desert between Cairo and Suez, provided carriages and placed small steamers on the Nile and the canal of Alexandria. Waghorn's triumph was on the 31st October, 1845, when he bore the mails from Bombay, only thirty days old, into London. This memorable feat settled the question of the superiority of the overland as compared with the old Cape route, but it was not given effect to without great opposition from the shipping companies.

In 1840 the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company obtained a charter of incorporation, and one of the conditions was that steam communication with India should be established within two years. This condition was fulfilled by the despatch of the *Hindustan* to India via the Cape of Good Hope in 1842. The advantages of the route across the isthmus of Suez were, however, too obvious, and the P. and O. Company took up a contract for the conveyance of mails between London and Suez, while vessels of the East India Company's navy conveyed them between Suez and Bombay. The journey from Alexandria to Suez was most uncomfortable for passengers. It was made by canal boat to Cairo, and then by two-wheeled vehicles across the desert to Suez. In 1844 a contract was given for five years to the P. and O. Company to establish a regular mail service in the Indian seas, with a subsidy of £160,000 a year for the combined India and China services. This contract was subsequently extended, and in January, 1853, a fresh contract was concluded with the Company under which fortnightly communication was secured between England, India and China, with a service once in two months between Singapore and Sydney. On the 7th July, 1854, a supplementary contract was entered into for the conveyance of mails between Southampton and Bombay through Alex-

andria, by which way the transit time was twenty-eight days. The total subsidy under both contracts was £224,300 a year. The sea postage collected by the United Kingdom and India was devoted to the payment of this subsidy, and any deficiency was borne equally by both countries. In 1867 a fresh contract for twelve years was concluded with the Company for a weekly service to and from Bombay and a fortnightly one to and from China and Japan. The annual subsidy was fixed at £400,000, to be increased to £500,000 if such should be necessary, in order to enable the Company to pay 6 per cent dividend upon their capital. This absurd clause was cancelled in 1870, and the annual subsidy was fixed at £450,000.

The Suez Canal was opened in 1869, but owing to difficulties with the British Government it was not used for the passage of the mail steamers until many years later. In 1880 the Southampton route was abolished, and the contract for the weekly service stipulated for a transit time of 17½ days between London and Bombay via Alexandria and Suez. It was not until 1888 that the mails were sent by the Suez Canal instead of by rail across Egypt.

During the term of the contract 1867–1869, the port for reception and despatch of mails was Marseilles. Arrangements were made in the new contract of 1869 for the substitution of Brindisi for Marseilles on the completion of the Mont Cenis Tunnel and railway, and Brindisi remained the European port for the reception and despatch of mails until the outbreak of war in 1914.

On the 1st July, 1898, a new contract was drawn up for a combined Eastern and Australian service. The transit time between London and Bombay was limited

to 14½ days and the annual subsidy was fixed at £330,000, of which £245,000 represented the payment for the service between Brindisi, India, Ceylon, the Straits Settlements and China. The last contract was entered into with the Company on the 1st July, 1908, for seven years. The transit time between Brindisi and Bombay was reduced to 11¼ days with an allowance of thirty-six hours in the monsoon, and the total subsidy was fixed at £305,000.

The present contract with the P. and O. Company expires in 1922, and what fate the future has in store for the Suez Canal route we cannot tell. There has been much talk of a through railway from Calais to Karachi, and with the Channel tunnel completed this would mean a railway route from London to India. The cost, however, of transporting the Indian mail, which often consists of more than ten thousand bags, over this enormous distance by rail would probably be prohibitive. Under the International Postal Convention each country traversed would have the right to claim a territorial transit charge, and with fast steamers between Marseilles and Bombay the saving in time might not be so great as has been anticipated.

Another competitor to the steamer service has appeared recently in the form of Aviation. Several proposals for an Air Mail Service between England and India have been made, but the success of long distance transits by air is not yet assured.

It has been stated that the old familiar scenes at Port Said and Aden will soon be as unknown to the Eastern traveller as Table Bay and St. Helena. The old trade routes are to be revived again, no longer with slow and picturesque caravans, but with rushing trains and

aeroplanes. Despite these prophecies the P. and O. continue to build new ships, they book passages even a year ahead, and are preparing to tender for a new mail contract. Is this mere contempt, is it optimism, or is it the adoption of Warren Hastings' motto: "Mens aequa in arduis"?

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE SEA POST OFFICE

IN 1859 the Postmaster-General, United Kingdom, announced that it had been determined to open the homeward-bound mails on board the steamers between Alexandria and Southampton and Alexandria and Marseilles, with a view to effect a partial or complete sorting of the letters and newspapers. He also suggested that the clerks entertained for this service might during the voyage out be employed in sorting the letters and newspapers contained in the mails despatched from England to India. At the same time he inquired whether the Government of India would be willing to bear their proportion of the cost of the scheme. The offer was declined on the ground that English clerks could not sort letters correctly for stations in India, where there were many places with the same name.

In 1860 the Bombay Government reported that on the Europe side of Egypt the former practice of sending an Admiralty Agent with each steamer of the Peninsular and Oriental Company in charge of mails had been abolished, and instead the Company carried a couple of post office clerks to sort the homeward mail. They embarked on the Marseilles boat at Alexandria, and before arriving at Malta they sorted all the letters for transmission via Marseilles. At Malta these clerks were transferred to the vessel for Southampton, and when the steamer reached

that port all the heavy mails were sorted. The Bombay Government suggested that a similar arrangement might be adopted east of Suez, the clerks told off for the work being employed in the Bombay post office when they were not engaged on the steamer. The Bombay Government's suggestion was negatived on the ground of expense in view of the unsatisfactory state of the Indian finances at the time.

In 1864 the subject was revived by Lord Lawrence. The Director-General, Mr. Monteath, agreed with the objections formerly urged that English Post Office clerks could not sort letters for all stations in India, but held that they could sort letters received by the Marseilles route only for Bombay and put up in boxes the letters and papers for the several Governments or Administrations in the provinces. It was then decided that sorting to the above limited extent might best be done in London and that, if it were done by a sorting establishment on a steamer west of Suez, the Indian Government might be reasonably called upon for a contribution. Thus the discussion ended for the time and nothing was done.

The subject was revived in 1868, when weekly communication between England and India was established. In the new contract with the Peninsular and Oriental Company provision was made to accommodate a postal sorting office and give free passages to sorters on the vessels east of Suez. The Government of India decided to take advantage of this arrangement and authorized experimental sea-sorting establishments on the scale of six sets of sorters for fifty-two voyages annually in each direction between Bombay and Suez. Each set consisted of a head sorter, a sorter and two packers. The calculation was based on an allowance of fifteen days each way

for the voyage to and from Suez, with an interval of from two days to six days between a return from Suez and the next departure from Bombay. Notice was at the same time given for the withdrawal of the Naval Agents employed on board the steamers. One of the principal duties of these Naval Agents appears to have been to report whether penalties for delay should be exacted or not according to the circumstances in which the delays occurred.

In his final report in 1870 on the working of the system, as a result of which the establishment was permanently continued, the Director-General described the work of the sea post office as " embracing the sorting of mails for transmission to the various localities of a huge continent, as well as the checking of the accounts made out in respect of such correspondence by the various European offices from which the mails are received. . . . It is a work which, in an office on shore, would be distributed among a large establishment, each member of which would have to learn only a small portion of the business ; and it is a work the bad performance of which even occasionally will give rise to the most serious consequences." The experimental formation of the sea-sorting office had succeeded so well that the inward overland mail was received at Bombay ready for despatch into the interior, instead of having to be detained there for about six hours, which often involved the loss of a whole day for certain places. The Bombay delivery ticket-holders got their overland letters at the post office window about ten minutes after the mail had arrived, and the delivery to Calcutta ticket-holders of letters, which had been sorted at sea, was similarly expedited.

The Indian sea-sorting office sorted letters for the United Kingdom, but the London General Post Office did not reciprocate by sorting the mail for India, the latter being done at sea, which enabled London to dispense with a large expenditure for Naval Agents. Although the revised contract with the Peninsular and Oriental Company provided for proper sorting accommodation on their vessels eastward of Suez, there was no similar provision westward of Suez; on the contrary, it was specially provided that the master or commander of the vessel should take charge of the mails to the west of Suez. The fact was that the work done by the Indian sea-sorting office on the homeward voyage was so complete and thorough that the British Post Office was able to abolish all its sea-sorting establishments west of Suez.

The steady growth in the work to be done and in the number of men required to cope with it gave rise to many difficulties in connection with the provision of suitable and adequate accommodation on board the steamers, the proper supervision of the staff, and the improvement of the service. The sorting arrangements had to be revised frequently, and the extent of the run, which, as stated above, was originally between Suez and Bombay, had in 1890 to be curtailed to the voyage between Aden and Bombay in consequence of the decision of the Peninsular and Oriental Company to tranship the outward and homeward mails at Aden every alternate week.

With the steady increase in the volume of the mails o be dealt with, it was found necessary to add to this staff considerably from time to time. In 1873 the total staff of the six sets comprising the "Marine Postal Service, Suez and Bombay," was raised to six mail

officers, six assistant mail officers, six supernumerary assistant mail officers and twelve packers, i.e. five men for each set. When the journey was curtailed to the Bombay-Aden run the sets were reduced to three, but the number in each set had to be steadily increased until in 1908 it reached twenty-nine, consisting of an assistant mail officer, fifteen sorters and thirteen packers.

In the year 1899 a special inquiry, made in connection with a question asked in Parliament as to the effect of the introduction of Imperial penny postage on work in the sea post office, revealed the fact that the conditions of the service were very exacting on the staff. The extent to which the sorting of the mails could be done at Bombay or in the Railway Mail Service instead of at sea was very fully considered, and, although the Committee of postal officers convened at Bombay to examine the subject did not recommend the discontinuance of the existing arrangement, its retention was made conditional upon the adoption of a number of special measures to reduce the amount of work at sea.

A further inquiry into the conditions of service in the sea post office, instituted in the year 1905 in connection with a representation on the subject made to the Secretary of State for India by the late Mr. Samuel Smith, M.P., again brought into prominence the fact that the work had to be performed in circumstances of a peculiarly trying nature. It also established that, owing to the rapid increase, at the rate of 10 to 12 per cent a year, in the volume of the mails, the question of arranging for the sorting work to be done on shore instead of at sea could not be deferred much longer. This growth was bound to involve further additions to the staff from time to time, while the accommodation which it was possible

to secure for the work, especially on board the through mail steamers, was strictly limited.

The subject of abolishing the sea post office altogether, or, at least, of restricting it to very small proportions, was again taken up in 1907, as the Postmaster-General, Bombay, reported that the service could not be placed on a proper footing without the provision of much more accommodation on board the through steamers, and expressed the opinion that the time had come for considering whether it was not possible to have most of the work of sorting done on shore.

By the end of 1908 the volume of the mails had become so large and the difficulty of dealing with them on board so great that a radical change was needed. The question of having the sorting work done on shore was, therefore, fully examined again with the Postmaster-General, Bombay. The position at the time was as follows: The mails for India despatched from the United Kingdom were received by the Aden-Bombay sea post office partly sorted for the various territorial divisions of India, and partly unsorted. The unsorted portion, which amounted to about 40 per cent of the total, consisted of the articles of all classes posted or received in London late on Friday evening, which the London General Post Office did not sort before despatch. The Indian mails from countries other than the United Kingdom were received by the sea post office wholly unsorted. With the exception of trade circulars and price lists, all the unsorted mails received were dealt with by the sea post office between Aden and Bombay. The average number of the unregistered letters, postcards, newspapers, packets of printed papers, and samples which had to be sorted by the sea post office

on each voyage from Aden to Bombay was 150,000 and, in addition, some 7000 registered articles had to be specially treated and about 6000 unpaid articles examined and taxed with postage. This work had to be performed under very trying conditions and, during the monsoon season especially, the staff was hard pressed to finish the sorting before the steamer reached Bombay. The accommodation for sorting the mails provided on the through mail steamers was becoming less and less adequate as the volume of the mail increased and no additional space could be obtained.

The proposal to meet the situation by again extending the run of the sea post office to Port Said or Suez had to be negatived owing to the transhipment at Aden on alternate weeks. Moreover, it was undesirable to resort to a measure of this kind, as, quite apart from the large additional expenditure involved in return for insufficient advantages, the difficulty of keeping the staff under close and constant supervision was becoming more pronounced. In fact, this difficulty of exercising proper supervision over the enormous volume of work at sea furnished in itself a very strong argument in favour of having the work of sorting and dealing with these important mails done entirely on shore.

It was estimated that, with the provision of all necessary appliances and conveniences for dealing rapidly with the work on shore, a staff of about 150 well-trained and efficient sorters could do within a period of two and a half hours from the time of the *landing* of the mails the whole of the work then done by the sea post office. This number could be easily provided from among the sorters already employed in the sea post office, in the Bombay General Post Office, and in sections of the

Railway Mail Service working into and out of Bombay. The provision of suitable accommodation for the sorting to be done on shore, which was formerly a matter of much difficulty owing to the want of space in the General Post Office, Bombay, no longer existed as the new General Post Office near the Victoria Terminus, the building of which was then well advanced, had ample room for this purpose.

It was unnecessary to enter into any examination of the question in respect of the outward mails from India as the whole of the work done by the sea post office in connection with those mails could just as easily be performed, without any public or postal inconvenience and at very little extra cost, by the Railway Mail Service and in the various large post offices in India.

In view of the increasingly unfavourable conditions under which the sorting had to be performed at sea and of the greater security and efficiency that would be secured by having it done on shore, it was admitted that the best course would be to abolish the sea sorting service, but to do so gradually in order to avoid any dislocation in the disposal of the foreign mails. The various Indian Chambers of Commerce were consulted in 1911, and the general opinion was that no change should be made until the Alexandra Docks at Bombay were completed. The authorities of the Bombay Port Trust were accordingly requested to provide a sorting hall for the Post Office on the new pier. On the completion of the new mole in the harbour the mail steamer, instead of discharging its mails in the stream, would be able to berth alongside the pier; the delay in transhipment would be greatly reduced, and with a sufficient staff of sorters on the spot the mails would be

ready for despatch by the special trains due to leave Bombay within four and a half hours of the signalling of the steamers.

The question was finally settled by the outbreak of the War in 1914. The sailings of the mail steamers became very irregular, accommodation on board could no longer be provided for sorters, and consequently the sorting of both the outward and inward mails had to be performed in the Bombay General Post Office. The sorting of the homeward mail on shore was undertaken from the 15th August, 1914, and the last inward mail sorted on board arrived at Bombay on the 27th August, 1914. In spite of war conditions, the first special train usually started within seven hours of the steamer having been signalled. In these circumstances the sea post office was formally abolished as such, and the Indian share of the Eastern Mail Service subsidy was reduced by a sum of £8800 a year on account of its discontinuance.

No other Postal Administration of the world has ever attempted to undertake the task of sorting the foreign mails while in course of transit by sea on anything like the scale on which this work was done by the Indian Post Office. A certain amount of sorting of mails was done on the steamers of the White Star Line sailing between Liverpool and New York, and on those of the American Line sailing between Southampton and New York, also on board the German steamers sailing between Bremen or Hamburg and New York. The work done on those lines, however, was on a very minor scale and a small staff of four men on the White Star and American Line steamers, and of three on the German steamers was employed. The strength of the staff of the sea post

office working between Bombay and Aden was, in 1914, one hundred and three men, divided into three sets of one assistant mail officer, seventeen sorters and fourteen packers each, with seven probationary sorters. The staff was a most extravagant one; the men were not employed for more than half their time. By using a large staff and with proper organisation the work that took five days at sea is now being done more efficiently in a less number of hours in Bombay.

Under present arrangements the mails are hoisted from the steamer direct into the Foreign Mail Sorting Office on the Ballard Pier. There they are opened and sorted for the various parts of India by about one hundred and fifty sorters, and within three hours they are ready for the postal special trains which leave the pier station for Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow and the Punjab. Foreign Mail Service sections work in each of these trains to deal with the final sorting and distribution of the mails to the various stations *en route*.

# CHAPTER XV

## THE POST OFFICE IN MESOPOTAMIA AND THE PERSIAN GULF

THE Great War has thrown such strong light on the countries which border on the Persian Gulf that it may be interesting to record the important part which has been played by the Post Office of India in connection with imperial policy in Persia and Mesopotamia.

Owing to political considerations and the necessity of keeping open alternative means of communication between Europe and India, the importance of the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia as a mail route was established nearly a century and a half ago. The ships of the old Indian Navy carried mail packets from Bombay to Basra, which was the starting-point of a regular dromedary post to Aleppo, linked with a horse post from Aleppo to Constantinople, and it is an interesting piece of history that Lord Nelson's letter to the Bombay Government, giving the news of the naval victory of the Nile, was transmitted by this route.

During the first half of the last century, as the Persian Gulf and the Shat-el-Arab were infested with pirates, these waters were avoided by British trading vessels, so that, when a ship of the Indian Navy was not available to convey mails to Bombay, letters from the Political Residents of the East India Company stationed at Bagdad and Basra were sent to India by the desert route

via Damascus and Beyrout and thence through Egypt, and correspondence between Bushire and India had to be diverted through Teheran and Alexandria. In 1862 a regular six-weekly mail service between Bombay and Basra was undertaken by the British India Steam Navigation Company, and about the same time the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company agreed to extend the mail service from Basra to Bagdad by running their steamers in connection with the ocean line. The postal system at the coast ports, however, was defective owing to the absence of local post offices for the collection and distribution of mails, but these were gradually established from the year 1864 onwards at Bushire, Muscat, Bandar Abas, Bahrain, Mohammerah, and other places under the protection of British Consular officers, and post offices were opened at Bagdad and Basra in Turkish Arabia in 1868.

Although all these post offices were primarily intended for the benefit of political officers of the Government of India, they have proved just as useful to the consular representatives of other European nations and to the public, and there is no doubt that, by supplying a commercial want, they gave a great impetus to trade in the Persian Gulf region. For years there was no other local postal service worthy of the name, and intercourse with the hinterland was entirely under the control of the British Consular officers. In 1868 Turkish Arabia was wholly dependent for regular communication with the outside world on English enterprise. There were two mail routes from Bagdad, one to Teheran via Kermanshah, a distance of 480 miles, and the other from Bagdad to Damascus, 500 miles, in connection with the British Consulate at the latter place and the route to

England via Beyrout. A monthly mail service was also maintained by the Government of India for the convenience of the British Legation at Teheran and the Residency of Bushire, the route lying through Shiraz and Ispahan, where British agencies had been established, but no postage was charged on letters despatched, as the line was kept up purely for political purposes. In addition to this post the Indo-European Telegraph Department had a weekly service from Bushire to Shiraz. These Persian lines were worked partly by runners and partly by horsemen, and continued until the Persian Government inaugurated its own service in 1877 and established a weekly post between Bushire and Teheran.

The Turkish representative at the International Postal Congress held at Berne in 1878 urged that all foreign post offices in the Ottoman dominions should be suppressed, but the demand was rejected as it involved a diplomatic question outside the province of the Congress. In 1881 the Turkish Government established a dromedary post between Bagdad and Damascus in opposition to the English consular overland post and, after repeated representations on the part of the Ottoman Government, the latter was abolished in 1886 after having been in existence for upwards of a hundred years. In the following year the Ottoman Government closed their own line, and the only direct route left open to Europe was the Turkish post via Mosul on the Tigris to Constantinople. When reporting the closing of the British desert post, the British Consul-General at Bagdad asked the Postmaster-General in London to warn the British public not to post anything of value by any route other than the one from London to

Bombay and thence by sea to Basra and Bagdad, and the numerous complaints of the loss of parcels, books and letters fully justified his want of confidence in the Ottoman post.

The British post offices at Basra and Bagdad and the service by river steamer between these two ports were subjected to marked hostility on the part of the Turks, notwithstanding the continued efforts of the British Consular officer to limit their functions. Competition with the local Ottoman postal institutions was never aimed at, and Indian post offices were primarily and chiefly maintained for Consular purposes and located in the Consulate buildings. Local traders, however, were not slow to discover the advantage of the safe transit offered by the Indian mail service and the convenience of the parcel post system, but their efforts to avoid payment of Customs dues on articles imported by this means were frustrated at the outset by the British Consul-General of Bagdad, Sir Arnold Kemball, who went so far as to suspend the parcel traffic in the interests of the Turkish Government until the latter could make adequate provision for Custom-House examination and levying of dues on both import and export parcels. After various methods of detecting and dealing with dutiable parcels had been tried for many years, the system of handing over all inward parcels received from the offices of exchange at Bombay, Karachi and Bushire to the Turkish Customs at Bagdad and Basra with copies of the Customs declarations and invoices received was adopted by the Consular post offices, the addressees being required to take delivery at the Customs House on presentation of a delivery order signed by the British-Indian postmaster.

Anyone who has had experience of the vagaries of Turkish Customs House officials can sympathize with people whose goods fell into their hands. The smallest irregularity, however unintentional, detected in a declaration or manifest could only be set right by the liberal distribution of bribes. Woe betide the scrupulous owner or consignee who declined to adopt such methods and decided instead to stand by his rights and carry his complaint to higher authorities. The story is told of a young missionary lady whose wedding outfit was packed into a box which was taken in custody by a Turkish official and was detained for the ostensible purpose of examination of the contents and assessment of duty. The settlement of this knotty point proceeded in a leisurely fashion for weeks, because the owner's conscience or purse would not permit of her speedily clinching the matter by a suitable payment. When the box was finally delivered the addressee found, to her horror, that the wedding dress and other articles of her trousseau bore unmistakable traces of having been worn. To add insult to injury, the Customs authorities threatened to confiscate the goods, saying that there was a prohibition against the importation of "worn clothes"! There is no doubt that they had been freely used by the harem of some Ottoman Customs official, as the curiosity of Turkish ladies regarding the latest European fashions was notorious and could usually overcome official scruples.

When the Inland Insurance system was introduced in India in 1877 it was extended to the post offices in the Persian Gulf and Turkish Arabia. The Insured Parcel Post was used largely by traders at Bagdad, Basra and Bushire for the exportation of specie, and the total value insured in 1882–83 amounted to over twenty-four lakhs

of rupees. The pearl merchants at Bahrain, which is the centre of the pearl fisheries in the Gulf, availed themselves largely of the Insured Parcels Post for the export of valuable parcels of pearls. Protests were soon lodged by the British India Steam Navigation Company, which held the mail contract, against this competition on the part of the Post Office on the ground that it infringed their monopoly. They argued that the carriage of specie and pearls was almost the sole source of profit from the Persian Gulf service, and after a careful review of the whole question it was decided in 1885 to abolish insurance of parcels and letters to and from the British post offices in the Gulf and Turkish Arabia. This measure resulted in a heavy loss in postal revenue, but was only fair to a Company which had risked much in maintaining British trade relations with that part of the world, and which has done more than any other to throttle German competition.

The steamship companies employed to carry mails have all along had to contend with serious difficulties at the Gulf ports. The original mail service undertaken by the British India Steam Navigation Company between Bombay and Basra, and by the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company between Basra and Bagdad, was a six-weekly one, but a monthly service was arranged in 1866 and a fortnightly service in 1870. From 1878 onwards mails were despatched weekly in both directions, and this has been supplemented in recent years by a fast service in connection with the English mail, the steamers calling only at the principal intermediate ports. There were many obstacles to speedy transit and delivery of mails, such as absence of lights and buoys, want of harbour facilities at the Persian ports, difficulties of navi-

gation in the river Tigris during the dry season, obstruction on the part of the authorities, especially the Turks, and difficulty of obtaining regular labour at the various anchorages. At many places the mail steamers have to anchor far out in the roadstead, and in rough weather there is some risk and delay in landing and embarking mails. The mail contract with the British India Steam Navigation Company required that mails should be exchanged during daylight, and three hours were specified for the purpose; but this condition could not always be observed, and it was in the power of the local postmaster to upset all arrangements. Unrest was a common feature of the political life of these parts, especially when there was a change of Governors, and the authorities were generally too feeble to cope with a rising among the Arab or Persian tribes without the assistance of British bluejackets or Indian troops, who were not always available on the spot. At such times the Indian postmaster used to shut up his office long before darkness set in and barricade himself and his mails in the inner rooms of the building, so that the ship's mail officer arriving at dusk had no easy task in getting access to him. On one occasion the Political Resident of the Persian Gulf, whose word is law in these regions, was a passenger by the mail steamer which arrived at a certain port on a very sultry summer evening. Being anxious that the steamer should sail to Karachi without unnecessary delay, he asked the captain to expedite its departure, and the latter, who had previous experience of the local post office, said that he had his doubts about receiving the mails before morning, but promised to try his best, and went ashore himself. Two hours later a message came to the ship asking for the Political Resident's personal assistance, and there was

nothing left for the distinguished official to do but to go to the office himself. He found the captain and his second officer pelting the roof of the post office with stones, while from inside issued forth the vilest abuse of all ships' captains and their relations, with threats to report the attack to the Resident. The matter was eventually settled, and the story is still told by all the natives with great gusto, as the Eastern mind sees a special humour in the setting down of an important official.

The Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company, owned by Messrs. Lynch Brothers, during the many years of its existence was never able to obtain permission from the Ottoman Government to run more than two steamers between Basra and Bagdad. The distance is five hundred miles, and, as the paddle-boats had occasionally to tie up during the night when the river was low, it is not surprising that the weekly mail service each way had no reputation for regularity. There were several other causes which contributed to misconnection between these boats and the ocean-going mail steamers of the British India Company. The run from Basra to Bagdad and vice versa was usually accomplished in five days, which left only two days at either end for loading and unloading, cleaning and repairs of engines and other duties. If a steamer reached port towards the end of the week, little or no work could be done. Friday is a general holiday among the Turks and Arabs who are Mohammedans, and the Customs House is kept closed; Saturday is the Hebrew Sabbath, when Jews are absent from the wharves; while Sunday is a *dies non* with the Armenian Christians, who are among the most important of the shippers. It was hard for an European merchant to contend with such an accumula-

tion of sacred days. He was willing to keep open and work on every day of the week, but the susceptibilities of the local population cannot be overridden. The Turkish Government tried every conceivable method of hindering the enterprise of Messrs. Lynch and Company, but their steamers continued to flourish and gain in popularity, whereas the Ottoman line of steamers, established in 1867 under the auspices of the Government with the avowed object of smashing the British line, failed to justify its existence. The Turkish steamers were badly equipped and inefficiently controlled, and being always in a state of dilapidation became a byword of reproach even among the Turkish subjects of Mesopotamia. It was not surprising, therefore, that overtures on the part of this Company to obtain the English contract for the carriage of mails were never seriously considered. Apart from the unreliability of the service, there were strong political grounds for supporting the Company which had done so much under the British flag to open up the commerce of Mesopotamia.

Originally the merchants at the intermediate river ports of Kurnah, Kut and Amara, on the Tigris, were accustomed to post letters on the river mail boats and the clerk on board acted as a sort of travelling postmaster, but it was not long before the Turkish authorities raised objections to this practice as an infringement of their postal rights, notwithstanding that they had a concession of free carriage of Turkish official correspondence through the British Post. After much correspondence and discussion between the Indian Political and Postal authorities it was decided not to allow the mail steamer to be used as a post office. Consequently all letters posted on board were made over to the Ottoman

post offices, and this procedure was also followed in respect of local postings in the British post offices at Basra and Bagdad for all places in Turkish Arabia.

The purely Consular status of the Post Office in the Persian Gulf region was shown by the fact that our mail bags for Bagdad were always labelled "H.M.'s Consul-General, Bagdad," and those for Basra directed to "H.M.'s Consul," special seals with the Royal Arms being used. The British Indian postmasters at these places held no written communication with Turkish officials, and the rule was that all such correspondence should pass through the Consul or Consul-General. Service privileged correspondence between Turkish Government departments, if properly franked, was allowed to pass free of postage through our post offices at Bagdad and Basra, and registered letters or packets suspected to contain precious stones, jewellery and other valuables liable to duty were transferred to the local Customs House.

The Indian Post Office in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf was not only the handmaiden of British commercial enterprise for many years, but also helped in an unostentatious way to consolidate our position and influence in those regions. Over thirty years ago a Persian Gulf division was formed under the control of an European Superintendent who had to supervise and visit the offices regularly. The postmasters are either Indian Christians, Mohammedans or Hindus, and they are invested by the backward and unenlightened inhabitants of the remote Gulf ports with mysterious powers as the representatives of the great Indian Government. Wild-looking Central Asian traders armed with dagger and pistol, who bring down camel-loads of carpets, dried fruit and other merchandise from the interior of Persia and

the Mekran; courtly and picturesque Arab horse-dealers who ship their thoroughbreds to Bombay every year; sleek Persians in their sky-blue tunics; emancipated negro slaves—all trust the postmaster in matters relating to their private business as they would never trust one of their own kind. The arrival of the weekly mail at a Persian Gulf port is like a festival. The precincts of the post office are thronged with a large and motley crowd drawn from all grades of the populace. Letters are delivered on the premises on this day, and everyone who has any link with the outer world is present on the off-chance of getting a communication through the post. The postmaster or his munshi stands at an open window calling out the addresses on the letters, the owners holding up their hands when they hear their names called. Most letters are prefixed with the word "Haji," which denotes that the recipients are good Mohammedans who have made the pilgrimage to the Prophet's tomb at Mecca. The deep, guttural Arabic or the soft Persian response is occasionally broken by a reply in the more familiar Hindustani or Gujrati, for in each Gulf port there is a small colony of Hindu traders from the West coast of India, easily distinguishable by their alert and business-like appearance. Women are conspicuous by their absence—more so, in fact, than in other Eastern countries—but, after the crowd has dispersed, a closely veiled and sheeted figure occasionally glides to the window and in plaintive tones asks for some service, the performance of which she must personally see to in the absence of her lord and master from home.

The Great War completely altered the conditions in Mesopotamia. In consequence of the Turkish Government having ordered the closure of all foreign post offices

within their territory, the Indian post offices at Bagdad and Basra were closed under protest on the 1st October, 1914. The sub-postmaster, Basra, continued at work settling the affairs of his office until the 27th October, 1914, and left for India next day, whereas the Postmaster, Bagdad, was made a prisoner on the outbreak of hostilities with Turkey on the 1st November, 1914, and the post office property in his charge fell into the hands of the Turks.

The formal entry into Basra by British troops was made on the 23rd November, 1914, and the postal service was undertaken by the Indian Field Post Office. The service was developed and extended as the troops advanced. A railway was constructed from Basra to Amara and from Kut-el-Amara to Bagdad, and a regular mail service has been introduced by river steamers between Amara and Kut-el-Amara. The transit time of mails between Basra and Bagdad has thus been reduced to two days. Excellent jetties have now been built at Basra, so that much time is saved in loading and unloading mails, and, with well-equipped post offices at all important places, the postal service of Mesopotamia has become quite efficient.

Since the Armistice in 1918 the Indian Field Post Offices have been gradually withdrawn and have been replaced by civil offices under a Civil Director of Postal Services. The occupied territory in Mesopotamia is known as Iraq, and Turkish postage stamps overprinted with the words "Iraq under British Occupation" were introduced in 1918. On the 1st May, 1919, the Military Director of Postal Services was withdrawn and the postal administration of the country handed over to the Civil Director, who is now an official of the Local Government. A few Indian field post offices are still retained

for the troops stationed beyond the frontiers of Iraq, but these will be closed as soon as military operations are finished.

The first Civil Director of the Post Office of Iraq was Mr. C. J. E. Clerici, an officer of the Indian Establishment. Almost the whole staff consists of men from the Post Office of India, and will continue to do so until local men have been trained in postal work. Indian inland postage rates were at first charged for correspondence exchanged between India and Iraq, but from the 1st September, 1919, the British Imperial foreign rates of postage were introduced. With the exception of four post offices on the Persian Gulf—namely, Koweit, Abadan, Mohammerah and Ahwaz, which are being administered by Iraq—the other Indian post offices in the Persian Gulf area are still under the control of the Post Office of India.

Such is the history of the establishment of the Indian Post Office in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf region. It began with the opening of small offices for the British Consular Agencies and commercial establishments of the East India Company. The public, however, were not slow to take advantage of the means of communication thus provided, and, despite the strenuous opposition of the Ottoman Empire, a really efficient postal system was organized. The extension of the Bagdad Railway, the Euphrates Valley irrigation project and the opening of the Anglo-Persian oil field, whose pipe-line terminates on the Shat-el-Arab, are the three great factors in the development of Mesopotamia. This country already occupies a prominent place in the affairs of the Empire, and, situated, as it is, on a main highway between East and West, it is possible that the region, which was the centre

and cradle of the earliest civilization of the world, will recover its old importance. When this has been achieved the Post Office of India will always be able to look back with pride on the pioneer work which it has done in its quiet, unassuming way during the past half century.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE POST OFFICE DURING THE INDIAN MUTINY

EVERY student of the history of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 knows the part played by the Indian Telegraph Department during that great crisis. The famous telegram of warning which was transmitted to the principal stations in the Punjab by two young signallers of the Delhi office (Messrs. Brendish and Pilkington) upon their own initiative on the morning of the 11th May, 1857, when the Meerut rebels, flushed with success, crossed the bridge of boats over the Jumna and entered the city of Delhi to join hands with their comrades there, is a splendid example of an assumption of responsibility followed by prompt action. Sir Herbert Edwardes refers to the final telegraphic message sent by Brendish to Mr. Montgomery, the Judicial Commissioner at Lahore, in these terms:

"When the mutineers came over from Meerut and were cutting the throats of the Europeans in every part of the Cantonment, a boy, employed in the telegraph office at Delhi, had the presence of mind to send off a message to Lahore to Mr. Montgomery, the Judicial Commissioner, to tell him that the mutineers had arrived and had killed this civilian and that officer, and wound up his message with the significant words 'we're off.' That was the end of the message. Just look at the

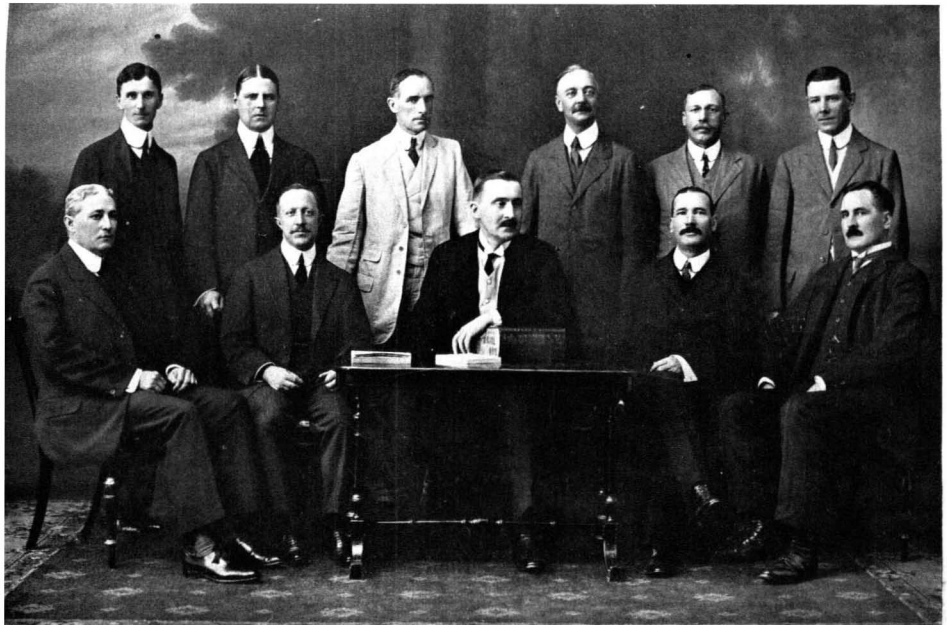
courage and sense of duty which made that little boy, with shots and cannon all round him, manipulate that message, which, I do not hesitate to say, was the means of the salvation of the Punjab."

In the General Report of the Telegraph Department for the year 1857–58 the Director-General remarked:

"The value of that last service of the Delhi office is best described in the words of Montgomery: 'The electric telegraph has saved India.'"

Excellent work was also done by Post Office officials during the Indian Mutiny, but unfortunately it is forgotten owing to its having received little historical recognition. A perusal of musty records which lie in the archives of the Indian Government reveals a record of duties well performed in the midst of insuperable difficulties and dangers of which the Department may well be proud.

At the time of the Mutiny the British Army in India was deficient in the organization of two branches indispensable to the success of military operations in the field, and it was left to the Post Office to supply the want to a considerable extent. The Intelligence and Transport Departments were in their infancy, and the military authorities were not slow to take advantage of facilities afforded by the Post Office. At the commencement of the outbreak it was evident that postmasters in the affected districts were in a position to keep the authorities accurately informed of the direction in which the rebellion was spreading and to report the movements of the mutineers as long as the postal lines of communication remained intact, especially in the districts where there



GROUP OF SENIOR OFFICERS IN 1907

P. ROGERS
E. A. DORAN
H. A. SAMS
H. N. HUTCHINSON
C. H. HARRISON
C. H. HOGG
C. STEWART WILSON
*Director General*
E. R. JARDINE
H. C. SHERIDAN
G. R. CLARKE
W. MAXWELL

were no telegraph lines or where the wires had been cut. Many officials—European, Eurasian and Indian—were killed at the outset, post offices being looted and destroyed and mails intercepted on the various lines wherever the rebels were in power. Much valuable information regarding such occurrences was collected and passed on to the authorities by postal employés in remote places. For transport, the Army had ready at hand, on the trunk roads of India, the machinery of the Post Office horse transit and bullock train, which was then in a high state of efficiency, and was able to render incalculable service in connection with the forward movement of troops and munitions of war as well as the despatch down country of wounded officers and men—and of refugees when the campaign was well advanced. After the final Relief of Lucknow by Sir Colin Campbell many of the ladies and children of the garrison were conveyed by this means in safety to Calcutta.

The Sepoy Mutiny began at Meerut on the 10th May, 1857. From the 18th May, 1857, onwards telegrams and letters were received at the Director-General's headquarters in Calcutta from the postmasters at Allahabad, Benares, Umballa and other stations, reporting the stoppage of mail communication with places which had fallen into the hands of the mutineers. News was also thus given of the destruction of post offices and plunder of mails at Sitapore, Indore, Hirapore, Cawnpore, Shahazadpore, Daryabad, Saugor, Segombe, Hamirpur, Jaunpor, Azimgarh and many more places. On the 15th May, 1857, the Postmaster-General, North-Western Provinces, gave instructions to his postmasters to collect waggons and bullocks for the conveyance of troops. On the 21st May the Postmaster, Agra, reported to the Director-

General that Dr. Clark, who had been specially vested with the authority of Postmaster-General in a portion of the North-Western Provinces, was safe and well at Muttra, and was trying to open mail communication. On the 26th May, 1857, the Postmaster, Benares, applied to the Director-General for authority to supply horses for conveyance of troops. Mr. H. B. Riddell, Director-General at the time, was fully alive to the situation and set a brilliant example to all ranks. He addressed the following letter to the Government of India from his camp at Sherghotty on the 30th May, 1857 :—

" I have the honour to report that arrangements have been made or are in train which will, I trust, enable the Bullock Train establishment to convey daily without interruption one hundred men from Raneegunge to Benares. There will be fifty-six pairs of Bullocks at each stage between Sherghotty and Benares.

" The Bullocks procurable are of the smallest and most miserable description. . . .

A workshop will be established at Dehree and, as the road over the sand of the Soane will be broken up in a day or two, the men of each detachment will be conveyed over in country carts, fresh waggons being ready on the other side. I shall probably have to stay to-morrow and make some arrangements at the Soane, but will, after doing so, move on to Benares and arrange for the despatch of troops from Benares to Allahabad. If the Commissariat bullocks are stationed along the line and they have any covered carts, large detachments can be sent every two or three days, but I will telegraph what can be done when I reach Benares. In the meantime Commissariat Gun bullocks should be stationed along the line."

The Director-General's efforts were ably seconded by Mr. C. K. Dove, Postmaster-General, and Mr. Garrett, Deputy Postmaster-General of Bengal, both of whom did all in their power to ensure the prompt despatch of troops up country, calling in the aid of the local magistrates to secure the best cattle and the services of the Engineering Department to facilitate the passage of carts over unbridged rivers along the Grand Trunk Road.

On the 2nd July, 1857, it was arranged to place the whole of the Bullock Train establishment north of Benares at the disposal of the military authorities. The transfer was made at the instance of General Havelock, who had just assumed command of the troops at Allahabad. He decided to use the Bullock Train entirely for the transport of stores and ammunition to the front and, when the rains had broken and the rivers became navigable, to convey troops by river steamers, a far more convenient and expeditious means than road conveyance. When it was necessary to use the roads, elephants were provided by the Commissary-General at Calcutta and by local zemindars (landholders).

On the 29th July, 1857, the Government of India published a notification authorizing the Chief Covenanted Civil or Military officer at every station throughout India where there was a post office under a Deputy Postmaster and no resident Postmaster had been specially appointed, to assume the office of Postmaster or to assign the office to some other Covenanted Civil or Military Officer at the station, reporting the arrangement in each instance for the information of the Postmaster-General of the Presidency. The Deputy Postmaster was to perform duties connected with the post office under the orders of the Postmaster so appointed. The functions of In-

specting Postmasters remained unaffected by this order, and post offices at places where there was no covenanted Civil or Military Officer were left in charge of the Deputy Postmasters. These orders were necessitated by the interruption of mail communication between many post offices and their head-quarters and the difficulty of control being exercised by Postmasters-General who were not always in a position to issue prompt instructions to their subordinates in matters of importance or emergency. At the same time no general power of censorship over correspondence was granted to officers, nor was anything done to diminish public confidence in the Government mail service.

Reports regarding the plunder of mails continued to come in from places as far removed as Kolhapur in the Southern Mahratta country and Bahraich in the United Provinces. Mails between Bengal and the United Provinces on one side and the Punjab on the other had to be diverted via Bombay, the Commissioner of Sind taking the responsibility for their safe despatch through Hyderabad (Sind). Many of the reports from post-masters referred to fresh outbreaks, and the movements of mutineers who did not hesitate to remove dak horses from relay stations on the mail routes whenever they had the chance. The information contained in these letters was duly passed on to the military authorities.

In connection with the correspondence for the army in the field, post offices were organized to accompany the movable columns under General Havelock, the Malwa Field Force and later the divisions commanded by General Outram and other distinguished leaders. During the campaign soldiers' letters were exempt from forward postage.

The large tract of country known as the North-Western Provinces and Oudh was the focus of the disturbance of 1857, and the strain put upon the postal officials in those provinces was greater than in other affected parts of the country. Most of the post offices and mail lines had to be closed at the beginning of the outbreak and were reopened one by one, as order was gradually restored by the British forces. A most interesting narrative of the interruption in the mail arrangements in the North-Western Provinces and Punjab subsequent to the outbreak at Meerut and Delhi on the 10th and 11th May, 1857, was supplied by Mr. Paton, Postmaster-General, and will be found in Appendix G.

As might be expected, the outbreak of the Mutiny caused a complete disorganization of postal communications, and the task of restoring mail lines in hostile territory was no easy one. The pay offered by the Department was not sufficient to induce men to risk their lives in isolated places, which were always open to attacks by the mutineers or by bands of armed villagers, and it is characteristic of the Indian Government at the time that they expected men to serve for salaries which were admitted to be inadequate even in times of peace. I will quote extracts from the reports of the Postmasters-General of the North-Western Provinces, Bengal and Bombay, which throw an interesting light upon the difficulties with which the Post Office had to contend in these troublous times.

Report of the Postmaster-General, North-Western Provinces, for the year ending the 31st March, 1858:

"In consequence of the rebellion, the Post Offices and lines of postal communication in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh were closed more or less, nearly

throughout the year under review, and many of those in Oude and Bundelkund have not yet been reopened, owing to a portion of the above Provinces being still in the hands of the rebels, so that a report of the transactions of the present year is chiefly a narrative of the effects of the disturbances on the Post Office Department. The results shown herein cannot therefore be fairly compared with those of the previous years.

"The number of complaints of the loss and missending of letters during the year under review is comparatively greater than many of the previous years, which is chiefly owing to the frequent loss of the mails on different lines of road by rebels, their transmission by circuitous routes from the direct lines being closed or unsafe, and their irregular despatch by inexperienced hands employed in the Camp Post Offices.

"The proportion of bearing to paid or stamped letters is 0.974 to 1, which shows a progressive increase in the number of the former. This may be fairly attributed to the general habit of the natives, especially those in the army, and also among lower classes to despatch their letters bearing, more particularly at this period, when, from the constant movements of the troops from one place to another and the disturbed state of the country, they are undoubtedly liable to miscarry.

"I may also observe that a very large number of letters posted by the military and lower classes of the people are intended for places in the interior of districts, and, as the District Post establishments have not yet been fully reorganized, there is no guarantee for their punctual or safe delivery. Natives, being real economists, naturally prefer the despatch of their letters bearing, and so prevent any loss from prepayment of postage.

"The staff of the Department was much reduced by casualties during the late mutinies, and much difficulty has been experienced in procuring properly qualified persons to accept employment. A large number of offices having had to be hastily reopened, the demand for English-speaking clerks has been unprecedented, and, without raising the salaries, I could not fill up the vacancies in the Post Office.

"It is not a matter of surprise that extraordinary difficulty has been experienced in reorganizing the Post Office in such a crisis, when it is recollected that the salaries allowed to the officers of the Department are on a scale below that generally obtained in other Departments, that there are no holidays allowed them, and that leave of absence, excepting on medical certificate, is in a measure prohibited, owing to the establishment being generally on such a minimum scale as not to admit of any one being absent without providing a trained substitute.

"But notwithstanding an increase to the salaries of the officials having been generally granted to the extent that I have represented as necessary, I regret to have to record that I have not yet been able to complete the revision of all the office establishments to my satisfaction. There are still many incompetent officials in the Department, whom I am obliged to tolerate, until I meet with better qualified persons to take their places.

"As might be expected from an inexperienced or untrained establishment, working under great disadvantages, a comparatively large number of complaints of the missending and loss of letters have been received during the year under review, and, though every care has been taken to prevent mistakes, yet, from the circumstance of the direction on letters being often hastily and illegibly

written, and the army, in numerous detached parties, constantly in the field, without their locality or destination being correctly known to the Post Office, the percentage of missent covers for the troops has unavoidably been great.

"I have again to remark the increase in the number of bearing letters; but considering the unsettled state of these Provinces, it is only what might be expected. I need not here repeat the reasons which induce the non-commercial class of natives to send their letters bearing postage.

"Taking into consideration the variety of languages in which native letters are generally written, and the very careless and illegible manner in which the directions and the names of addressees and senders are given, I am of opinion that the proportion disposed of at my office (being about 33 per cent on the whole number received) is satisfactory."

Report of the Postmaster-General, Bengal, for the year 1857–58:

"The mutinies which broke out in the North-Western Provinces in May, 1857, were also felt during the past year in the Bengal Presidency, and parts of the province were more or less affected by them, but, happily for Bengal, the interruptions and disorganization to her Postal Department caused by them were, by the adoption of prompt and vigorous measures, speedily restored. The Post Office Department, however, did not escape—a Deputy Postmaster and an Overseer were killed, a runner was wounded, a number of post offices, especially in Behar, were plundered, and a number of mails and mail packets were seized and destroyed by the mutinous sepoys.

"The rebellion of Koer Sing and the mutinies of the Dinapore sepoys interrupted and closed for a short time a portion of the Grand Trunk Road between Saseram and Benares, and the insurgents carried off some cattle belonging to the Department, and also burnt down some dak bungalows above Sherghotty.

"The revolt of the hill tribes on the southern line in the neighbourhood of Sumbulpore disturbed the communication with Bombay via Sumbulpore, which had been opened after the interruption of communication with Bombay by the Jubbulpore road, and the rebellion of the Ramghur Battalion disorganized the daks for a while in the South-West Frontier Agency between Chota Nagpore and Chyebassa.

"The mutinies of the Chittagong sepoys and the Segowlee insurgents caused only the destruction of some packets that fell into their hands, but passed off without any serious interruption to any mail line in Bengal."

Report of the Postmaster-General, Bombay, for the year 1857–58:

"The mutinies imperilled and interrupted almost every line in the Presidency; the foot lines were obliged to be strengthened, diverted, abandoned and reopened as circumstances required; those most severely tried were in Malwa, Rajpootana, Khandeish, Berar, the Southern Mahratta country and Guzerat, on some of which double pay and double numbers were scarcely sufficient to keep them open, and it was only by the activity, local knowledge, morale and reliance of the inspecting officers (always supported strongly by the Civil officers), whose powers were discretionally enlarged by me, that the lines were sustained.

"It is remarkable that in the midst of universal disturbance (especially in Malwa and Rajpootana), when distrust and confusion were at their height, and opportunities for plunder were frequent, and detection next to impossible, only one case occurred, or rather was brought home, in which the carriers of the mails either personally plundered or wilfully destroyed them.

"Although animosity was directed against the servants of the Post Office in common with every class of persons in Government employ, it was not especially so in this Presidency against the Post Office, unless where the collections offered temptation, as at Indore, Erinpoora, Neemuch and Mundessore, which offices were assailed and gutted.

"The knowledge that other lines of post either existed or would assuredly be established, and that no efforts would be left unemployed to effect free postal intercourse whenever required, possibly pointed to the futility of a general crusade against post runners. Nevertheless, both as a precaution against disappointment and as removing a source of temptation, banghy parcels were discontinued for four months, from July until November.

"The only lines which have been permanently closed are four branch lines in Malwa.

"That no coercion was used, and that the post was kept open (it is true by circuitous routes, but still open) all through this postal range, is strong evidence that the feeling of the country was not unfavourable to British authority; it was found that whenever a road was impracticable, it was rendered so only from fear of the acts of rebels, upon whose departure or overthrow the post line was again opened.

"Exempt as the post carriers have been from concurrence in the general insurrection, the conduct of the other descriptions of postal servants has been not less good, with the exception of those attached to the Indore post office. There the temptation of plunder excited an overseer and peon, and the people of the workshop, to join in plundering the post office and premises, and one kitmutgar (table servant), a Mussulman at Samwere, near Oojein, hounded on some miscreants to murder an European serjeant from Mahidpore, who took refuge in it, for which he was subsequently hanged, and the others transported.

"In the higher grades, the conduct of the postal officers has been very exemplary; no instance has occurred in which a postmaster either deserted his post, or has been suspected of having made use of his position to give information, to open letters, or to favour in any way the rebel cause.

"Ten travellers' bungalows and seven post offices have been burned down, and ten evacuated, of which three only have remained closed. This does not represent the extent of injury done, or loss occasioned, the destruction of stamps, and in other ways by the carrying away of mail carts, destruction of property, and loss in postage collection, and compensation to people in postal employ for good behaviour, or for personal suffering."

The success of the postal arrangements during the Mutiny is largely due to the organization and example of Mr. Riddell, the Director-General, who attended to all important matters personally. He was assisted by the loyal devotion of the entire staff, and the men whose names may be mentioned for special services are Mr.

Dove, officiating Postmaster-General, Bengal; Mr. Bennett, Mr. Wallace and Mr. McGowan, of the Bengal establishment; Lala Salig Ram in the North-Western Provinces; Dr. Clark and Mr. H. A. Brown in Agra; Captain Fanshawe and Babu Eshan Chander Mookerjee in Aligarh; Mr. Taylor in the Deccan and Babu Sheo Pershad in Delhi. Where so many did well it seems invidious to mention only a few names, and the President in Council, when thanking the Director-General for the work done by the Post Office during the crisis, expressed the high opinion which the Government entertained of the services rendered by all the officers of the Department, European and Indian, in circumstances of the greatest difficulty.

Enough has been written to show the nature of the help given to the Indian Empire by the staff of the Post Office during the Mutiny. It is a record of loyalty and devotion to duty of which the Department may well be proud.

# CHAPTER XVII

## THE INDIAN FIELD POST OFFICE

IN a country where there is seldom perfect peace it is only natural that the Post Office must accustom itself to war conditions, and the Field Postal Service has been a feature of the Indian Post Office for more than sixty years. During that period there have been over forty wars and expeditions, extending from Burma to the Mediterranean, and, as postal arrangements were required for the forces engaged, the Field Post Office system in India has been gradually developed and perfected, and is now recognized as an important part of the military organization of the country.

Field Post Office arrangements used to be in the hands of the Postmaster-General of the Punjab, and he maintained lists of men willing to serve. In 1918, however, owing to the wide distribution of the postal staff in various parts of the world, it was found necessary to bring the Field Post organization under the immediate control of the Director-General. When an expedition is announced, the forces of the Post Office are immediately mobilized according to the strength of the field army, and, as the staff required for a brigade and division has been settled by long experience, no time is lost in getting the necessary number of men to the assembling stations.

The regulations for the working of Field Post Offices

are laid down in the Indian Field Service Manual and the Postal Manual (War), two handbooks issued by the Indian Army Department; and a complete equipment of tents and furniture, sufficient for three base post offices, fifty first-class and twenty second-class field offices, and for the use of the supervisory staff, is kept at Lahore ready for immediate despatch. When the Department has to make its own arrangements for the carriage of mails between the base post office and the field offices, overseers are employed to supervise the transit. The establishment laid down for a base office is one postmaster, two deputy or assistant postmasters, fifteen clerks and ten menials, but these numbers must necessarily vary with the number of field offices required with the different units.

Postal officials in the field are subject to full military discipline under the Army Act. Superior officers wear field service khaki uniform with badges of rank and the letters "Post" in brass on the shoulders. A Deputy Postmaster-General or Assistant Director-General of the Post Office ranks as a Lieutenant-Colonel, and a Superintendent as Major, Captain or Lieutenant, according to his grade and length of service. Subordinate officials, if Europeans, are classed as Assistant Commissaries, Sub-Conductors or Sergeants, according to their pay, and Indians are given rank as Subadars, Jemadars, Havildars or Naiks. Field allowances, in addition to pay, are fixed according to a sanctioned scale, the rate for a Director or Superintendent being 25 per cent of his pay, subject to a minimum monthly allowance of Rs.100 in the case of the latter. Inspectors and Postmasters draw Rs.90 a month in addition to pay, other subordinates being remunerated at a lower rate. In virtue of the military rank

held by them, officers and subordinates are entitled to all privileges and advantages for service in the field, such as wound pensions, family pensions, medals and compensation for loss of baggage.

The officer in charge of field post offices is attached to the head-quarters of an Expeditionary Force as adviser to the Military Authorities on all postal matters; he is required to visit the base and field post offices as frequently as possible, and is responsible for the proper working and efficiency of mail arrangements. He arranges with head-quarters for carriage of mails between the base and the field, fixes the hours of despatch of mails from all post offices and the hours during which money orders are issued, and also settles the question of making over cash collections to the nearest Field Paymaster, Treasure Chest Officer, Regimental Accounts Officer or Post Commandant, as the case may be.

The development of the Field Postal System has been gradual and has undergone many changes. The earliest record of a regular Indian Post Office staff proceeding for active service with a military force is in connection with the Persian Expedition of 1856. The establishment consisted of two clerks, an interpreter (moonshee) and four peons, and, as no suitable departmental officer could be found to take charge of the arrangements, the Government of Bombay appointed the Military Paymaster of the Persian Expeditionary Force to take control.

The work accomplished by the Post Office during the Indian Mutiny has been described in a separate chapter. Every office situated within the wide area of the disturbances or on the line of march of the troops performed the functions of a field post office, the control of the arrangements devolving on the chief local civil or military

authority in places where there was no departmental officer of sufficient seniority or rank to hold charge. The great services rendered by the Post Office horse transit and bullock train establishments to the Army were a prominent feature of the campaign. Separate field post offices accompanied the moving columns under Generals Havelock, Outram, Campbell, Hugh Rose, Hope Grant and other leaders. Twenty years later, when the Afghan war broke out, the Army had again to rely on the Post Office for the transport of mails and military stores for hundreds of miles through the Khyber and Bolan passes into Afghanistan.

The extension of the railways to the frontiers of India has put an end to this branch of postal enterprise. Mail tonga lines worked by contractors still flourish on routes where there are no railways, but they are being gradually supplanted by motor conveyances.

A scheme under which the Post Office should maintain a large number of motor mail vans, which could be used in time of war for military transport, has already been suggested, and it is one well worth consideration. An arrangement of this kind should go far towards solving the problem of maintaining transport in times of peace, and should prove advantageous and economical to both the Army and the Post Office.

The success of the Indian Field Post Office in the numerous wars and expeditions in which it has been employed can be vouched for by the reports of commanding officers. Experience has been bought by long practice, and the Department never loses an opportunity of training its staff for military service. At the great military manœuvres which are frequently held during the cold weather in India the troops engaged are always

accompanied by field post offices fully equipped for war conditions, with the result that there is always a large body of men in the Post Office thoroughly trained in this kind of work. On field service the postal official is "Nobody's child." He has to fend for himself, and, although transport is told off for the conveyance of camp equipment and mails, it is seldom forthcoming when required. The Army Head-quarters Staff looks after its own post office, but is inclined to regard the others as an encumbrance, and this attitude has developed a faculty of "slimness" in the field postal officer, which he uses for defeating military regulations. He has become an expert in stealing transport; a mule, a cart, a few coolies, a motor lorry, even an idle railway train, all serve his purpose as occasion rises, and his motto is "Get there, if not by fair means, then somehow," and get there he generally does. He has an uncanny instinct for finding out the secret destination of his brigade and is often on the ground, sorting the mail, before the troops arrive.

Mr. Charles Sheridan, a very well-known member of the Department, used to tell an amusing story of the horror of a senior staff officer meeting him one day on a frontier road pronounced absolutely unfit for wheeled traffic. Mr. Sheridan was driving along merrily with the mails in a two-horsed tonga; it was the shortest road and he took it, and the staff had to reconsider seriously their strategic plans, simply because the Superintendent of the Postal Service would not act according to military instructions.

The heart of the field postal system in any campaign is the Base Office. It is there that all information concerning the movements of regiments and units is carefully recorded. Lists of officers are kept in alphabetical

order, and these lists are kept corrected from day to day on information received from the various field offices. The Base Office controls the main routes of mails to the divisional and brigade offices, it issues instructions and is ready to supply reliefs. It searches for missing men, disposes of undeliverable correspondence and has a hospital for repairing articles damaged in transit; in fact, the smooth running of the whole organization depends on the work done at the Base.

The arrangements for conveying the mails between the base office and the field offices devolves on the supervising officers, and endless difficulties have to be faced in order to obtain transport. A great deal depends on the personality of the postal officer in charge. If he is a pleasant fellow and popular with the transport staff he can get most things done, but, if he is insistent on his rights and has not learnt the meaning of "give and take" on a campaign, he will get nothing but excuses and regrets, the mail bags will be left behind in the last camp, irate Colonels will write to their personal friend the Director-General and the promising career of a conscientious public servant will be seriously injured.

In Appendix H is given a list of the most important expeditions in which field post offices have been employed, with a brief account of the arrangements made on each occasion. Most of these were small frontier wars and little difficulty was felt in providing the personnel. The Great War, however, was a very different matter. It necessitated the despatch of large numbers of post offices all over the world, and the demand on the resources of the Post Office of India was on such a vast scale that an account of it has been reserved for a separate chapter.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## THE INDIAN FIELD POST OFFICE DURING THE GREAT WAR

IN 1914, when war broke out, a large postal contingent accompanied the troops sent to France. It was under the control of Mr. Pilkington, Assistant Director-General of the Post Office, who had the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and it comprised one Base Office and 22 field offices, with a staff of 13 supervising officers, 22 field postmasters, 84 clerks and 78 menials. During the early years of the war the work performed by this staff was very heavy. Frequently over 23,000 letters and 2000 parcels would arrive for the Indian contingent in one day, while newspapers published in England were regularly received for delivery to the troops. At the end of 1916 the Indian field postal staff in France was considerably reduced, as large numbers accompanied the Indian troops transferred to Egypt and Mesopotamia, and at the end of the war only one or two field offices remained to serve some Labour Corps units which had been left behind.

At the end of 1916 Mesopotamia was the most important theatre of war so far as the Indian Post Office was concerned. A small field postal contingent was sent in 1914 and was steadily increased as the operations extended. Mr. A. B. Thompson, Deputy Postmaster-General, was the first Director of Postal Services. He was succeeded in 1917 by Mr. A. J. Hughes, who had

been Deputy Director in Egypt. By the end of 1917 the army was so large and the work of the Post Office so extensive that it was decided to place an officer of the rank of Postmaster-General in charge, and Mr. H. A. Sams, Postmaster-General, Central Circle, was selected to be Director of Postal Services in Mesopotamia. By 1918 the staff consisted of 17 superintendents, 45 inspectors, 2 base postmasters, 7 deputy postmasters, 79 field postmasters, 542 clerks and 797 menials. The Field Post Office in Mesopotamia had not only military work, but also a great deal of civil work. The magnitude of the business may be gauged by the following monthly figures :—

| | ABOUT |
|---|---|
| Number of letters received and despatched | 12,000,000 |
| Number of parcels received and despatched | 70,000 |
| Number of money orders issued and paid | 67,000 |
| Value of money orders issued and paid | Rs.30,00,000 |

Large numbers of British postal orders were also sold and Savings Bank business was freely transacted.

During the year 1916 a great deal of difficulty was experienced in Mesopotamia in dealing with returned letters, the addressees of which could not be traced. To dispose of these a Returned Letter Office was established at Basra, for which a staff of 165 permanent base men was employed. Subsequently, as these men were released or recalled to military duty, their places were taken by Anglo-Indian boys recruited in India. The establishment of the Returned Letter Office put a stop to very

many complaints regarding loss of letters. The office used to deal with about 200,000 articles a month and worked very efficiently under the supervision of the Base Postmaster, Basra.

Upon the fall of Kut the field post office there shared the fate of the garrison, and a number of postal officials were taken prisoners of war by the Turks.

From the beginning of 1918 to the end of the war the postal service in Mesopotamia was extremely good, and both in Basra and Bagdad a regular local post was established and deliveries by postmen were introduced. At the end of 1918 a number of civil post offices were opened and steps were taken to close down field post offices wherever possible. From the 1st May, 1919, the postal administration of Mesopotamia was finally handed over to the civil authorities and almost all the field post offices were withdrawn, but a very large proportion of the Indian Field staff remained in the country and took service under the new Iraq Government.

Next in importance to Mesopotamia came the Indian postal services in Egypt, Palestine and Salonika, and in these places the Indian field post offices worked side by side with the British Army Postal Corps. In 1915 they were under the control of Mr. A. J. Hughes as Deputy Director, who was succeeded later by Mr. S. C. Sinclair. In 1915 Indian field post offices were sent to Gallipoli, and the work done by them there won the warm appreciation of the military authorities. The extension of operations to Palestine necessitated the despatch of a number of field post offices to that country. In 1918 it was found necessary to separate the postal contingent at Salonika from the control of the Deputy Director in Egypt, and the force was placed in charge of Mr. A.

Gillespie as an independent Assistant Director, with a staff of 1 base postmaster, 2 inspectors, 28 field postmasters and clerks and 36 menials. The Salonika postal service extended to Baku and Constantinople, where there were Indian field post offices.

Field post offices were sent to East Africa in 1914 under the control of Mr. K. A. Appleby, who was subsequently made a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel. The organization consisted of a base office, 25 field post offices, with a staff of 4 superintendents, 6 inspectors, 1 base postmaster, 25 field postmasters, 76 clerks and 67 menials. About a million letters and parcels were handled monthly by this staff, and work had to be carried on under the most trying conditions, as many of the mail lines traversed country covered with thick jungle. In 1917 and 1918 the whole postal service of German East Africa was carried on by the Indian Field Post Office, and the greatest credit is due to Lieutenant-Colonel Appleby for the excellent arrangements made by him.

In 1918 Lieutenant Kilman was sent to take control of the field post offices attached to the East Persian Cordon between Meshed and Dalbandin. The East Persian Cordon was subsequently known as the Force in East Persia, and the postal organization consisted of 1 Base post office and 13 field post offices, with a staff of an Assistant Director of Posts and Telegraphs, 1 inspector, 1 base postmaster, 13 field postmasters, 31 clerks and 54 menials.

A field post office contingent was also sent to Bushire in 1918 in connection with the operations between Bushire and Shiraz. This was placed under the control of Mr. C. F. Quilter as Assistant Director, who was also given control of the postal arrangements of the British

Mission Escort in South Persia operating from Bunder-Abbas to Kerman and Shiraz. The British Mission Escort commenced its operations early in 1916 and its postal arrangements were in charge of Captain Greene, R.E., Superintendent of post offices, prior to their being taken over by Mr. Quilter. Up to March, 1919, the postal organization of the Bushire Force and British Mission Escort consisted of 2 Base post offices and 18 field post offices, with a staff of an Assistant Director, a Deputy Assistant Director, 2 inspectors, 2 base postmasters, 18 field postmasters, 49 clerks and 86 menials. From April, 1919, the Force was considerably reduced and a large portion of the field postal staff was withdrawn.

The operations in the neighbourhood of Aden led to the establishment of a few field post offices under the postmaster of Aden, who carried out this work in addition to his own.

The total number of officials of the Indian field post offices serving with the various Expeditionary Forces in 1918 was about two thousand, and with this large contingent serving abroad the Department in India had to undertake the difficult task of equipping and despatching regular reinforcements to the several theatres of war. In order to deal with the enormous quantity of Army mails, both originating in India and received from abroad, two special base offices were established, one at Bombay and one at Karachi. The Base Office in Bombay was converted in 1918 into a Base Postal Depot, and in addition to dealing with the mails for the troops it was also assigned the duty of recruitment and mobilization of postal reinforcements. The establishment of the Base Postal Depot in Bombay solved many of the difficulties which attended the organization of field post offices and

the disposal of mails for armies in the field. The depot was divided into four main sections for Enquiry, Sorting, Mobilization and Correspondence. The chief duty of the Enquiry section was to ensure the correct delivery of correspondence for the troops that had returned or had been invalided from the field. This section was in charge of a lady Superintendent with forty lady clerks, and their duty was to keep up to date a regular record giving the names, designations and addresses of officers and men who had returned to India. The Enquiry section kept its records by means of index cards, of which there were over 133,000 when the armistice was declared. About 330,000 letters monthly were disposed of in this section.

In the Sorting section the average number of postal articles dealt with in a month was about one million. The sorting of mails for all the forces was done by units, separate bundles or packets being prepared for the officers and men with each unit. These mails were then forwarded ready sorted to the base offices at the various fronts, where they were distributed to the field offices serving the units in question.

The Mobilization section dealt with all matters relating to the mobilization of the staff recruited in India for service overseas. Only men who had volunteered for field service were taken, and on receiving orders these men reported themselves to the Officer Commanding, Base Postal Depot, Bombay, who arranged for their kit, uniform and transport to the force for which they were detailed. The Correspondence section dealt with all complaints regarding postal articles for the field forces, and, by being in close connection with the Enquiry branch, it was able to dispose of a large number of complaints without delay.

The Base Postal Depot, Bombay, was thus the most essential factor in the whole postal organization, and the smooth working of mail arrangements for the Expeditionary Forces depended very largely upon its efficiency. The Depot was directly under the control of the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs and in charge of Captain Love, a pensioned officer of the Department, who had retired as Presidency Postmaster, Bombay.

To reward the good work done by the Indian postal staff in the field, no less than fifty-two personal distinctions were granted and over three hundred men were mentioned in despatches. The Department may well be proud of its achievements during the war. Volunteers were always ready to come forward for service in the worst places and many lost their lives. The best proof of their work, however, is the high reputation which the Post Office of India has earned among all branches of the Army.

# CHAPTER XIX

## INDIAN POSTAGE STAMPS

THE first issue of postage stamps in India was made by Sir Bartle Frere in the Province of Scinde (now spelt Sind) in 1852. At that time the post offices of Scinde were administered by the Local Government, and it was not until 1855 that they were placed under the control of the Postmaster-General of Bombay. The Scinde District dawk stamps are very rare. There were three kinds: (1) the design embossed on white paper without colour; (2) blue embossed on white paper; (3) the design embossed on vermilion wafers. The design is shown in the accompanying illustration (Fig. 1), and the central portion consists of a modification of the broad arrow used by the East India Company. The issue was a comparatively small one, and the stamps were withdrawn from use in September, 1854.

The early postal system of India was solely used for official purposes, and it was not until 1837 that a public post was established. Postage rates varied with distance, and the charge was levied in cash, the lowest rate being two annas for every hundred miles. For this purpose copper tokens of the value of two annas were struck which were available for the prepayment of postage.

In 1850 a Commission was appointed to inquire into the working of the Post Office, and among its recom-

mendations were the formation of an Imperial Post Office of India under a Director-General, the abolition of franking and the employment of stamps in pre-payment of postage.

There was a great deal of discussion between the Indian Government and the Court of Directors in London as to where the stamps should be manufactured; the former desired to procure them from England, but the latter, on the ground of economy, decided that sufficiently good stamps could be made in India. The first effort was a design of the "Lion and Palm tree" made by Colonel Forbes of the Calcutta Mint. This essay (Fig. 2), however, was never used, as the Mint could not promise a sufficient supply. Subsequently the manufacture of stamps was entrusted to the Survey Office, and after many failures Captain Thuillier, Deputy Surveyor-General, succeeded in producing nine hundred sheets of red half-anna stamps by means of lithography. These stamps are known as the red ½ anna stamps "with 9½ arches" and were printed in sheets of one hundred and twenty, consisting of twelve rows of ten labels. They were sent to Bombay on the 5th April, 1854, but after despatch it was found that the stock of vermilion was exhausted, and as the same quality of ink could not be procured in India a new ink was prepared and at the same time a fresh design was made. Owing to the fresh design, it was decided not to issue the "9½ arches" stamps. It is disappointing to think that this first and historic set of Indian stamps was never used postally; but the omission does not seem to have detracted from their philatelic value. Good specimens are very rare, and command a high price in the market.

The design for the ½ anna stamp that was finally

accepted was one of eight arches, and it was printed in blue. There are three distinct shades of blue in the 1854 issues, varying from deep to pale. These stamps were prepared by engraving on copper plate and transferring to stones. The sheets consisted of twelve horizontal rows of eight stamps on paper watermarked with the arms of the East India Company. The sheets, dated May and July, 1854, were evidently made up of blocks of twenty-four stamps, repeated four times on each sheet. This is apparent from the fact that the fifth stamp in each of the third, sixth, ninth and twelfth rows is slightly out of alignment, and the sixth stamp in each of the first, fourth, seventh and ninth rows has had the chignon redrawn (Plate facing p. 180). The sheets are not perforated, and are without gum: 333,399 sheets were printed in 1854 and 48,831 in 1855.

The 1 anna stamp was printed in vermilion-red, and 26,897 sheets were ready by August, 1854; there were further supplies of 54,961 sheets in November, 1854, and 15,834 sheets by November, 1855.

The colour selected for the 2 annas stamp was green, and the printing was completed in October, 1854. There is no record of the number printed.

The need for a 4 annas stamp was badly felt for postage to the United Kingdom, which cost 1 rupee 4 annas an ounce in 1854. A design was prepared in two colours, blue and red, and the first sheets contained only twelve stamps (Plate facing p. 178), and the first supply consisted of 17,170 sheets delivered on 14th October, 1854; in all 61,580 sheets were printed. In April, 1855, a new setting was adopted with twenty-four stamps on a sheet, and two arrangements of this setting were made, one with the stamps much closer together than the other.

All the stamps referred to above were prepared by Captain Thuillier, who subsequently became General Sir Henry Thuillier, C.S.I., Surveyor-General of India.

In November, 1855, stamps of the value of ½, 1, 2, 4 and 8 annas were received from Messrs. De La Rue & Co. The designs were engraved on steel and the stamps were printed on white wove unwatermarked paper with white gum. The 4 and 8 annas are also found printed on a highly glazed thick bluish paper without watermark. These stamps supplanted the old issues manufactured in India, but the stocks of the latter were not finally called in and destroyed until 1858.

In 1860 8 pies[1] stamps were on sale in India. These were required for prepayment of soldiers' letters to the United Kingdom. Up to August, 1855, British soldiers' correspondence was carried free of charge, but when this privilege was withdrawn they had the option of prepaying the postage in cash at 9 pies a tola (¾ of an ounce) or else affixing a stamp for 8 pies. Up to 1864 certain changes were made in the colours of some of these stamps; the 2 annas green was altered to brown-pink early in 1856, subsequently to buff, and then to yellow. At the end of 1864 the colour of the 4 annas was changed from black to green, as the stamp had been forged.

The 8 annas and 4 annas stamps on bluish glazed paper, and the 4 annas, 1 anna and 8 pies on white paper, have been found cut in halves upon postal articles in order to pay half their face value postage. All covers found with these bisected stamps were posted in Singapore, which had an Indian post office at the time.

The first issue of Indian postage stamps with the

[1] 12 pies=1 anna=1 penny approximately.