves in greater detail.[1] Sections 30 to 36 and 43 to 48 of the Act deal with the power of the Governor-General in Council to make rules for the insurance of postal articles and the transmission of value-payable articles and money orders by post.

To judge from the large number of additional penalty clauses introduced into this Act, postal crime seems to have grown side by side with postal development. Every possible misdemeanour and fraud is visited with appropriate punishment; not even the mail runner who fails in his duty to appear at the time he is required can escape, while the postman who makes a false entry in his book to show that he has been visiting a certain village, when all the time he has been loitering in a neighbouring bazaar, renders himself liable to six months' imprisonment or a fine of one hundred rupees. Sections 62 and 63 are taken from the English Post Office Protection Act, 1884, and impose penalties for injuring the contents of any letter-box or for disfiguring any post office or letter-box. To prevent hasty and ill-considered prosecutions, it was laid

[1] The first instance of an article being prohibited from passing through the post is that of the *Bengal Gazette* (editor, J. A. Hicky), quoted by Dr. Busteed in his *Echoes of Old Calcutta*:

"*Order.* Fort William, November 14th, 1780. Public notice is hereby given that as a weekly newspaper called the *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertiser*, printed by J. A. Hicky, has lately been found to contain several unbroken paragraphs tending to vilify private characters and to disturb the peace of the Settlement, it is no longer permitted to be circulated through the channel of the General Post Office."

down in Section 72 that no Court should take cognizance of any offence under the Act, except with the previous sanction or on the complaint of the Director-General of the Post Office or of a Postmaster-General.

In 1898 postage rates on letters were reduced to the following scale:—

Not exceeding ½ tola . . .	½ anna.
„ „ 1½ tolas . . .	1 „
„ „ 3 „ . . .	2 annas.
For every additional 1½ tolas or fraction thereof	1 anna.

The postage on newspapers was fixed at:

Not exceeding 4 tolas . . .	¼ anna.
„ „ 20 „ . . .	½ „
For every additional 20 tolas or part thereof	½ „

In 1905 a still further reduction in letter postage was made, namely:

Not exceeding ¾ tola . . .	½ anna.
„ „ 1½ tolas . . .	1 „
„ „ 3 „ . . .	2 annas.
For every additional 1½ tolas or fraction thereof	1 anna.

In 1907, after a long discussion, it was decided to make the Indian anna rate approximate to the English penny rate. The British Post Office had decided to carry 4 ounces for one penny, and as an ounce is roughly 2½ tolas the weight that could be sent for an anna was increased from 1½ to 10 tolas. The ¾ tolas for ½ anna was very

properly considered absurd, and the weight was raised to 1 tola. The rates as revised in 1907 were:

Not exceeding 1 tola . . .	½ anna.
„ „ 10 tolas . . .	1 „
For every additional 10 tolas or fraction thereof	1 anna.

This was a sweeping measure which mainly benefited that portion of the community which could best afford to pay high rates of postage, and the argument for making the anna rate correspond to the penny rate in England left out of account the very important fact that in England the minimum rate for letters was a penny, whereas in India it is half that amount. It is difficult to estimate what the loss to the Post Office must have been, but when one considers that a letter of 10 tolas, which under the previous rates would have had to bear 7 annas postage, could be sent for 1 anna it will be understood that the loss was considerable. The measure was also one that affected the Post Office in two ways, since less revenue was received in postage stamps and the increased number of bulky letters necessitated a larger carrying staff. Despite the admitted cheapness of postage in India, some short-sighted agitators cry out for a ½ anna letter rate; but the Post Office can well afford to disregard their murmurings and may congratulate itself on having made its services accessible to even the very poorest member of the community.

By Act III of 1912 the Indian Post Office Act of 1898 was further amended, and special rules were made to protect postmasters who had to search or detain articles passing through the post. The public who use the value-payable system have been protected from fraudulent

traders by a section which provides for the retention and repayment to the addressee, in cases of fraud, of money recovered on the delivery of any value-payable postal article; at the same time the Post Office is authorized to levy a fee before making any inquiry into complaints of this kind.

Since the Great War broke out in 1914 it has been found necessary to increase inland postage rates for both letters and parcels. In 1918 the letter rates were fixed as follows:—

For letters: Not exceeding 1 tola .	½ anna.
Exceeding 1 tola, but not exceeding 2½ tolas	1 „
For every additional 2½ tolas or part thereof	1 „
For parcels: Not exceeding 20 tolas .	2 annas.
Exceeding 20 tolas, but not exceeding 40 tolas	4 „
For every additional 40 tolas or part thereof	4 „

Many complaints were received that the parcel rates were excessive and injuring the fruit trade and other local industries, so that with effect from the 1st June, 1919, the rates were reduced to 3 annas for every 40 tolas up to 440 tolas, the minimum of 2 annas for 20 tolas remaining the same.

CHAPTER V

PARCEL POST

THE parcel post in India has its origin in the old "Bhangy Post," a name derived from the bamboo stick or bhangy which an Indian carrier balances on his shoulder with the weights slung at each end. The Bhangy Post was first used solely for the conveyance of official records and articles sent on Government service, and the limit of weight was 600 tolas (15 lbs.). In 1854 a regular Bhangy Post was established and opened to the public. The rates varied with weight and distance according to the scale laid down in the Post Office Act of 1854. Where communication by rail existed, the practice was to hand over bhangy parcels to the railway at the latter's risk and to demand their conveyance to destination free of charge. This procedure led to a series of those acrimonious disputes which are so characteristic of the early relations between the Post Office and the railway companies. The contention of the Post Office was that the bhangy mail formed part of the regular mail which the railway was bound by law to carry free of charge. The East India Railway, which took up the cudgels on the other side, denied this contention and insisted upon charging for parcels as goods sent by passenger train. Finally, after much wrangling, the matter was settled by Government in 1855, when it was decided that service bhangy parcels

should be carried free and that the rate for non-service parcels should be fixed at $\frac{1}{3}$ anna per maund (80 lbs.) per mile, which was the existing rate for passengers' luggage. At the same time the Post Office was directed to withdraw from the carrier traffic wherever the railway could supply its place, and post offices were forbidden to accept non-service bhangy parcels for places situated on railway lines.

These rules were not very effective, since it was impossible to distinguish service from non-service parcels or to ascertain the weight of the latter when they were both despatched together and lump sum payments were accepted. The amounts paid show that the traffic cannot have been very great; for instance, in 1871 the Great India Peninsula Railway agreed to accept a monthly payment of Rs.568, the Madras Railway Rs.173 and the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway Rs.150, which was afterwards raised to Rs.400 in 1881. The whole question was soon merged in that of general haulage rates for postal vehicles, which is discussed in the chapter upon the Railway Mail Service.

The statement at the end of this chapter shows the variation in parcel rates from 1866 to 1919. The first great step forward in the administration of the parcel post was in 1871, when rates according to distance were abolished and a fixed rate of 3 annas for 10 tolas was introduced. The limits of weight were retained at 600 tolas for foot lines and 2000 tolas for railway lines, which were fixed in 1869. In 1895 rates were reduced and registration for all parcels exceeding 440 tolas in weight was made compulsory. In 1907, after a strong representation made by the Railway Conference that the parcel post was interfering with the railway parcel traffic, the limit

of weight was lowered to 800 tolas (20 lbs.). As a matter of fact, after a careful inquiry it was found that very few parcels above this weight were carried by the Post Office and that these were carried at a loss. In the same year the rates for small parcels were greatly reduced, with the result that the total number carried in 1907–8 increased by over 600,000. The railways did not gain much by the concession, as the retail dealers adopted the simple device of packing their goods in smaller bulk, which the low rates enabled them to do without any appreciable loss.

The development of parcel traffic since 1854 is shown by the following figures :—

	Number of Parcels.
1854–55	463,000
1870–71	694,000
1880–81	1,080,868
1890–91	1,901,547
1900–01	2,679,119
1910–11	11,205,844
1913–14	12,667,172
1917–18	14,150,948

The increase in the last few years is little short of marvellous and is due to the reduction in rates and the growth of the value-payable or cash on delivery system so largely adopted by all retail traders, which has diverted the whole of the light parcel traffic from the railways to the Post Office.

In 1873 an overland Parcel Post was established between Great Britain and India through the agency of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. The British Post Office had no concern with this arrangement, and in 1885 a direct exchange, which was quite

separate from the P. & O. Company's contract, was introduced between the two administrations for parcels up to a limit of seven pounds in weight. In 1897, at the Universal Postal Congress held at Washington, India joined the International Parcel Post Union, and since 1899, when the Acts of the Congress came into force, parcels can be exchanged with almost any country in the world.

As already mentioned, nothing has affected the parcel post traffic of the country to such an extent as the value-payable or cash on delivery system, which was introduced in 1878 and is now used generally by all retail firms in India. By this system the Post Office not only undertakes to deliver a parcel, but also, for a small commission, to collect the cost of it from the addressee. In India, where there are few large firms outside the Presidency towns, the value-payable system has proved an inestimable convenience to the upcountry purchaser, who pays the Post Office for his purchases on receipt and is put to no further trouble. Like everything designed for the good of mankind, the Value-Payable Post is not altogether an unmixed blessing, and it is a source of continual worry to the officials of the Department. The weak point in the system is that people have to buy articles without seeing them, and if they are disappointed in their purchases they are inclined to think that the Post Office is at fault and to demand their money back. It is customary in India for certain ladies to dispose of their garments through the medium of the advertisement columns of the *Pioneer*, one of the leading newspapers. The dresses are always by Paquin and quite new; the hats are the latest from Paris. This is the seller's point of view. How different that of the purchaser! As Postmaster-General I have received many a bitter complaint

of the rag which has been received under the name of a new Paquin gown and for which I apparently was held personally responsible. "I never imagined that the Post Office could lend its assistance to such disgraceful swindling," once wrote an indignant lady who had suffered in this way and who was told that the Department could not possibly adjudicate on the quality of the goods received by her, that the Department was only in the position of carriers and that she must settle her dispute with the sender.

The value-payable system suffers chiefly from the firm belief in Providence which is so deeply engrained in the Eastern mind. Although strictly forbidden by the rules of the Post Office, the small trader sends out numbers of articles by value-payable post to persons who have not given any orders for them, trusting that some of them will be accepted by a confiding public, and, strange to say, he manages to do a certain amount of business in this way. On the other hand, many people are quite ready to order things from shops which they hope to be able to pay for upon arrival, but, unfortunately for the firms that supply them, these hopes are often not fulfilled. The Indian schoolboy, who is very like all other schoolboys in the world in this respect, is specially tempted by the flashy catalogues issued by the cheap Calcutta firms, and when, in the enthusiasm of the moment, he orders a five rupee watch, it doesn't follow that he has the money or is even likely to have it; but his self-esteem is satisfied by the mere issue of the order and, as for his ability to pay when the time comes, it lies on the knees of the gods. The result of this trait in Eastern character is that about 20 per cent of the value-payable articles posted are returned to the senders.

Some years ago a firm of box-makers who wanted to push their business discovered that the value-payable post, assisted by the national character, provided them with a royal road to success, and they set to work on the following lines. They issued a large number of tickets by post, which were delivered on payment of 1 rupee and 2 annas. Any person who was innocent enough to accept one of these found that the ticket was composed of six coupons, and that if he could induce six of his friends to send the coupons to the firm and each to receive in return a similar ticket *and pay for it*, then he as the original recipient would be presented with a steel trunk. The success of this scheme was extraordinary, and every post office in India was flooded with these coupon tickets. About 70 per cent were refused, but the firm lost nothing by this, as it saved them in the matter of trunks, since, if any one of the coupon holders failed to keep faith with his friend the bargain was off. The whole business was a gigantic swindle, and it so offended the Director-General's sense of morality that he had a regulation passed to put a stop to any articles being sent by post which contained " coupons, tickets, certificates or introductions for the sale of goods on what is known as the snowball system."

A complete history of the Indian Parcel Post would require the pen of a military historian. It is a history of warfare with continuous engagements, sometimes regular pitched battles with the railways and sometimes small but sharp skirmishes with irate ladies. The latest foes are the municipal councils of certain large towns in which the revenue is raised by an octroi tax upon all imported articles. Hitherto articles received by post have been exempt from any tax of this kind, and all attempts made

by municipalities to be allowed to scrutinize the parcel post have been strenuously opposed. The thin end of the wedge has, however, been introduced at Delhi, where lists of insured parcels are supplied to the municipality, which makes its own arrangements for ascertaining the contents from the addressees. The practice is wrong in principle, because it is a breach of the confidence which the public place in the Post Office on the understanding that no information of any kind regarding postal articles is imparted except to the persons immediately concerned, and any measure which tends to shake the confidence of the public in the secrecy of the Department is to be strongly deprecated. A great deal of fuss was made in Simla some years ago about this very matter on the ground that the local traders suffered from people purchasing goods outside the municipality and getting them in by post. When an inquiry was held, it was found that the large majority of parcels received by post were addressed to the firms in the town, a discovery which put a sudden stop to the agitation. It is very doubtful if the Parcel Post at the present rates pays the Post Office, and where places are situated some distance off the line of rail and have to be reached by foot lines it is quite certain that every parcel is carried at a loss. Unfortunately these are the very places where people make the greatest use of the Parcel Post; the tea planters of Assam, for example, getting their whisky, jam and other stores in this way from Calcutta.

A further agitation is now afoot to have the weight of parcels brought down to eleven pounds, which is the maximum weight for a foreign parcel and is also the limit of weight in England. This, on the whole, is as much as the Post Office can be fairly expected to carry, but

whether the proposal will be adopted remains to be seen.

Parcel Post Rates

(1) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1866 to 31st March, 1878 :

For Distances		If not Exceeding in Weight													
		20 tolas.		50 tolas.		100 tolas.		200 tolas.		300 tolas.		400 tolas.		500 tolas.		600 tolas.	
	Miles	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.	Rs.	a.
Not exceeding	300	0	4	0	8	0	12	1	8	2	4	3	0	3	12	4	8
Not exceeding	600	0	8	1	0	1	8	3	0	4	8	6	0	7	8	9	0
Not exceeding	900	0	12	1	8	2	4	4	8	6	12	9	0	11	3	41	8
Not exceeding	1200	1	0	2	0	3	0	6	0	9	0	12	0	15	0	18	0
Exceeding	1200	1	4	2	8	3	12	7	8	11	4	15	0	18	12	22	8

(2) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1st April, 1878, to 14th August, 1880 :

Not exceeding 40 tolas in weight . 8 annas.
Exceeding 40 tolas and not exceeding 80 tolas . . . . . 12 ,,
For every additional 40 tolas . . 4 ,,

(3) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 15th August, 1880, to 31st July, 1895 :

Not exceeding 20 tolas in weight . 4 annas.
Exceeding 20 tolas and not exceeding 40 tolas . . . . . 8 ,,
For every additional 40 tolas . . 4 ,,

(4) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1st August, 1895, to 30th June, 1901 :

Any parcel not exceeding 20 tolas in weight . . . . . 2 annas.

Any parcel exceeding 20 tolas, but not exceeding 40 tolas in weight . 4 annas.
For each additional 40 tolas or fraction of 40 tolas up to 2000 tolas . 4 „

Registration fee (optional for uninsured parcels not exceeding 440 tolas in weight)—

For a parcel not exceeding 20 tolas in weight . . . . . 2 annas.
For a parcel exceeding 20 tolas in weight . . . . . 4 „

(5) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1st July, 1901, to 30th September, 1907 :

(*a*) Parcels not exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel not exceeding 20 tolas in weight . . . . . 2 annas.
For a parcel exceeding 20 tolas, but not exceeding 40 tolas in weight 4 „
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight . . . . 2 „

(*b*) Parcels exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel exceeding 440 tolas, but not exceeding 480 tolas in weight Rs.3
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight . . . . 4 annas.

(6) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1st October, 1907, to 31st October, 1918 :

(*a*) Parcels not exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel not exceeding 40 tolas in weight . . . . . 2 annas.
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight . . . . 2 „

(*b*) Parcels exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel exceeding 440 tolas, but not exceeding 480 tolas . .	Rs.3
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight	4 annas.

(7) From 1st October, 1908, the maximum limit of weight for an inland parcel was reduced from 2000 tolas to 800 tolas in the case of a private (non-official) parcel, and raised from 600 tolas to 800 tolas in the case of an official parcel.

(8) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 1st November, 1918, to 15th May, 1919:

For a parcel not exceeding 20 tolas .	2 annas.
For a parcel exceeding 20 tolas, but not exceeding 40 tolas . . .	4 „
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight up to 800 tolas .	4 „

(9) Rates of postage on inland parcels in force from 16th May, 1919, up to date:

(*a*) Parcels not exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel not exceeding 20 tolas .	2 annas.
For a parcel exceeding 20 tolas, but not exceeding 40 tolas . . .	3 „
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight	3 „

(*b*) Parcels exceeding 440 tolas in weight—

For a parcel exceeding 440 tolas, but not exceeding 480 tolas . .	Rs.3
For every additional 40 tolas or part of that weight	4 annas.