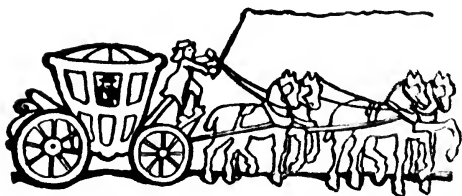
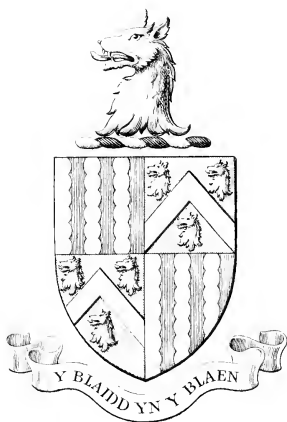


STAGE-COACH AND MAIL IN DAYS OF YORE



CHARLES G. HARPER



John Geoffrey Nelson Howles



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STAGE-COACH
AND MAIL IN
DAYS OF YORE

BY J. W. B. WILSON

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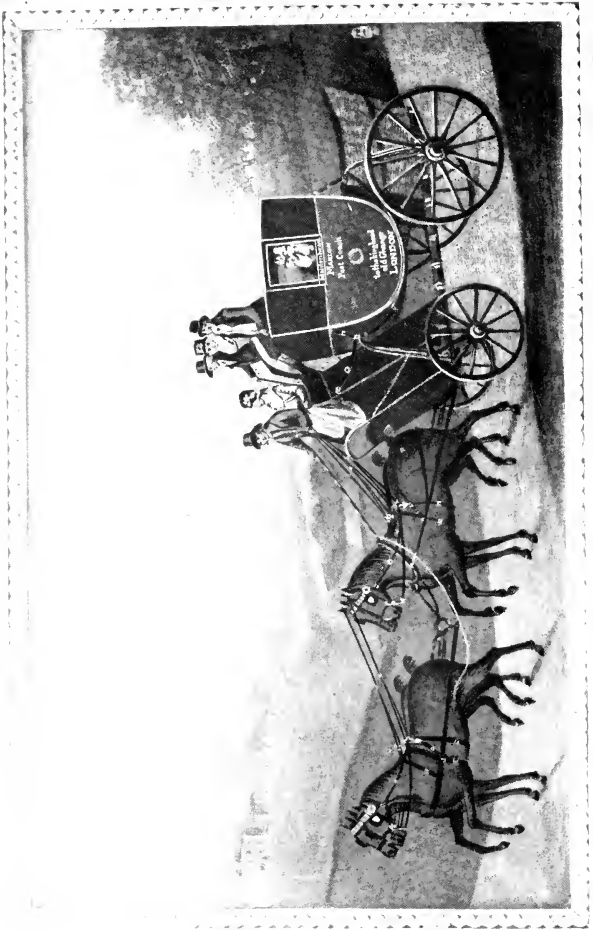
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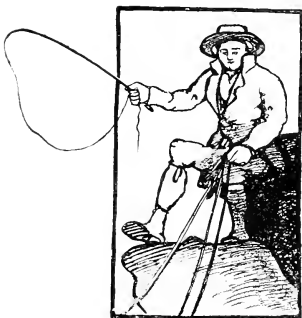
From a contemporary painting.

THE MAIDENHEAD AND MARLOW POST-COACH, 1782.

*A PICTURESQUE HISTORY
OF THE COACHING AGE*

VOL. I

By CHARLES G. HARPER



*Illustrated from Old-Time Prints
and Pictures*

LONDON :

1903

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"HANG up my old whip over the fireplace,"
said Harry Littler, of the Southampton
"Telegraph," when the London and Southampton
Railway was opened, in 1833,—*"I shan't want it*
never no more" : and he fell ill, turned his face to
the wall, and died.

The end of the coaching age was a tragedy for
the coachmen ; and even to many others, whose
careers and livelihood were not bound up with the
old order of things, it was a bitter uprooting of
established customs. Many travellers were never
reconciled to railways, and in imagination dwelt
fondly in the old days of the road for the rest of
their lives ; while many more never ceased to re-
count stories of the peculiar glory and exhilaration
of old-time travel, forgetting the miseries and in-
conveniences that formed part of it. But although
reminiscent oldsters have talked much about those
vanished times, they have rarely attempted a con-
secutive story of them. Such an attempt is that
essayed in these pages, confined within the compass
of two volumes, not because material for a third
was lacking, but simply for sake of expediency. It

is shown in the body of this book, and may be noted again in this place, that the task of writing anything in the nature of a History of Coaching is rendered exceeding difficult by reason of the disappearance of most of the documentary evidence on which it should be based ; but I have been fortunate enough to secure the aid of Mr. Joseph Barendale in respect of the history of Pickford & Co., of Mr. William Chaplin, grandson of the great coach-proprietor, and of Mr. Benjamin Worthy Horne, grandson of Chaplin's partner, for information concerning their respective families. Colonel Edmund Palmer, also, communicated interesting notes on his grandfather, John Palmer, the founder of the mail-coach system. To my courteous friend, Mr. W. H. Duignan, of Walsall, whose own recollections of coaching, and whose collections of coaching prints and notes I have largely used, this acknowledgment is due. Mr. J. B. Muir, of 35, Wardour Street, my obliging friend of years past, has granted extensive use of his collection of sporting pictures, and Messrs. Arthur Ackermann & Son, of 191, Regent Street, have lent prints and pictures from their establishment.

CHARLES G. HARPER.

PETERSHAM, SURREY,

April 1903.

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CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION OF CARRIAGES

“ Ah! sure it was a coat of steel,
Or good tough oak, he wore,
Who first unto the ticklish wheel
’Gan harness horses four.”

THE lines quoted above are not remarkably good as poetry. Nay, it is possible to go farther, and to say that they are exceptionally bad—the product of one of those corn-box poets who were accustomed to speak of steam as a “demon foul”; but if his lines are bad verse, the central idea is good. That man who first essayed to drive four-in-hand must indeed have been more than usually courageous.

To form anything at all like an adequate idea of the Coaching Age, it is first necessary to discover how people travelled before that age dawned. As a picture is made by contrasted light and shade, so is the story of the coaching

period only to be properly set forth by first narrating how journeys were made from place to place before the continuous history of wheeled traffic begins. That history, measured by mere count of years, is not a long one. It cannot, in its remotest origin, go back beyond the first appearance of the stage-waggon, about 1590, when the peasantry of this kingdom began to obtain an occasional lift on the roads, and sat among the goods which it was the first business of those waggons to carry. The peasant, then, was the first coach-passenger, for while he was carried thus, everyone else, in all the estates of the realm, from King and Queen down to the middle classes, rode horseback, and it was not until 1657 and the establishment of the Chester Stage that the Coaching Age opened for the public in general.

If, then, we please to pronounce for that event as the true beginning, and allow 1848, the year when one of the last coaches, the Bedford "Times," was withdrawn from the London and Bedford road in consequence of the opening of the Bletchley and Bedford branch railway, to be the end, we have the beginning, the growth and perfection of the old coaching era, and its final extinction, all comprised within a period of a hundred and ninety-one years.

Wheeled conveyances are generally said by the usual books of reference to take their origin in this country with the introduction of Queen Mary's Coronation carriage in 1553; but, so far

from that being correct, mention of carriages is often found in authorities of a period earlier by almost two centuries. Thus, in her will of September 25th, 1355, Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady Clare, bequeathed her "great carriage, with the covertures, carpets, and cushions," to her eldest daughter; and carriage-builders at the close of Edward III.'s reign charged £400 and £1000 for their wares. Carts were not unknown to the peasantry; Froissart tells us that the English returned from Scotland in 1360 in "charettes," a kind of carriage whose make he does not specify; and ladies are discovered in 1380 travelling with the baggage in "whirlicotes," which were cots or beds on wheels, or a species of wheeled litter. We have, by favour of one of the old chroniclers, a fugitive picture of Richard II., at the age of seventeen, travelling in one of these whirlicotes, accompanying his mother, who was ill.

But such instances do not prove more than occasional use, and it certainly appears that when Queen Mary rode from the Tower of London to Westminster on her Coronation Day, September 20th, 1553, in her State coach, she thereby revived the use of carriages, which, for some reason or another, had fallen into disuse since those early days. Her coachmaker, by a grant made on May 29th in the first year of her reign, was one Anthony Silver.

We may seek the cause of wheeled conveyances going out of use in the two centuries before this date in the steady and continuous decay of the

roads consequent upon the troubled state of the kingdom in that intervening space. Rebellions, pestilences, foreign wars, and domestic strife had marked that epoch. The Wars of the Roses themselves lasted thirty years, and in all that while the social condition of the people had not merely stood still, but degenerated. Towns and districts were half depopulated, and the ancient highways fell into disuse. It is significant that the first General Highway Act, a measure passed in 1555, was practically coincident with the reintroduction of carriages.

Queen Mary's Coronation carriage—or, as it was called in the language of that time, "coach"—was drawn by six horses, less for reasons of display than of sheer necessity, for, with a less numerous and powerful team, it would probably have been stuck fast in the infamously bad roads that then set a gulf of mud between the twin cities of London in the east and Westminster in the west. Only three other carriages followed her Majesty on that historic occasion, and the ladies who attended rode horseback.

Two years after this new departure mention is found of a "coach"—still, of course, a carriage—made for the Earl of Rutland by one Walter Rippon, who in the same year appears to have built a new one for the Queen.

The next patron of carriages seems to have been Sir Thomas Hoby, sometime Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador to the French Court: that Sir Thomas who lies beside his brother, Sir Philip,

in their magnificent tomb in the little Berkshire village church of Bisham, beside the Thames. He owned a carriage in 1566.

The progressive age of Elizabeth now opens. In 1564, six years after her accession, she was using a carriage brought over from Holland by a certain William Boonen, himself a Hollander. Boonen, indeed, became her Majesty's coachman, but his services cannot often have been required, for, if we are to believe Elizabeth's own words to the French Ambassador in 1568, driving in these early carriages, innocent of springs, must have been as uncomfortable as a journey in a modern builder's cart or an ammunition-waggon would be. When his Excellency waited upon her, she was still suffering "aching pains, from being knocked about in a coach driven too fast a few days before."

Little wonder, then, that the great Queen used her coach only when occasions of State demanded. She journeyed to her palace at Greenwich by water, between Greenwich and her other palace of Eltham on horseback, and to Nonsuch and Hampton Court and on her many country progresses in like manner, resorting only to wheels with advancing years. How bad were even the roads especially repaired for her coming may be judged from a contemporary description of her journey along that "new highway" whose "perfect evenness" is the theme of the writer. "Her Majesty left the coach only once, while the hinds and the folk of a base sort lifted it on

with their poles." Majesty must have been sore put to it to look majestic on such occasions, and in the bad condition of all roads at that time we find a new significance in the courtliness of Sir Walter Raleigh, who at Greenwich threw his velvet cloak upon the ground for Elizabeth to walk over.

Elizabeth was an accomplished horsewoman, and it is not surprising, under these circumstances, that she made full use of the accomplishment, continuing on all possible public occasions to appear in this manner. On longer journeys she rode on a pillion behind a mounted chamberlain, holding on to him by his waistbelt just as ladies continued to do for centuries yet to come. The curious in these things may find interest in the fact that the modern groom's leathern waistbelt, which now serves no practical function, is merely a strange survival of that old necessity of feminine travel. The commonly-received opinion that Elizabeth objected to carriages from the supposed "effeminaey" of using them receives a severe shock from her carriage experiences, which make it quite obvious that travelling in the earliest of them was only to be indulged in by persons of the strongest frame and in the rudest health. She who, mounted on her palfrey before her troops at Tilbury, when the Armada threatened, could justly claim that though but a woman she had the spirit of a King—aye, and a King of England—quailed before the rigours of a carriage-drive.

In 1579 the Earl of Arundel imported one of

these new and strange machines from Germany. How novel and strange they were may be gathered from the particular mention thus accorded them in the annals of the time. When we consider how bad was the condition even of the streets of London, it will be abundantly evident that a desire for display rather than comfort brought about the increasing use of carriages that marked the closing years of Elizabeth's reign. By 1601 they had become so comparatively numerous that it was sought to obtain an Act restraining their excessive use and forbidding men riding in them. This projected ordinance especially set forth the enervating nature of riding in carriages; but it would seem that the real objection was the growing magnificence displayed in this way by the wealthy, tending to overshadow the public appearances of Royalty itself. Whatever the real reason of this disabling measure, it was rejected on the second reading and never became law, and four years later both hackney and private carriages were in common use in London. Carters and waggoners hated them with a bitter hatred, called them "hell-carts," and heaped abuse upon all who used them. Both their primitive construction and the fearful condition of the roads rendered their use impossible in the country. Teams of fewer than six horses were rarely seen drawing coaches in what were then regarded as London suburbs, districts long since included in Central London; and perhaps even the haughty and arrogant Duke of Buckingham, favourite of

James I. and Charles, was misjudged when, in 1619, the people, seeing his carriage drawn by that number, "wondered at it as a novelty, and imputed it to him as a mastering pride." Had he employed fewer horses he certainly would have been obliged to get out and walk, or to have again resorted to the use of the sedan-chair, in which, before he had set up a carriage, he was used to be carried, greatly to the indignation of the populace, to whom sedan-chairs were at that time novelties. "The clamour and the noise of it was so extravagant," we are told, "that the people would rail upon him in the streets, loathing that men should be brought to as servile a condition as horses." Yet no one ever thought of denouncing Buckingham or any other of the magnificos when they lolled in easy seats under the silken hangings of their state barges and were rowed by the labour of a dozen lusty oarsmen on the Thames. The work was as servile as the actual carrying of a passenger, but the innate conservatism of mankind could not at first perceive this. On the whole, Buckingham therefore has our sympathy. The most innocent doings of a favourite with Royalty are capable of being twisted into haughty and malignant acts, and had it not been for Buckingham's position at Court his displays would not have brought him the hatred of the people and the rivalry of his own order which they certainly did arouse. The Earl of Northumberland was one of those who were thus goaded into the rivalry of display. Hearing that the favourite had six

horses to his carriage, he thought that he might very well have eight, "and so rode," we are told, "from London to Bath, to the vulgar talk and admiration."

The first public carriages, according to a statement made to Taylor, the "water poet," by Old Parr, the centenarian, were the "hackney-coaches," established in London in 1605. "Since then," says Taylor, writing on the subject at different times between 1623 and 1635, "coaches have increased with a mischief, and have ruined the trade of the watermen by hackney-coaches, and now multiply more than ever." The "watermen" were, of course, those who plied with their boats and barges for hire upon the Thames, chiefly between London and Westminster, the river being then, and for long after, the principal highway for traffic in the metropolis. So greatly, indeed, was the river traffic for the time affected, that the sprack-witted Taylor relinquished his trade of waterman and embarked upon the more promising career of pamphleteering.

"Thirty years ago," he says, in one of these outbursts, "The World runnes on Wheelles," "coaches were few":—

Then upstart helcart coaches were to seeke,
 A man could scarce see twenty in a weeke,
 But now I thinke a man may daily see
 More than the whirries on the Thames can be.
 Carroches, coaches, jades and Flanders mares
 Doe rob us of our shares, our wares, our fares;
 Against the ground we stand and knock our heeles,
 Whilest all our profit runs away on wheelles.

“This,” we find him saying, on another occasion, “is the rattling, rowling, rumbling age, and the world runnes on wheelles. The hackney-men, who were wont to have furnished travellers in all places with fitting and serviceable horses for any journey, are (by the multitude of coaches) undone by the dozens.”

The bitter cry of Taylor and the Thames watermen may or may not have been hearkened to, but certainly hackney-coaches were prohibited in 1635. This, however, was probably due rather to Royal whim or prejudice than to any consideration for a decaying trade.

It was an arbitrary age, and it only needed a Star Chamber order for public carriages, considered by the Court to be a nuisance, to be suppressed. The reasons advanced read curiously at this time: “His Majesty, perceiving that of late the great numbers of hackney-coaches were grown a great disturbance to the King, Queen, and nobility through the streets of the said city, so as the common passage was made dangerous and the rates and prices of hay and provender and other provisions of the stable thereby made exceeding dear, hath thought fit, with the advice of his Privy Council, to publish his Royal pleasure, for reformation therein.” His Majesty therefore commanded that no hackney-coaches should be used in London unless they were engaged to travel at least three miles out of town, and owners of such coaches were to keep sufficient able horses and geldings, fit for his Majesty’s

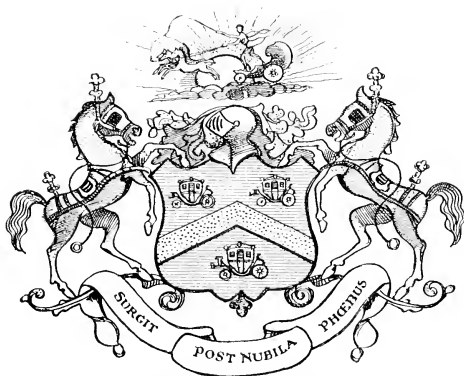
service, "whensoever his occasion shall require them."

This despotic measure was amended in 1637, when fifty hackney-coachmen for London were licensed, to keep not more than twelve horses each. This meant either that three hundred or a hundred and fifty public carriages then came into use, according to whether two or four horses were harnessed. "And so," says Taylor, "there grew up the trade of coach-building in England."

These early carriages, whether hackney or private, were not only without springs, but were innocent of windows. In their place were shutters or leather curtains. The first "glass coach" mentioned is that made for the Duke of York in 1661. Pepys at this period becomes our principal authority on this subject. On May 1st, 1665, he is found witnessing experiments with newly-designed carriages with springs, and again on September 5th, finding them go not quite so easy as their inventor claimed for them. Yet, since private carriages were clearly becoming the fashion, Mr. Secretary-to-the-Admiralty Pepys must needs have one; and accordingly, on December 2nd, 1668, he takes his first ride: "Abroad with my wife, the first time that I ever rode in my own coach."

Pepys always delighted in being in the fashion. He would not be in advance of it, and not, if he could help it, behind. The fact, then, of his setting up a carriage of his own is sufficient to show how largely the moneyed classes had begun

to go about on wheels. But better evidence still is found in the establishment, May 1677, of the Worshipful Company of Coach and Harness Makers, whose arms still bear representations of the carriages in use at that period. The armorial bearings of the Coach-makers are, when duly tricked out in their proper colours, somewhat



ARMS OF THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF COACH AND
HARNESS MAKERS.

striking. Stated in plain terms, done into English out of heraldic jargon, they consist of a blue shield of arms with three coaches and a chevron in gold, supported on either side by a golden horse, harnessed and saddled in black studded with gold; with blue housings garnished with red, and fringed and purpled in gold. The horses are further adorned with plumes of four feathers in gold, silver, red, and blue. A crest above displays

Phœbus driving his chariot, and the motto beneath declares that "After clouds rises the sun."

The hackney-carriages of London in 1669, the year following Pepys' establishment of his own private turn-out, numbered, according to the memoirs of Cosmo, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who travelled England at that time, eight hundred. The age of public vehicles was come.

CHAPTER II

THE HORSEMEN

“The single gentlemen, then a hardy race, equipped in jack-boots and trousers up to their middle, rode post through thick and thin, and, guarded against the mire, defying the frequent stumble and fall, arose and pursued their journey with alacrity.”—*Pennant*, 1739.

LONG before wheeled conveyances of any kind were to be hired in this country, travellers were accustomed to ride post. To do so argued no connection with that great department we now call the Post Office, although that letter-carrying agency and the custom of riding post obtain their name from a common origin. The earliest provision for travelling post seems to have been in the reign of Henry VIII., when the office of “Master of the Postes” was established. Sir Brian Tuke then held that appointment, and to him were entrusted the arrangements for securing relays of horses on the four great post roads then recognised: the road from London to Dover, on which the carriers came from and went to foreign parts; the road to Plymouth, where the King’s dockyard was situated; and the great roads to Scotland and Chester, and on to Conway and Holyhead. These relays of horses were established exclusively for use of the despatch-riders who went on affairs of State; but by the time of Elizabeth

these messengers were, as a favour, already accustomed to carry any letters that might be given into their charge and could be delivered without going out of their way; while travellers constantly called at the country post-houses, and on pretence of going on the Queen's business, obtained the use of horses, which they rode to exhaustion, or overloaded, or even rode away with altogether.

These abuses were promptly suppressed when James I. came to the English throne. In 1603, the year of his accession, a proclamation was issued under which no person claiming to be on Government business was to be supplied with horses by the postmasters unless his application was supported by a document signed by one of the officers of State. The hire of horses for public business was fixed at twopence-halfpenny a mile, and in addition there was a small charge for the guide. A very arbitrary order was made that if the post-houses had not sufficient horses, the constables and the magistrates were to seize those of private owners and impress them into the service. Post-masters, who were salaried officials, were paid at the very meagre rate of from sixpence to three shillings a day. They were generally innkeepers on the main roads; otherwise it is difficult to see how they could have existed on these rates of pay. Evidently these were considered merely as retaining fees, and so, in order to give them a chance of earning a more living wage, they were permitted to let out horses

to "others riding poste with horse and guide about their private business." Those private and unofficial travellers could not demand to be supplied with horses at the official rate: what they were to pay was to be a matter between the post-masters and themselves. In practice, however, the tariff for Government riders ruled that for all horsemen, as made clear in Fynes Morison's *Itinerary*, 1617, where he says that in the south and west of England and on the Great North Road as far as Berwick, post-horses were established at every ten miles or so at a charge of twopence-halfpenny a mile. It was necessary to have a guide to each stage, and it was customary to charge for baiting both the guide's and the traveller's horses, and to give the guide himself a few pence—usually a four-penny-piece, called "the guide's groat"—on parting. It was cheaper and safer for several travellers to go together, for one guide would serve the whole company on each stage, and it was not prudent to travel alone. Morison says that, although hiring came expensive in one way, yet the speed it was possible to maintain saved time and consequent charges at the inns. The chief requisite, however, was strength of body and ability to endure the fatigue.

As to that, the horsemen of the period were, equally with those of over a hundred years later, mentioned by Pennant, "a hardy race." In March, 1603, for example, Robert Cary, afterwards Earl of Monmouth, eager to be first in acclaiming James VI. of Scotland as James I. of England,

left London so soon as the last breath had left the body of Queen Elizabeth, and rode the 401 miles to Edinburgh in three days. He reached Doncaster, 158 miles, the first night, Widdrington, 137 miles, the second, and gained Edinburgh, 106 miles, the third day, in spite of a severe fall by the way. About the same time a person named Coles rode from London to Shrewsbury in fourteen hours.

When Thomas Witherings was appointed Master of the Post, in 1635, the Post Office, as an institution for carrying the correspondence of the public, may be said to have started business, although as early as 1603 private persons were forbidden to make the carrying of letters a business. Like all such ordinances, this seemed made only to be broken every day. It was particularly unreasonable because, before Witherings came upon the scene in 1635 and reorganised the posts, there existed no means by which letters could be sent generally into the country. Only the post-riders on business of State on the four great roads were in the habit of taking letters, and their doing so was a matter of private arrangement.

The postmasters now, on the appointment of Witherings, first officially made acquaintance with letters, and their name began to take on something of its modern meaning. They still supplied horses to the King's messengers and the King's liege subjects, and held a monopoly in these businesses.

In 1657 the so-called " Post Office of England "

was established by Act of Parliament, and the office of Postmaster-General created, in succession to that of Master of the Posts. His business was defined as “the exclusive right of carrying letters and the furnishing of post-horses,” and these two functions—the overlordship of what were officially known for generations afterwards as the “letter post” and the “travelling post”—the long line of Postmasters-General continued to exercise for a hundred and twenty-three years.

In 1658 the mileage the country postmasters were entitled to charge was, according to an advertisement of July 1st in that year, increased from twopence-halfpenny to threepence, and on the Chester Road, at least, there was no longer any obligation to take a guide:—

“The postmasters on the Chester Road, petitioning, have received order, and do accordingly publish the following advertisement: All gentlemen, merchants, and others who have occasion to travel between London and West Chester, Manchester, and Warrington, or any other town upon that road, for the accommodation of trade, dispatch of business, and ease of purse, upon every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning, between six and ten of the clock, at the house of Mr. Christopher Charteris, at the sign of the Hart’s Horns, in West Smithfield, and postmaster there, and at the postmaster of Chester, and at the postmaster of Warrington, may have a good and able horse or mare, furnished at threepence the mile, without the charge of a guide; and so likewise at the

house of Mr. Thomas Challoner, postmaster at Stone in Staffordshire, upon every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings, to go to London; and so likewise at all the several postmasters upon the road, who will have such set days, so many horses, with furniture, in readiness to furnish the riders, without any stay, to carry them to and from any of the places aforesaid in four days, as well to London as from thence, and to places nearer in less time, according as their occasions shall require, they engaging, at the first stage where they take horse, for the safe delivery of the same to the next immediate stage, and not to ride that horse any farther without consent of the postmaster, by whom he rides, and so from stage to stage to their journey's end. All those who intend to ride this way are desired to give a little notice beforehand, if conveniently they can, to the several postmasters where they first take horse, whereby they may be furnished with as many horses as the riders shall require, with expedition. This undertaking began the 28th of June 1658, at all the places aforesaid, and so continues by the several postmasters."

The Chester Road—the road to Ireland—was of great moment at that age. Indeed, it had been of importance for centuries past. It was in a lonely hollow near Flint, on his landing from Ireland, that Richard II. was waylaid in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke, and his progress to London barred; and from Chester as well as from Milford Haven English expeditions were wont to

sail—some carrying fire and sword across St. George's Channel, and later ones taking English colonists to occupy and cultivate the lands from which the shiftless Irish had been driven. But it was not until the close of Elizabeth's reign, when Ireland was subjugated, that this road began to be constantly travelled.

Under James I. the Irish chieftains came to these shores to swear fealty, and in the wild and whirling series of events that filled the years from 1641 to 1692 with horror, a continual flux and reflux of military travellers and trembling refugees came and went along these storied miles.

Already, in the year before the announcement of post-horses on the Chester Road, the first stage-coach of which we have any particulars had been established on this very route. It did not continue to Holyhead, for the individually sufficient reasons that no practicable road to that port existed for anything going on wheels, and that Chester itself, and Parkgate, a few miles down the estuary of the Dee, were the most convenient ports of embarkation for Ireland. No direct road to Holyhead existed until 1783, when coaches began to run to that port. Before that time, those who wished to cross from Holyhead generally rode horseback. Few ventured across country by Llangollen and Bettws-y-Coed; most, like Swift, leaving civilisation behind at Chester, took horse and guide, and going by Rhuddlan and Conway, dared the precipitous heights of that great headland called Penmaenmawr, or, even

more greatly daring, crept round by the rocks underneath at ebb tide. Swift wrote two couplets for the inn that then stood beside the track on Penmaenmawr. As the traveller approached he read, on the swinging sign:—

Before you venture here to pass,
Take a good refreshing glass:

while the returning wayfarer was cheered by:—

Now this hill you're safely over,
Drink, your spirits to recover.

One personage, greatly daring, did in 1685 succeed in passing his carriage over this height. This was the Viceroy, Henry, Earl of Clarendon, who, ill enough advised to try for Holyhead, embarked his baggage at Chester, and essayed this perilous undertaking. "If the weather be good," he wrote, before setting out, "we go under the rocks in our coaches." But it was December, the weather was *not* good, and so they had to take to the hill-top. His Excellency had ample cause to regret the venture, for he was five hours travelling the fourteen miles between St. Asaph and Conway, and on the crossing of Penmaenmawr the "great heavy coach" had to be drawn by the horses in single trace, while three or four sturdy Welsh peasants, hired for the job, pushed behind, so that it should not slip back. His Excellency walked all the way across, from Conway to Bangor, and Lady Clarendon was carried in a litter. How the Menai Straits were crossed does not appear, but

there is evidence in the tone of his letters that he was astonished at last to find himself safely come to Holyhead.

In 1660, on the Restoration, the law of 1657, constituting the Post Office and regulating the letting of post-horses, was re-enacted. By some new provisions and amendments of old ones, travellers might now hire horses wherever they could if the postmasters could not supply them within half an hour. This concession, together with that which repealed the power given by the earlier Act for horses to be seized, was evidently made in deference to the indignation of travellers delayed by lack of horses in the hands of the only persons who could legally hire them out, and by the fury of private individuals who had seen their own choice animals not infrequently requisitioned in the King's name and hack-ridden unconscionable distances by travellers or King's messengers whose first and last thoughts were for speed, and who had not the consideration of an owner for the steeds that carried them. The term "postage," occurring in the Act of 1660, shows that a widely different meaning was then attached to the word: "Each horse's hire or postage" is a phrase that sufficiently explains itself.

Such were the methods and costs of riding horse-back when stage-coaching began. The Government monopoly, however, was infringed with increasing impunity as time went on, and as the letter-carrying business of the Post Office developed, so

was the "travelling post" allowed to decay. The growing number and increasing convenience of the coaches, too, helped to make the monopoly less valuable, for when travellers could be conveyed without exertion by coach at from twopence to threepence a mile, they were not likely to pay threepence a mile and a guide's groat at every ten miles for the privilege of bumping in the saddle all day long. Those who mostly continued in the saddle were the gentlemen who owned horses of their own, or those others to whom the chance company of a coach was objectionable.

The Post Office monopoly in post-horses was, accordingly, not worth preserving when it was abolished by the Act of 1780. From that time the Postmasters-General ceased to have anything to do with horse-hire, and anything lost by their relinquishing it was amply returned to the State by the new license duties levied upon horse-keepers or postmasters, and coaches. A penny a mile was fixed as the Government duty upon horses let out for hire, whether saddle-horses or to be used in post-chaises. All persons who made that a business—generally, of course, innkeepers—were to take out an annual five-shilling license, and were under obligation to paint in some conspicuous place on their houses "Licensed to let Post-Horses." In default of so doing the penalty was £5. As a check upon the business done, travellers hiring post-horses were to be given a ticket, on which the number of horses so hired, and the distance, were to be specified. These tickets were to be delivered

to the turnpike-keeper at the first gate, and the vigilance of these officials was made a matter of self-interest by the allowance to them of three-pence in the pound on all tickets thus collected. At certain periods the tickets were delivered to the Stamp Office, and the innkeepers and post-masters themselves were visited by revenue officers, who required to see the books and the counterfoils from which these tickets had come.

But the Government did not for any length of time directly collect these duties. They were farmed out by the Inland Revenue Department, just as the turnpike tolls were farmed by the Turnpike Trustees, and men grew rich by buying these tolls and duties at annual auctions, relying for their profit on the increased vigilance they would cause to be exercised. The Jews were early in this field. In the golden era of coaching a man named Levy farmed tolls and duties to the annual value of half a million sterling.

But to return to our horsemen. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the country gentlemen, the members of Parliament, the judges on circuit, every hale and able-bodied man of means sufficient, rode his horse, or hired one on his journeys, for the reason that carriages could only slowly and with great difficulty and expense be made to move along the distant roads. The passage from Pennant's recollections, quoted at the head of this chapter, shows the miseries made light of by the single gentlemen, and endured by those married ones whose wives rode behind them

on a pillion and clutched them convulsively round the waist as the horse stumbled along.

Nor did stage-coaches immediately change this time-honoured way of getting about the country, for there existed an aristocratic prejudice against using public vehicles. Offensive persons who never owned carriages of their own were used to give themselves insufferable airs when journeying by coach, and hint, for the admiration or envy of their fellow-passengers, that an accident had happened to their own private equipage. Satirists of the time soon seized upon this contemptible resort of the snob, and used it to advantage in contemporary literature. Thus we find the committeeman's wife in Sir Robert Howard's comedy explaining her presence in the Reading coach to be owing to her own carriage being disordered, adding that if her husband knew she had been obliged to ride in the stage he would "make the house too hot to hold some."

Here and there we find exceptions to this general rule. In the coach passing through Preston in 1662, one Parker was fellow-traveller with "persons of great qualitie, such as knightes and ladies"; and on one occasion in 1682 the winter coach on its four days' journey between Nottingham and London had for passenger Sir Ralph Knight, of Langold, Yorks; but the single gentlemen in good health continued for years after the introduction of stage-coaches to go on horseback, and when their families came to town they usually took the family chariot, and either contracted with

stable-keepers for horses on the way, or else, taking their most powerful horses from the plough, harnessed four or six of them to their private vehicle, and so, with the driving of their best ploughman, came to the capital in state, much to the amusement of the fashionables of Piccadilly and St. James's.

We must, however, suppose, from the fury of Cresset's *Reasons for Suppressing Stage Coaches*, of 1662, that some of the less energetic among the country gentlemen had already succumbed to the discreditable practice of travelling in them. In his pages we learn something of what a horseman's life on the road was like, and what he escaped by taking to the coach. The hardy race became soft and grievously enervated by the unwonted luxury; their muscles slackened, and they developed an infirmity of purpose that rendered them no longer able to "endure frost, snow, or rain, or to lodge in the fields"—trifling inconveniences and incidents of travel which, it appears, they had previously been accustomed to support with that cheerfulness or resignation with which one faces the inevitable and incurable.

But Cresset had other indictments, throwing a flood of light upon what the horseman endured in wear and tear of body, mind, and wearing apparel: "Most gentlemen, before they travelled in coaches, used to ride with swords, belts, pistols, holsters, portmanteaus and hat-cases, which in these coaches they have little or no use for; for, when they rode on horseback, they rode in one

suit and carried another to wear when they came to their journey's end, or lay by the way; but in coaches a silk hat and an Indian gown, with a sash, silk stockings, and beaver hats, men ride in, and carry no other with them, because they escape the wet and dirt, which on horseback they cannot avoid; whereas, in two or three journeys on horseback these clothes and hats were wont to be spoiled; which done, they were forced to have new ones very often, and that increased the consumption of the manufactures and the employment of the manufacturers; which travelling in coaches doth in no way do."

Fortunately, the biographical literature of our country is rich in records of the horsemen who, still relying upon their own exertions and those of their willing steeds, rode long distances and left the toiling stage leagues behind them at the close of each day's journey. Ralph Thoresby, of Leeds, a pious and God-fearing antiquary who flourished at this time, gives us, on the other hand, the spectacle of one who generally rode horseback trying the coach by way of a change. He had occasion to visit London in February 1683, and as there was at that time no coach service between Leeds and London, he rode from Leeds to York to catch the stage, which seems to have kept the road in this particular winter. He rose at five one Saturday morning, and was at York by night, ready for the coach leaving for London on the Monday. Four years earlier he had scorned the coach, and did not now take it for sake of speed,

for he commonly rode from Leeds to London in four days, and the York stage at this period of its career took six; so, including the two days expended in coming to York, he was clearly twice as long over the business. He looked forward to the coach journey with misgivings, "fearful of being confined to a coach for so many days with unsuitable persons and not one I know of."

On other occasions, when he rode horseback, his diary is rich with picturesque incident. He finds the waters out on the road between Ware and Cheshunt, and waits until he and a party of other horsemen can be guided across by a safe way, and so avoid the pitiful fate of a poor higgler, who blundered into the raging torrent where the road should have been, and was swept away and drowned. He loses his way frequently on the high-road; shudders with apprehension when crossing Witham Common, near Stamford, "the place where Sir Ralph Wharton slew the highwayman"; and, with a companion, has a terrible fright at an inn at Topeliffe, where they miss their pistols for a while and suspect the inn-keeper of sinister designs against them. Hence, at the safe conclusion of every journey, with humble and heartfelt thanks he inscribes: "God be thanked for his mercies to me and my poor family!"

In 1715, when John Gay wrote his entertaining poem, *A Journey to Exeter*, describing the adventures of a party of horsemen who rode down from London, things were, we may suppose, much

better, for the travellers found amusement as well as toil on their way.

They took five days to ride to Exeter. The first night they slept at Hartley Row, 36 miles. The second day they left the modern route of the Exeter Road at Basingstoke, and, like some of the coaches about that time, struck out along the Winchester road as far as Popham Lane, where they branched off across the downs to Sutton and Stockbridge, at which town they halted the night, after a day's journey of 30 miles. The third morning saw them making for Salisbury. Midway between Stockbridge and that city their road falls into the main road to Exeter. That night they were at Blandford. The fourth day took them to Axminster, and the fifth to Exeter:—

'Twas on the day when city dames repair
To take their weekly dose of Hyde Park air;
When forth we trot: no carts the road infest,
For still on Sundays country horses rest.
Thy gardens, Kensington, we leave unseen;
Through Hammersmith jog on to Turnham Green:
That Turnham Green which dainty pigeons fed,
But feeds no more, for Solomon is dead.
Three dusty miles reach Brentford's tedious town,
For dirty streets and white-legg'd chickens known:
Thence o'er wide shrubby heaths and furrow'd lanes
We come, where Thames divides the meads of Staines.
We ferry'd o'er; for late the winter's flood
Shook her frail bridge, and tore her piles of wood.
Prepar'd for war, now Bagshot Heath we cross,
Where broken gamesters oft repair their loss.
At Hartley Row the foaming bit we prest,
While the fat landlord welcom'd ev'ry guest.

Supper was ended, healths the glasses crown'd,
 Our host extolled his wine at ev'ry round,
 Relates the Justices' late meeting there,
 How many bottles drank, and what their cheer;
 What lords had been his guests in days of yore,
 And praised their wisdom much, their drinking more.

* * * * *

Let travellers the morning's vigils keep:
 The morning rose, but we lay fast asleep.
 Twelve tedious miles we bore the sultry sun,
 And Popham Lane was scarce in sight by one;
 The straggling village harbour'd thieves of old,
 'Twas here the stage-coach'd lass resigned her gold;
 That gold which had in London purchas'd gowns,
 And sent her home, a belle, to country towns.
 But robbers haunt no more the neighbouring wood;
 Here unnamed infants find their daily food;
 For should the maiden mother nurse her son,
 'Twould spoil her match, when her good name is gone.
 Our jolly hostess nineteen children bore,
 Nor fail'd her breast to suckle nineteen more.
 Be just, ye prudes, wipe off the long arrear,
 Be virgins still in towns, but mothers here.
 Sutton we pass; and leave her spacious down,
 And with the setting sun reach Stockbridge town.
 O'er our parch'd tongues the rich metheglin glides,
 And the red dainty trout our knife divides.
 Sad melancholy ev'ry visage wears;
 What! no election come in seven long years!
 Of all our race of Mayors, shall Snow alone
 Be by Sir Richard's dedication known?
 Our streets no more with tides of ale shall float,
 Nor cobblers feast three years upon one vote.

* * * * *

Next morn, twelve miles led o'er th' unbounded plain
 Where the cloak'd shepherd guides his fleecy train.
 No leafy bow'rs a noontide shelter lend,
 Nor from the chilly dews at night defend;

With wondrous art he counts the straggling flock,
 And by the sun informs you what's o'clock.
 How are our shepherds fall'n from ancient days!
 No Amaryllis chants alternate lays;
 From her no list'ning echoes learn to sing,
 Nor with his reed the jocund valleys ring.
 Here sheep the pasture hide, there harvests bend,
 See Sarum's steeple o'er yon hill ascend;
 Our horses faintly trot beneath the heat,
 And our keen stomachs know the hour to eat.
 Who can forsake thy walls, and not admire
 The proud cathedral and the lofty spire?
 What sempstress has not proved thy scissors good?
 From hence first came th' intriguing riding-hood.
 Amid three boarding-schools well stock'd with misses,
 Shall three knight-errants starve for want of kisses?
 O'er the green turf the miles slide swift away,
 And Blandford ends the labours of the day.

* * * * *

The morning rose; the supper reck'ning paid,
 And our due fees discharg'd to man and maid,
 The ready ostler near the stirrup stands,
 And as we mount, our halfpence load his hands.
 Now the steep hill fair Dorchester o'erlooks,
 Bordered by meads, and wash'd by silver brooks.
 Here sleep my two companions, eyes supprest,
 And propt in elbow-chairs they snoring rest;
 I weary sit, and with my pencil trace
 Their painful postures and their eyeless face;
 Then dedicate each glass to some fair name,
 And on the sash the diamond scrawls my flame.
 Now o'er true Roman way our horses sound;
 Grævius would kneel and kiss the sacred ground.
 On either side fair fertile valleys lie,
 The distant prospects tire the travelling eye.
 Through Bridport's stony lanes our route we take,
 And the proud steep ascend to Morecombe's lake.
 As hearses pass'd, our landlord robb'd the pall,
 And with the mournful scutcheon hung his hall.

On unadulterate wine we here regale,
 And strip the lobster of his scarlet mail.
 We climb'd the hills when starry night arose,
 And Axminster affords a kind repose.
 The maid, subdued by fees, her trunk unlocks,
 And gives the cleanly aid of dowlas smocks.
 Meantime our shirts her busy fingers rub,
 While the soap lathers o'er the foaming tub.
 If women's gear such pleasing dreams incite,
 Lend us your smocks, ye damsels, ev'ry night.
 We rise, our beards demand the barber's art;
 A female enters, and performs the part.
 The weighty golden chain adorns her neck,
 And three gold rings her skilful hand bedeck;
 Smooth o'er our chins her easy fingers move,
 Soft as when Venus strok'd the beard of Jove.
 Now from the steep, 'mid scatter'd cots and groves,
 Our eye through Honiton's fair valley roves.
 Behind us soon the busy town we leave,
 Where finest lace industrious lasses weave.
 Now swelling clouds roll'd on; the rainy load
 Stream'd down our hats, and smoked along the road;
 When (O blest sight!) a friendly sign we spy'd,
 Our spurs are slacken'd from the horse's side;
 For sure a civil host the house commands,
 Upon whose sign this courteous motto stands—
 "This is the ancient hand, and eke the pen;
 Here is for horses hay, and meat for men."
 How rhyme would flourish, did each son of fame
 Know his own genius, and direct his flame!
 Then he that could not Epic flights rehearse
 Might sweetly mourn in Elegiac verse.
 But were his Muse for Elegy unfit,
 Perhaps a Distich might not strain his wit;
 If Epigram offend, his harmless lines
 Might in gold letters swing on alehouse signs.
 Then Hobbinol might propagate his bays,
 And Tuttle-fields record his simple lays;

Where rhymes like these might lure the nurses' eyes,
While gaping infants squall for farthing pies.
"Treat here, ye shepherds blithe, your damsels sweet,
For pies and cheesecakes are for damsels meet."
Then Maurus in his proper sphere might shine,
And these proud numbers grace great William's sign;—
"This is the man, this the Nassovian, whom
I named the brave deliverer to come."
But now the driving gales suspend the rain,
We mount our steeds, and Devon's city gain.
Hail, happy native land!—but I forbear
What other counties must with envy hear.

Dean Swift, too, was a frequent traveller on horseback, particularly on the Chester and Holyhead road. He seems once to have tried the Chester stage, and ever after to have taken to the saddle. Riding thus in 1710 from Chester to London in five days, he describes himself as "weary the first, almost dead the second, tolerable the third, and well enough the rest," but "glad enough of the fatigue, which has served for exercise." After making the journey from London to Holyhead and Dublin in 1726, he wrote to Pope, describing "the quick change" he had made in seven days from London to Dublin, "through many nations and languages unknown to the civilised world." He had expected the enterprise, "with moderate fortune," to take ten or eleven days. "I have often reflected," he adds, "in how few hours, with a swift horse or a strong gale, a man may come among a people as unknown to him as the Antipodes." Swift was by no means indulging in playful banter when he wrote this.

He felt a genuine cause for wonder in such expedition; and certainly if the rustic speech of rural England was like a strange and uncivilised tongue, how much more strange and uncivilised the languages of Wales and Ireland must have sounded!

The Dean's last recorded journey was made in September 1727. The little memorandum-book, tattered and discoloured, in which he noted down many of its incidents is still in existence, and is not only a valuable document in the story of Swift's life, but is equally precious and interesting as an intimate record of the daily trials and troubles of a traveller in those times, set down while he was still on his journey and thus echoing every passing feeling. Swift was in bad health and worse spirits when he wrote this diary at Holyhead, where he was detained for seven days by contrary winds. It was written for lack of employment afforded to a cultivated mind in the dreary little seaport, and under the influence of a great sorrow. "Stella" lay dying over in Ireland, and he, raging with impatience at Holyhead, filled his notebook with aimless scribbling. "All this to divert thinking," he writes, sadly, in the midst of it.

The original notebook is still in existence, and is carefully preserved at the South Kensington Museum, to which it was bequeathed by John Forster. Inside its cover the handwriting of successive owners gives the relic an authentic pedigree, and Swift himself humorously declares

how he came into possession of the blank book : “ This book I stole from the Right Honourable George Dodington, Esq., one of the Lords of the Treasury, but the scribblings are all my own.” This George Dodington was George Bubb Dodington, afterwards Lord Melcombe.

On the first page are hastily-scribbled memoranda for appointments : “ In Fleet Street, about a clerk of St. Patrick’s Cathedral ” ; “ Spectacles for seventy years old ” ; “ Godfrey in Southampton Street ” ; “ Hungary waters and palsy drops.”

Then the Dean left London, riding horseback, with his servant, Watt, for company on another nag, and carrying his master’s travelling valise. The heavy luggage had been sent on by waggon to Chester. Watt, as we shall presently see, was a veritable Handy Andy, always doing the wrong thing, or the right thing in a wrong way. Swift carried the notebook in his pocket, without writing anything of his journey in it until Holyhead was reached.

A few unfinished lines on an old cassock, out at elbows, preface the diary, which begins abruptly : “ Friday at 11 in the morning I left Chester. It was Sept. 22, 1727. I baited at a blind ale house 7 miles from Chester. I thence rode to Ridland (Rhuddlan), in all 22 miles. I lay there : bred, bed, meat and tolerable wine. I left Ridland a quarter after 4 morn on Saturday, slept on Penmanmaur (Penmaenmawr), examined about my sign verses the Inn is to

be on t'other side, therefore the verses to be changed."*

Here, on the verge of the wild Welsh coast, the way was so uncertain and dangerous that travellers had of necessity to employ guides, who conducted them thence to Bangor, and across Anglesey to Holyhead. The roads in Anglesey were unworthy of the name, and only a little better than horse-tracks; while the inhabitants of the isle spoke only Welsh, and understood not a word of English. Nearly two hundred years have passed, but although the roads have been made good, the folks of Anglesey speak English no more than they did then, when the guides acted the part of interpreters as well.

Swift, therefore, is found at Conway, mentioning the guide who had already brought him safely over Penmaenmawr: "I baited at Conway, the guide going to another Inn; the maid of the old Inn saw me in the street and said that was my horse, she knew me. There I dined, and sent for Ned Holland, a Squire famous for being mentioned in Mr. Lyndsay's verses to Day Morice. I there again saw Hook's tomb, who was the 41st child of his mother, and had himself 27 children, he dyed about 1638. There is a note here that one of his posterity new furbished up the inscription. I had read in Abp. Williams' Life that he was buryed in an obscure Church in North Wales. I enquired, and heard

* See p. 21.

that it was at* . . . Church, within a mile of Bangor, whither I was going. I went to the Church, the guide grumbling. I saw the Tomb with his Statue kneeling (in marble). It began thus (*Hospes lege et relege quod in hoc obscuro sacello non expectares. Hic jacet omnium Praesulum celeberrimus*). I came to Bangor and crossed the Ferry, a mile from it, where there is an Inn, which, if it be well kept, will break Bangor. There I lay; it was 22 miles from Holyhead."

This was the "George" at Menai Straits, a house that until the building of Telford's suspension bridge in 1825, flourished greatly on the traffic of the ferry that then plied between it and the opposite shore. Large additions have been made to the hotel, but the original wing that Swift knew is still in existence, and is a characteristic specimen of the architecture in vogue about the time of Queen Anne.

Swift unfortunately tells us nothing of the actual crossing of the Straits. He must have been up at an unconscionable hour, for he was already on the Anglesey side by four o'clock the next morning, Sunday: "I was on horseback at 4 in the morning resolving to be at Church at Holyhead, but we then lost Owain Tudor's tomb at Penmarry." This was Penmynydd, a very steep and craggy place, whence came those Tudors who through the fortunate marriage of Owain Tudor came at last to the throne of England.

* It was Llandegai.

“ We passed the place,” says Swift, “ being a little out of the way, by the Guide’s knavery, who had no mind to stay. I was now so weary with riding that I was forced to stop at Langueveny (Llangevni), 7 miles from the Ferry, and rest two hours. Then I went on very weary, but in a few miles more Watt’s horse lost his two fore-shoes. So the Horse was forced to limp after us. The Guide was less concerned than I. In a few miles more my Horse lost a fore-shoe and could not go on the rocky ways. I walked above two miles, to spare him. It was Sunday, and no Smith to be got. At last there was a Smith in the way: we left the Guide to shoe the horses and walked to a hedge Inn 3 miles from Holyhead. There I stayed an hour with no ale to be drunk. A boat offered, and I went by sea and sayled in it to Holyhead. The Guide came about the same time. I dined with an old Innkeeper, Mrs. Welch, about 3, on a Loyne of mutton very good, but the worst ale in the world, and no wine, for the day before I came here a vast number went to Ireland after having drunk out all the wine. There was stale beer, and I tryed a receipt of Oyster shells which I got powdered on purpose; but it was good for nothing. I walked on the rocks in the evening, and then went to bed and dreamt I had got 20 falls from my Horse.

“ *Monday, Sept. 25.* The Captain talks of sailing at 12. The talk goes off, the wind is fair, but he says it is too fierce. I believe he wants more Company. I had a raw Chicken for

dinner and Brandy with water for my drink. I walked morning and afternoon among the rocks. This evening Watt tells me that my land-lady whispered him that the Grafton packet-boat just come in had brought her 18 bottles of Irish Claret. I secured one, and supped on part of a neat's tongue which a friend at London had given Watt to put up for me, and drank a pint of the wine, which was bad enough. Not a soul is yet come to Holyhead, except a young fellow who smiles when he meets me and would fain be my companion, but it has not come to that yet. I writ abundance of verses this day; and several useful hints, tho' I say it. I went to bed at ten and dreamt abundance of nonsense.

Tuesday 26th.—I am forced to wear a shirt 3 days for fear of being lowsy. I was sparing of them all the way. It was a mercy there were 6 clean when I left London;—otherwise Watt (whose blunders would bear an history) would have got them all in the great Box of goods which went by the Carrier to Chester. He brought but one crevat, and the reason he gave was because the rest were foul and he thought he should not get foul linen into the Portmanteau. For he never dreamt it might be washed on the way. My shirts are all foul now, and by his reasoning I fear he will leave them at Holyhead when we go. I got a small Loyn of mutton but so tough I could not chew it, and drank my second pint of wine. I walked this morning a good way among the rocks, and to a hole in one of them from whence

at certain periods the water spurted up several feet high. It rained all night and hath rained since dinner. But now the sun shines and I will take my afternoon walk. It was fiercer and wilder weather than yesterday, yet the Captain now dreams of sailing. To say the truth Michaelmas is the worst season in the year. Is this strange stuff? Why, what would you have me do? I have writ verses and put down hints till I am weary. I see no creature. I cannot read by candle-light. Sleeping will make me sick. I reckon myself fixed here, and have a mind like Marshall Tallard to take a house and garden. I wish you a Merry Christmas and expect to see you by Candlemas. I have walked this morning about 3 miles on the rocks; my giddiness, God be thanked, is almost gone and my hearing continues. I am now retired to my chamber to scribble or sit humdrum. The night is fair and they pretend to have some hopes of going to-morrow.

September 26th.—Thoughts upon being confined at Holyhead. If this were to be my settlement during life I could content myself a while by forming new conveniences to be easy, and should not be frightened either by the solitude or the meanness of lodging, eating or drinking. I shall say nothing about the suspense I am in about my dearest friend because that is a case extraordinary, and therefore by way of comfort. I will speak as if it were not in my thoughts, and only as a passenger who is in a scurvy, unprovided comfortless place without one companion, and who

therefore wants to be at home where he hath all conveniences proper for a gentleman of quality. I cannot read at night, and I have no books to read in the day. I have no subject at present in my head to write upon. I dare not send my linen to be washed for fear of being called away at half an hour's warning, and then I must leave them behind, which is a serious Point. I live at great expense without one comfortable bit or sup. I am afraid of joyning with passengers for fear of getting acquaintance with Irish. The days are short and I have five hours a night to spend by myself before I go to Bed. I should be glad to converse with Farmers or shopkeepers, but none of them speak English. A Dog is better company than the Vicar, for I remember him of old. What can I do but write everything that comes into my head? Watt is a booby of that species which I dare not suffer to be familiar with me, for he would ramp on my shoulders in half an hour. But the worst part is in my half-hourly longing, and hopes and vain expectations of a wind, so that I live in suspense which is the worst circumstance of human nature. I am a little wrung from two scurvy disorders, and if I should relapse there is not a Welsh house-cur that would not have more care taken of him than I, and whose loss would not be more lamented. I confine myself to my narrow chamber in all unwalkable hours. The Master of the paequet-boat, one Jones, hath not treated me with the least civility, although Watt gave him my name. In short I come from being

used like an Emperor to be used worse than a Dog at Holyhead. Yet my hat is worn to pieces by answering the civilities of the poor inhabitants as they pass by. The women might be safe enough who all wear hats yet never pull them off, and if the dirty streets did not foul their petticoats by courtesying so low. Look you; be not impatient, for I only wait till my watch makes 10 and then I will give you ease and myself sleep, if I can. O' my conscience you may know a Welsh dog as well as a Welsh man or woman, by its peevish passionate way of barking. This paper shall serve to answer all your questions about my journey, and I will have it printed to satisfy the kingdom. *Eorson et hacc olim* is a damned lye, for I shall always fret at the remembrance of this imprisonment. Pray pity your Watt for he is called dunce, puppy and lyar 500 times an hour, and yet he means not ill for he means nothing. Oh for a dozen bottles of Deanery wine and a slice of bread and butter! The wine you sent us yesterday is a little upon the sour. I wish you had chosen a better. I am going to bed at ten o'clock because I am weary of being up.

“*Wednesday.*—To-day we were certainly to sayl: the morning was calm. Watt and I walked up the mountain Marucia, properly called Holyhead or Sacrum Promontorium by Ptolemy, 2 miles from this town. I took breath 59 times. I looked from the top to see the Wicklow hills, but the day was too hazy, which I felt to my sorrow; for returning we were overtaken by a furious

shower. I got into a Welsh cabin almost as bad as an Irish one. There were only an old Welsh woman sifting flour who understood no English, and a boy who fell a roaring for fear of me. Watt (otherwise called unfortunate Jack) ran home for my coat, but stayed so long that I came home in worse rain without him, and he was so lucky to miss me, but took good care to convey the key of my room where a fire was ready for me. So I cooled my heels in the Parlour till he came, but called for a glass of Brandy. I have been cooking myself dry, and am now in my night gown. . . . And so I wait for dinner. I shall dine like a King all alone, as I have done these six days. As it happened, if I had gone straight from Chester to Park-gate 8 miles I should have been in Dublin on Sunday last. Now Michaelmas approaches, the worst time in the year for the sea, and this rain has made these parts unwalkable, so I must either write or doze. Bite, when we were in the wild cabin I order Watt to take a cloth and wipe my wet gown and cassock: it happened to be a meal-bag, and as my gown dried it was all daubed with flour well cemented with the rain. What do I but see the gown and cassock well dried in my room, and while Watt was at dinner I was an hour rubbing the meal out of them, and did it exactly. He is just come up, and I have gravely bid him take them down to rub them, and I wait whether he will find out what I have been doing. The Rogue is come up in six minutes, and says there were but few specks

(tho' he saw a thousand at first), but neither wondered at it, nor seemed to suspect me who laboured like a horse to rub them out. The 3 packet boats are now all on their side, and the weather grown worse, and so much rain that there is an end of my walking. I wish you would send me word how I shall dispose of my time. I am as insignificant a person here as parson Brooke is in Dublin; by my conscience I believe Cæsar would be the same without his army at his back. Well, the longer I stay here the more you will murmur for want of packets. Whoever would wish to live long should live here, for a day is longer than a week, and if the weather be foul, as long as a fortnight. Yet here I could live with two or three friends in a warm house and good wine; much better than being a slave in Ireland. But my misery is that I am in the very worst part of Wales under the very worst circumstances, afraid of a relapse, in utmost solitude, impatient for the condition of our friend, not a soul to converse with, hindered from exercise by rain, caged up in a room not half so large as one of the Deanery closets; my Room smokes into the bargain, but the weather is too cold and moist to be without a fire. There is or should be a proverb here: When Mrs. Welch's chimney smokes, 'Tis a sign she'll keep her folks, But when of smoke the room is clear, It is a sign we shan't stay here. All this to divert thinking. Tell me, am not I a comfortable wag? The Yatcht is to leave for Lord Carteret on the 14th

of October. I fancy he and I shall come over together. I have opened my door to let in the wind that it may drive out the smoke. I asked the wind why he is so cross; he assures me 'tis not his fault, but his cursed Master, Eolus's. Here is a young Jackanapes in the Inn waiting for a wind who would fain be my companion, and if I stay here much longer I am afraid all my pride and grandeur will truckle to comply with him, especially if I finish these leaves that remain; but I will write close and do as the Devil did at mass, pull the paper with my teeth to make it it hold out.

“*Thursday.*—’Tis allowed that we learn patience by suffering. I have not spirit enough now left me to fret. I was so cunning these three last days that whenever I began to rage and storm at the weather I took special care to turn my face towards Ireland, in hope by my breath to push the wind forward. But now I give up. . . . Well, it is now three in the afternoon. I have dined and revisited the master; the wind and tide serve, and I am just taking boat to go to the ship. So adieu till I see you at the Deanery.

“*Friday, Michaelmas Day.*—You will now know something of what it is to be at sea. We had not been half an hour in the ship till a fierce wind rose directly against us; we tryed a good while, but the storm still continued; so we turned back, and it was 8 at night dark and rainy before the ship got back, and at anchor. The other passengers went back in a boat to Holyhead; but to prevent

accidents and broken shins I lay all night on board, and came back this morning at 8. Am now in my chamber, where I must stay and get a fresh stock of patience."

So ends this curious diary. This is the last time that Swift is known to have visited England, and it has always been assumed, from the lack of evidence of his again touching these shores, that he never did return. But he was mentally active until 1736, and it was not until 1745 that he died,

*There are three
Crosses at your door
Hang up your Wife
and you'll count Four
Swift ©
1730*

EPIGRAM SCRATCHED WITH A DIAMOND-RING ON A WINDOW-PANE BY DEAN SWIFT.

in madness and old age. Meanwhile, there still exists indisputable evidence of his travelling along the Holyhead Road in 1730; for an old diamond-shaped pane of glass, formerly in a window of the "Four Crosses" Inn at Willoughby, and deeply tinged with a greenish hue, as much old glass commonly is, may be found in private possession at Rugby, inscribed by him with a diamond ring. The handwriting compares exactly with that of his diary and other manuscripts still extant, and the ferocity of the humour in the lines is characteristic of him. Other windows, at Chester and elsewhere, are known to have been inscribed by him with epigrams and satirical verses, but they do not appear to have survived. The occasion of

of his travelling along the Holyhead Road in 1730; for an old diamond-shaped pane of glass, formerly in a window of the

his offering this advice to the landlord of what was then the "Three Crosses" has always been said to have been the landlady's disregard of his importance. Anxious to set off early in the morning, he could by no means hurry the good woman over the preparation of his breakfast. She told him: "he must wait, like other people." He waited, of necessity, but employed the time in this manner.

John Wesley was of this varied company of horsemen, and in a long series of years rode into every nook and corner of England. His "Journal," abounding with details of his adventures on these occasions, proves him to have been a hard rider and among the most robust and enduring of travellers in that age. He rode incredible distances in the day, very frequently from sixty to seventy miles. Once, in 1738, he travelled in this way from London to Shipston-on Stour, a distance of $82\frac{3}{4}$ miles, and ended the long day, as usual with him, in religious counsel. "About eight," he says, "it being rainy and very dark, we lost our way, but before nine came into Shipston, having rode over, I know not how, a narrow footbridge which lay across a deep ditch near the town. After supper I read prayers to the people of the inn, and explained the Second Lesson; I hope not in vain." The next day this indefatigable traveller and missionary rode 59 miles, to Birmingham, Hednesford, and Stafford; and the next a further 53 miles, to Manchester, feeling faint (and no wonder!) on the way, at Altrincham. In November 1745, riding from Newcastle-on-

Tyne to Wednesbury, he did not experience many difficulties until he came, in the dark, to Wednesbury Town-end, where he and his companion stuck fast. That is indeed a bad road in which a horse sticks. However, people coming with candles, Wesley himself got out of the quagmire and went off to preach, while the horses were disengaged from their awkward position by local experts. The spot where Wesley was bogged is now a broad and firm macadamised road through Wednesbury, part of the great Holyhead Road. Eighteen years before this happening, an Act of Parliament had been passed for repairing and turnpiking the road between Wednesbury and Birmingham; but, although the turnpike gates may have been in existence, the road itself certainly does not seem to have been repaired, and must have remained in the condition described in the preamble to that Act, when it was "so ruinous and bad that in the winter season many parts thereof are impassable for waggons and carriages, and very dangerous for travellers." At the same time, the road on the other side of Wednesbury was "in a ruinous condition, and in some places very narrow and incommodious"; so it is evident that Wednesbury was in the unenviable but by no means unique position of being islanded amid execrable and scarcely practicable roads.

In his old age Wesley occasionally made use of coaches and chaises, which were then a great deal better and more numerous than they had

been forty years earlier, when he commenced his labours; but he did not give up the saddle until very near the last. In 1779, being then in his seventy-seventh year, he was still so active that on one day he rode from Worcester to Brecon, sixty miles, and preached on his arrival there. In 1782, when eighty, he still travelled, according to his own computation, four or five thousand miles a year, rose early, preached, and possessed the faculty of sleeping, night or day, whenever he desired to do so. When he began to travel he rose at the most astonishing hours—hours unknown even to the early-rising, hard-riding, hard-living travellers of that time. Let us look at his record for February 1746, along the Great North Road:—

“16th *February*.—I rose soon after three. I was wondering the day before at the mildness of the weather, such as seldom attends me in my journeys; but my wonder now ceased. The wind was turned full north, and blew so exceeding hard and keen that when we came (from London) to Hatfield neither my companions nor I had much use of our hands or feet. After resting an hour, we bore up again through the wind and snow, which drove full in our faces; but this was only a squall. In Baldock field the storm began in earnest; the large hail drove so vehemently in our faces that we could not see, nor hardly breathe; however, before two o’clock we reached Baldock, where one met and conducted us safe to Potton. About six I preached to a serious congregation.

“17th.—We set out as soon as it was well light; but it was hard work to get forward, for the frost would not well break or bear; and, the untracked snow covering all the roads, we had much ado to keep our horses on their feet. Meantime the wind rose higher and higher, till it was ready to overturn both man and beast. However, after a short bait at Bugden, we pushed on, and were met in the middle of an open field with so violent a storm of rain and hail as we had not had before; it drove through our coats, great and small, boots, and everything, and yet froze as it fell, even upon our eyebrows, so that we had scarce either strength or motion left when we came into our inn at Stilton.

“We now gave up our hopes of reaching Grantham, the snow falling faster and faster. However, we took the advantage of a fair blast to set out, and made the best of our way to Stamford Heath; but here a new difficulty arose from the snow lying in large drifts. Sometimes horse and man were well nigh swallowed up, yet in less than an hour we were brought safe to Stamford. Being willing to get as far as we could, we made but a short stop here; and about sunset came, cold and weary, but well, to a little town called Brig Casterton.

“18th.—Our servant came up and said, ‘Sir, there is no travelling to-day; such a quantity of snow has fallen in the night that the roads are quite filled up.’ I told him, ‘At least we can walk twenty miles a day, with our horses in our

hands.' So in the name of God we set out. The north-east wind was piercing as a sword, and had driven the snow into such uneven heaps that the main road was not passable. However, we kept on on foot or on horseback, till we came to the White Lion at Grantham"—from whence Mr. Wesley continued his journey to Epworth, his birthplace, in Lincolnshire.

Wesley's economy of time and his methods when riding are indicated in an interesting way in his observations on horsemanship:—

“I went on slowly, through Staffordshire and Cheshire, to Manchester. In this journey, as well as in many others, I observed a mistake that almost universally prevails; and I desire all travellers to take good notice of it, which may save them both from trouble and danger. Near thirty years ago I was thinking, ‘How is it that no horse ever stumbles while I am reading?’ (History, poetry, and philosophy, I commonly read on horseback, having other employment at other times.) No account can possibly be given but this—because when I throw the reins on his neck, I set myself to observe: and I aver that in riding above a hundred thousand miles, I scarce ever remember any horse, except two, (that would fall head over heels any way,) to fall, or make a considerable stumble, while I rode with a slack rein. To fancy, therefore, that a tight rein prevents stumbling is a capital blunder. I have repeated the trial more frequently than most men in the kingdom can do. A slack rein will

prevent stumbling, if anything will, but in some horses nothing can."

Dr. Johnson's is a figure more often associated with coach and chaise travelling than with horsemanship, but in his younger days he could ride horseback with the best. He only lacked the money to afford it. His wedding-day—when he took the first opportunity of teaching his *Tetty* marital discipline—was passed in a journey from Derby. His wife rode one horse and he another. "Sir," he said, a few years later, "she had read the old romances, and had got into her head the fantastical notion that a woman of spirit should use her husband like a dog. So, sir, at first she told me that I rode too fast, and she could not keep up with me; and when I rode a little slower she passed me and complained that I lagged behind. I was not to be made the slave of caprice, and I resolved to begin as I meant to end. I therefore pushed on briskly, till I was fairly out of her sight. The road lay between two hedges, so I was sure she could not miss it; and I contrived that she should soon come up with me. When she did, I observed her to be in tears."

It has already been noted that judges and barristers formerly rode circuit on horseback. As Fielding says, "a grave serjeant-at-law condescended to amble to Westminster on an easy pad, with his clerk kicking his heels behind him." In such cases, and when a lady rode pillion behind her squire, clutching him by the

waistbelt, the "double horse" was used. This, which was by no means a zoological freak, was the type of horse asked for and supplied by postmasters to two riders going in this fashion on one animal. Like the brewers' double stout, the "double horse" was specially strong, and possessed more the physique of the cart-horse than the park hack. It was chiefly for the use of the ladies thus riding that the "upping blocks," or stone steps, still occasionally seen outside old rustic inns, were placed beside the road. They enabled them to get comfortably seated.

Travellers from Scotland to London about the middle of the eighteenth century were accustomed to advertise for a companion. Thus, in the *Edinburgh Courant* for January 1st, 1753, we find:—

"A GENTLEMAN fets off for LONDON Tomorrow Morning, and will either poft it on horfes or a Poft-Chaife, fo wants a Companion. He is to be found at the Shop of Mr. Sands, Bookfeller."

It was then generally found cheap, and sometimes profitable as well, to buy a horse when starting from Edinburgh, and to sell him on arrival in London. Prices being higher in the Metropolis, the canny travellers who adopted this plan often got more for the horse than they had given. This method had, however, the defect of not working in reverse, and so those Scots who returned would have had to hire at some considerable expense, or buy dear to sell cheap, a thing peculiarly abhorrent to the Scottish mind. Mr. Johnson would have characteristically brushed

this argument away by declaring that the Scot never did return.

During many long years Scots travelling in their own country followed an equally economical plan. "The Scotch gentry," said Thomas Kirke in 1679, "generally travel from one friend's house to another; so seldom require a change-house. Their way is to hire a horse and a man for two-pence a mile; they ride on the horse thirty or forty miles a day, and the man who is his guide foots it beside him, and carries his luggage to boot. The "change-house" was, of course, an inn; and from this custom, when every man's house was an hotel, the Scottish inns long remained very inferior places.

Fielding throws a very instructive light upon the device hit upon by any two travellers who wished to go together and yet had only one horse between them. This was called "Ride and Tie." He says: "The two travellers set out together, one on horseback, the other on foot. Now, as it generally happens that he on horseback outgoes him on foot, the custom is, that when he arrives at the distance agreed on, he is to dismount, tie the horse to some gate, tree, post, or other thing, and then proceed on foot; when the other comes up to the horse, he unties him, mounts, and gallops on, till, having passed by his fellow-traveller, he likewise arrives at the place of tying. And this is that method of travelling so much in use among our prudent ancestors, who knew that horses had mouths as well as legs, and that they

could not use the latter without being at the expense of suffering the beasts themselves to use the former."

Not until the first decade of the nineteenth century had gone by did the horseman wholly disappear from the road into or on to the coaches. Let us attempt to fix the date, and put it at 1820, when the fast coaches began to go at a pace equal or superior to that of the saddle-horse. The curious may even yet see the combined upping-blocks and milestones placed for the use of horsemen on the road across Dunsmore Heath.

In thus giving 1820 as the date of the horseman's final disappearance, it need not be supposed that Cobbett and his *Rural Rides* are forgotten. He covered England on horseback some years later, but his journeys are not on all fours with those of the horsemen whose only desire was quickly to get from start to finish of their journeys. He halted by the way, and from the vantage-point of the saddle cast a keenly scrutinising eye upon the agricultural methods of the various districts, as seen across the tops of hedges, or delayed his travels to harangue the farmers on market-days. Nor is the existence forgotten of those country gentlemen and City merchants who, seventy years ago, rode to and from the City on horseback; but they also formed an exception. Already, by some ten years or so, the commercial travellers, as a body, had left the saddle and taken to what was, in its first inception, essentially the vehicle of the commercial

representative. This was the "gig." The gig at once became a favourite middle-class conveyance. Thurtell, the flashy betting-man, vulgar *roué*, and murderer, was thought by a witness "a respectable man: he kept a gig." This aroused the scorn of Carlyle, who coined the word "gigmanity."

The early commercial travellers, in fact, were long known as "riders," from their custom of riding horseback from town to town, sometimes with a led pack-horse when their samples were unusually bulky or heavy. The "London riders" sometimes found mentioned in old literature were therefore London commercials. The successive names by which these "ambassadors of commerce," as they have sometimes been grandiloquently styled, were known are themselves highly illuminating. They were, in succession, "bagmen," "riders," "travellers," and "commercial gentlemen." They are now "representatives."

CHAPTER III

DAWN OF THE COACHING AGE

MEANWHILE the first stage-coaches had been put upon the chief roads out of London, and had begun to ply between the capital and the principal towns. Stage-coaches are, on insufficient authority, said to have begun about 1640, but no particulars are available in support of that statement, and in considering this point we are bound to look into the social state of England at that time, and to consider the likelihood or otherwise of a public service of coaches being continued throughout those stormy years which preceded, accompanied, and followed the great Civil War that opened with the raising of the King's standard at Nottingham in 1642, and ended with the Battle of Naseby in June 1645. That victory ended the war in favour of the Parliament men, but the political troubles and their attendant social displacements continued.

It has been said that hawking parties pursued their sport between the opposed armies on Marston Moor, and the inference has been drawn that the nation was not disturbed to its depths by what we are usually persuaded was a tremendous struggle between King and Parliament. Certainly the

Associated Counties of East Anglia were little affected by the contest, but theirs was an exceptional experience, brought about by that association, entered upon for mutual protection against either side, and to prevent the scene of warfare being pitched within those limits. It is not likely that any service of coaches ran in the disturbed period, when confidence was so rudely shaken; and it was not until the Commonwealth had been established some years that the first coaching advertisement of which we have any knowledge appeared.

In writing thus, it is not forgotten that somewhere about the year 1610 a foreigner from the wilds of Pomerania obtained a Royal patent granting him, for the term of fifteen years, the exclusive right of running coaches or waggons between Edinburgh and Leith. We have no details of this purely local service, but it is to be supposed that it was little more than a stage-waggon carrying goods and passengers too infirm to ride horseback between Edinburgh and its seaport. We are equally ignorant of the length of time the service lasted.

The next reference to stage-coaches is equally detached and inconclusive. It is found in a booklet issued by John Taylor, describing a journey he made to the Isle of Wight in 1648. He and his party set out on October 19th to see the captive Charles the First, their "gracious Sovereigne, afflicted Lord and Master," imprisoned at Carisbrooke Castle. They "hired the

Southampton Coach, which comes weekly to the Rose, near Holborn Bridge"—a statement that at least proves the existence of a public vehicle of sorts. But it is the first and last reference to the Southampton Coach that has come down these two hundred and fifty-odd years. If Taylor tells us nothing of its history, he at least gives a description of the journey that retains something of its original amusing qualities, and, with the lapse of time, becomes something of an historic document:—

We took our coach, two coachmen and four horses,
 And merrily from London made our courses.
 We wheel'd the top of th' heavy hill call'd Holborne
 (Up which hath been full many a sinful soule borne),
 And so along we jolted past St. Gileses,
 Which place from Brainford six (or neare) seven miles is.
 To Stanes that night at five o'clock we coasted,
 Where (at the Bush) we had bak'd, boyl'd, and rcasted.
 Bright Sol's illustrious Rayes the day adorning,
 We past Bagshot and Bawwaw Friday morning.
 That night we lodg'd at the White Hart at Alton,
 And had good meate—a table with a salt on.
 Next morn w'arose with blushing cheek'd Aurora ;
 The wayes were faire, but not so faire as Flora,
 For Flora was a goddessse, and a woman,
 And (like the highwayes) to all men was Common.
 Our Horses, with the Coach, which we went into,
 Did hurry us amaine, through thick and thine too ;
 With fiery speede, the foaming bit they champt on,
 And brought us to the Dolphin at Southampton.

Southampton, eighty miles from their starting-point, was therefore a three days' journey in the autumn of 1648. That they were careful not to

be on the road after dark is evident from the time they got to Staines, the first stopping-place. The sun sets at exactly 5 p.m. on October 19th.

The reference to a place called "Bawwaw," between Bagshot and Alton, is not to be explained by any scrutiny of maps.

Thenceforward until 1657 stage-coaches are not mentioned in the literature of the age, and we set foot upon firm ground only with the advertisement in the *Mercurius Politicus* of April 9th in that year:—

"FOR the convenient accomodation of Passengers from and betwixt the Cities of London and Westchester, there is provided several Stage-Coaches which go from the George Inn without Aldersgate upon every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to Coventry, in Two days for Twenty five shillings, to Stone in Three days for Thirty shillings, and to Chester in Four days for Thirty five shillings, and from thence to return upon the same days; which is performed with much safety to the Passengers, having fresh Horses once a day. In Mondays Intelligence last the severall fums and rates were by the Printer mislaken."

The objective of the first stage-coach ever established being Chester naturally provokes inquiry. There seems to have been no other stage upon any road in that pioneer year. The preference for Chester argues a large traffic already existing on that road: men riding post-horses, women riding pillion behind friends, relatives, or servants, or possibly in some stage-waggon whose history has not come down to us. The coach can

only have been established to satisfy a pre-existent demand. The question why there should have been more travellers on this route than any other is answered in this being the road to Ireland then generally followed, and Chester itself the port of embarkation for that country. Coventry and Stone were only served incidentally.

The following spring witnessed an amazing burst of coaching activity, for the *Mercurius Politicus* in April contained an advertisement announcing stage-coaches on the Exeter and Great North roads, to begin on the 26th of that month. They ran from the "George" Inn, Aldersgate Street Without:—

"On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to Salisbury in two days for xx^s, Blandford and Dorchester in two days and a half for xxx^s, Burput in three days for xxx^s, and Exmaster, Hunnington, and Exeter in four days for xl^s.

"Stamford in two days for xx^s, Newark in two days and a half for xxx^s, Doncaster and Ferribridge for xxxv^s, and York in four days for xl^s."

Every Monday and Wednesday others were to set forth for,

"Ockinton and Plimouth for l^s.

"Edinburgh, once a fortnight for £1 apeece.

"Darneton and Ferryhill for l^s, Durham for lv^s, and Newark for £III."

Every Friday,

"To Wakefield in four days for xl^s."

This advertisement then concluded by inviting passengers to another "George" Inn:—

“Let them repair to the George Inn on Holborn Bridge, and they shall be in good Coaches with good Horses at and for reasonable rates, to Salisbury, Blandford, Exmaster, Hunnington, Exeter, Oekinton, Plimouth, and Cornwall.”

The extraordinarily misspelt names of some of the places mentioned in these notices show how ill-known the country then was. For “Burput” we must read Bridport; for “Hunnington,” Honiton; and for “Exmaster,” Axminster; “Oekinton” is probably Okehampton.

At this time, and for very many years yet to come, the stage-coaches were strictly fair-weather services. With every recurrent spring they were brought out from their retirement, and so early as Michaelmas were taken off the roads and laid up for the winter. How the pioneer coach to Chester fared in its second season is hid from us, but the announcement of its third year, in 1659, is instructive:—

“These are to give notice, that from the George Inn, without Aldersgate, goes every Monday and Thursday a coach and four able horses, to carry passengers to Chester in five days, likewise to Coventry, Cosell (Coleshill), Cank, Litchfield, Stone, or to Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Newport, Whitchurch, and Holywell, at reasonable rates, by us, who have performed it two years.

“WILLIAM DUNSTAN.

“HENRY EARLE.

“WILLIAM FOWLER.”

It now took a day longer to reach Chester—assuming that the promise to perform the journey in four days ever was kept; and it will be observed that Birmingham, Shrewsbury, and other places, on a different route than that through Lichfield and Stone, are named in the manner of an alternative. The Chester stage of this year, in fact, varied its itinerary to suit its passengers. The “by us, who have performed it two years,” looks suspiciously like an opposition already threatened; while the “four able horses” insisted on (but not mentioned in the first announcement) reads like an improvement upon a former team that was not able. Those, of course, were times before horses were generally changed on the way, and the same long-suffering beasts that dragged the coaches from London often brought them to their destination. According to the first advertisement of this Chester stage, quoted above, this particular coach was an exception to the usual practice, and actually had fresh horses once a day.

A stage seems to have plied between London and Oxford in 1661, but new coaches for a time were few, and it is said that there were but six in 1662. In the following year a coach of sorts ran from Preston in Lancashire to London; and, as may be gathered from a letter from Edward Parker to his father, it was a very primitive contrivance:—

“I got to London on Saturday last; my journey was noe way pleasant, being forced to

ride in the boote all the waye. The company y^t came up with mee were persons of greate qualitie, as knightes and ladyes. My journey's expense was 30^s. This travell hath soe indisposed mee, y^t I am resolved never to ride up againe in y^e coatche. I am extremely hott and feverish. What this may tend to I know not. I have not as yet advised my doctor."

Our natural curiosity on that head cannot be satisfied, for the Parker correspondence ends abruptly there; but we fear the worst. Reading that testimony to the quality of early coach-travelling, we may find it not altogether without significance that from this year forward to 1667 little is heard of coaches. Perhaps those who gave the early ones a trial were glad to get back to their saddles and ride horseback again. However that may be, certainly coaching history, except by inference, is in those years a blank. We may infer services to other towns from oblique and scattered references, but direct information is lacking. That a stage-coach—or possibly more than one—was on the road between London and Norwich in 1665 is to be gathered from the proclamation issued in that East Anglian city on July 20th of that terrible year of the Great Plague, which destroyed half the population of London: "From this daie," ran that ordinance, "all ye passage coaches shall be prohibited to goe from ye city to London, and come from thence hither, and also ye common carts and wagons." Already, before that notice was issued, wayfarers

from that doomed city had been struck down by the deadly and mysterious disease, and at Norwich itself travellers hailing from the centre of infection had died, swiftly and in circumstances that struck terror into the hearts of the people. Not that plagues were things unknown; for Hobson, the Cambridge carrier, had died from the vexation and enforced idleness of the Cambridge edict of 1631, forbidding intercourse with London, even then ravaged with an infectious disorder.

What were the first stage-coaches like?

If we are to credit Taylor's description of the earliest coaches, some of them must have resembled the present Irish jaunting-car, or Bianconi's mid-nineteenth century coaches, in the manner of carrying passengers. He tells us, in his fanciful way, that a coach, "like a perpetual cheater, wears two bootes and no spurs, sometimes having two pairs of legs to one boote, and oftentimes (against nature) it makes faire ladies weare the boote; and if you note, they are carried back to back, like people surprised by pyrats, to be tyed in that miserable manner, and thrown overboard into the sea. Moreover, it makes people imitate sea-crabs, in being drawn sideways, as they are when they sit in the boot of the coach; and it is a dangerous kind of carriage for the commonwealth, if it be considered." This boot, or this pair of boots—which did not in the least resemble, in shape or position, the fore and hind boots of a later age—was a method of carrying the outsides in days before the improvement of

roads rendered it possible for any one to ride on the roof without incurring the danger of being flung off. No illustration of this type of coach has ever been found, but it seems possible that the back-to-back boots, to carry four, were built on to the hinder part of the coach, and really formed the first attempt to carry outsiders.

This type of coach described by Taylor must have been freakish and ephemeral. Those in general use were very different, resembling in their construction the private carriages and London hackney-coaches of the time, and varying from them only in being built to hold a number of people—usually six, but on occasion eight. In Sir Robert Howard's comedy, *The Committee*, printed in 1665, the Reading coach brings six passengers to London.

The body was covered with stout leather, nailed on to the frame with broad-headed nails, whose shining heads, gilt or silvered, picked out the general lines of the structure, and were considered to give a pleasing decorative effect. Windows and doors were at first unknown. In their stead were curtains and wooden shutters, so that the interior of an early coach on a wet or chilly day, when the curtains were drawn, must have been a close and dismal place. It was this feature that gave Taylor an opportunity of comparing a coach with a hypocrite: "It is a close hypocrite, for it hath a cover for knavery and curtains to vaile and shadow any wickedness." The first vehicle with glass windows was the

private carriage of the Duke of York, in 1661, and we do not begin to hear of glazed windows in stage-coaches until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when "glass coaches" were announced. It is, indeed, unlikely that glass could in any case have been introduced for the purpose of country travelling at an earlier date, for it would need to have been of extraordinary strength and thickness to survive the shocks and crashes of travel of this period.

All these vehicles were low hung, for the heavy body, slung by massive leather braces from the upright posts springing from the axletrees of front and hind wheels, was too responsive to any and every rut and irregularity of the road to be placed at the height to which the coaches of a century later attained.

In the excessive jolting then incidental to travelling, the body of a coach swayed laterally to such an extent that it would often swing, in the manner of a pendulum, quite clear of the underworks. Occupants of coaches were thus often afflicted with nausea, not unlike that of sea-sickness, and to be "coached" was at that time an expression which meant the getting used to a violent motion at first most emphatically resented by the human stomach.

Although the body of a coach enjoyed a wide range of motion sideways, it had not by any means the same freedom back and forth. A severe strain, in the continual plunging and jolting, was therefore thrown upon the supporting uprights, so that

they not infrequently gave way under the ordeal, and suddenly threw passengers and coachman in one common heap of ruin. To aid him in making such roadside repairs as these and other early defects of construction often rendered necessary, the coachman carried with him a box of tools placed under his seat, and it is from this circumstance that the name of "hammercloth"—the hangings decorating the coachman's seat on many a State carriage—was derived.

Bad as was the situation of the passengers, that of the coachman was infinitely worse. His was a seat of torture, for it was placed immediately over the front pair of wheels, and, totally unprovided with springs, transmitted to his body the full force of every shock with which those wheels descended into holes or encountered stones.

In 1667 a London and Oxford coach is found, performing the fifty-four miles in two days, halting for the intervening night at Beaconsfield; and in the same year the original Bath coach appears, in this portentous announcement:—

“ FLYING MACHINE.

“ All those desirous to pass from London to Bath, or any other Place on their Road, let them repair to the ‘ Bell Savage ’ on Ludgate Hill in London, and the ‘ White Lion ’ at Bath, at both which places they may be received in a Stage Coach every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday,

which performs the Whole Journey in Three Days (if God permit), and sets forth at five o'clock in the morning.

“Passengers to pay One Pound five Shillings each, who are allowed to carry fourteen Pounds Weight—for all above to pay three-halfpence per Pound.”

This is the first appearance of the epithet “Flying” in the literature of coaches. Possibly it was used in this first instance in order to distinguish the new conveyance from a stage-waggon that must for many years before have gone the journey, as well as to justify the higher fare charged by the new vehicle. The waggon would have conveyed passengers at anything from a halfpenny to a penny a mile; by “Flying Machine” it came to threepence. The term “Flying,” for a coach that consumed three days in performing a journey of 109 miles, raises a smile; but it was only relative, and in contrast with the pace of the waggons of that period, which would probably have made it a six-days’ trip.

This Bath coach would seem to have set the fashion in nomenclature, for in April 1669 a “Flying Coach” began to fly between Oxford and London. It was, it will be noticed, a “coach,” and not a “machine”; the term “machine” did not come into general use until about seventy years later. But although the

Oxford coach did not call itself by so high-sounding a title, it made a better pace than the Bath affair, doing the fifty-four miles in one day, between the hours of six o'clock in the morning and seven in the evening. Moreover, its fare—twelve shillings, reduced two years later to ten—was somewhat cheaper. Perhaps one was always charged higher rates on the fashionable Bath Road.

How, in this thirteen years' interval between 1657 and 1669, had the older stages progressed? The Chester stage was going its way, promising to do the distance in five days, but taking six—a sad falling off from the original four; of the others, presumably continuing, we hear nothing further, and of new ventures there is not a whisper. Yet it is surely not to be supposed that, at a time when coaches ran to Bath, to York, to Coventry, and to Norwich, such a place (for instance) as Bristol would be without that convenience. For Bristol was then what Glasgow is now—the second city. London came first, with its half a million inhabitants; Bristol came next, with some 28,000, and Norwich third, with 27,000. It is, then, only fair to assume that other coaches existed of whose story nothing has survived. A strong reason for coming to this conclusion is found in the publication in 1673 of Cresset's violent tirade against coaches, not, surely, called forth *apropos* of the already old-established stages, but provoked, doubtless, by some sudden increase, of which we, at this lapse

of time, know nothing. What brief John Cresset could have held for the inn-keepers and horse-breeders, and for the other trades supposed to be injuriously affected by the increase of stage-coaches, we know not, nor, indeed, anything of Cresset himself, except that he lived in the Charterhouse.

Between London, York, Chester, and Exeter he calculated that a total number of fifty-four persons travelled weekly, making a grand total for those roads of 1,872 such travellers in a year. A brief examination of his arithmetic shows—as we have already pointed out—that the coaches of that age lay up for the winter months.

His indictment of coaches is to be found in his *Grand Concern of England Explained*, and is very vigorous indeed, and—as we see it nowadays—extravagantly silly:—

“Will any man keep a horse for himself and another for his servant all the year round, for to ride one or two journeys, that at pleasure, when he hath occasion, can slip to any place where his business lies for two or three shillings, if within twenty miles of London, and so proportionately to any part of England? No, there is no man, unless some noble soul that seems to abhor being confined to so ignoble, base, and sordid a way of travelling as these coaches oblige him to, and who prefers a public good before his own ease and advantage, that will keep horses.”

According to this vehement counsel for the suppression of stage-coaches, they brought the

country gentlemen up to London on the slightest pretext—sometimes to get their hair cut—with their wives accompanying them; and when they were both come to town, they would “get fine clothes, go to plays and treats, and by these means get such a habit of idleness and love for pleasure that they are uneasy ever after.

“Travelling in these coaches can neither prove advantageous to men’s health or business, for what advantage is it to men’s health to be called out of their beds into their coaches an hour before day in the morning, to be hurried in them from place to place till one, two, or three hours within night, insomuch that sitting all day in the summer time stifled with heat and choked with dust, or in the winter time starving or freezing with cold, or choked with filthy fogs? They are often brought to their inns by torchlight, when it is too late to sit up to get a supper, and next morning they are forced into the coach so early that they can get no breakfast. What addition is this to men’s health or business, to ride all day with strangers oftentimes sick, or with diseased persons, or young children crying, to whose humours they are obliged to be subject, forced to bear with, and many times are poisoned with their nasty scents, and crippled by the crowd of their boxes and bundles? Is it for a man’s health to travel with tired jades, to be laid fast in the foul ways and forced to wade up to the knees in mire, afterwards to sit in the cold till teams of horses can be sent to pull the coach out?”

Cresset was also of opinion that the greater number of the many roadside inns would lose their trade owing to the rapidity of coach-travelling. Here, at least, he exceeded his brief, for coaches by no means attained so speedy a rate of travel as that reached by horsemen. Thoresby, ten years later, is a case in point. He was wont to travel horseback between Leeds and London in four days, but when he journeyed from York to London in the coach, no greater distance than from Leeds, it took six days. Swift, too, in 1710, rode from Chester to London in five days; when the degenerating Chester stage, which had started to perform it in 1657 in four days, had already taken one additional day, and was about to take another. Cresset, summing up such objectionable things as "rotten coaches" and traces, and coachmen "surly, dogged, and ill-natured," advocated the total suppression of such methods of travelling, or at least—counsels of moderation prevailing—of most of them. In conclusion, he proposed that coaches should be limited to one for every county town in England, to go backwards and forwards once a week.

Unhappily for Cresset's peace of mind, coaches did not decay. Nor did they wilt and wither before the onslaught of another writer, who, under the pen-name of "A Country Tradesman," published a pamphlet in 1678, called *The Ancient Trades Decayed, Repaired Again*. According to this writer, if coaches were suppressed, more wine and beer would be drunk at the inns, to the great

increase and advantage of the Excise; and the breed of horses would be improved, in consequence of the gentlemen who then rode in coaches being obliged to return to horse-riding.

In 1673, in an announcement of stages to York, Chester, and Exeter, the journey to Exeter is put at "eight days in summer, ten in winter." Here was at least one coach that had already begun to run throughout the year, but its summer performance justified the remarks of those ancients who, seeing the original "four-days" announcement of 1658, had shaken their heads and suspected it would never last.

The year 1678 saw a coach on the road between the important seaport of Hull and the city of York, probably in connection with the York stage between that and London; but our only knowledge of its existence at so early a date is—to put it in rather an Irish way—a reference to its having been taken off. Ralph Thoresby, the Yorkshire antiquary, is our authority. In his diary he notes that he landed at Hull in November of that year, and that the stage coach was already over for the winter. This Hull and York coach we may suppose to have been in connection with a York and London stage already existing—that original vehicle, started in 1658 and alluded to in 1673, which was to perform the journey in four days, the fare 40s. The first detailed account of the "York Old Coach," as it came to be known, is found in an old advertisement broadside discovered some years since at the back of an old drawer at the "Black

Swan," in York. It is dated 1706, and is evidently an announcement of the coach resuming its season after one of its annual hibernations:—

YORK Four Days Stage-Coach.

Begins on Friday the 12th. of April. 1706.

ALL that are desirous to pass from London to York, or from York to London, or any other Place on that Road; Let them Repair to the *Black Swan* in *Holbourn* in London, and to the *Black Swan* in *Coney street* in York

At both which Places, they may be received in a Stage Coach every *Monday, Wednesday and Friday*, which performs the whole Journey in *Four Days*, (if *God permits*.) And sets forth at *Five* in the Morning.

And returns from York to *Stamford* in two days, and from *Stamford* by *Huntington* to *London* in two days more. And the like Stages on their return.

Allowing each Passenger 14^s weight, and all above 3^d a Pound.

Performed By { *Benjamin Kingman,*
Henry Harrison,
Walter Baynes,

Also this gives Notice that *Newcastle Stage Coach*, sets out from *York*, every *Monday*, and *Friday*, and from *Newcastle* every *Monday*, and *Friday*.

OLD COACHING BILL, PRESERVED AT THE "BLACK SWAN,"
YORK.

It still took four days, as it had done when first established close upon half a century before. Clearly times and coaches alike moved slowly.

That York even then displayed its sub-metropolitan character will be seen from the footnote to the handbill, relating to the Newcastle coach. Local services apparently radiated from the city to Hull, Leeds, Wakefield, and other places.

Meanwhile, other provincial towns had not been idle, and we must needs make a slight divergence here to give an outline of what Glasgow was attempting in local intercommunication. Nothing thus early was on the road between Glasgow and London, but strenuous efforts were made to link Glasgow and Edinburgh (forty-four miles apart) together by a public service so early as 1678, when Provost Campbell and the magistrates of Glasgow agreed with William Hoorn, of Edinburgh, for a coach to go on that road once a week: "a sufficient strong coach, drawn by sax able horses, whilk coach sall contine sax persons and sall go ance ilk week, to leave Edinburgh ilk Monday morning, and to return again (God willing) ilk Saturday night." To travel those forty-four miles was, therefore, the occupation of three days. Even thus early we see the beginnings of that spirit of municipal enterprise which has in modern times carried Glasgow so far. Now the local tramway, water, gas, and electric lighting authority, she, so early as the seventeenth century, essayed a public service of coaches.

Like much else in early coaching history, this is merely a fragment; but again, in 1743, Glasgow is found returning to the question, in an attempt of the Town Council to set up a stage-coach or

“lando,” to go once a week in winter and twice in summer. The attempt failed, and it was not until 1749 that the first conveyance to ply regularly between Glasgow and Edinburgh was established. This was the “Caravan,” which made the passage in two days each way. It was succeeded in 1759 by the “Fly,” which brought the time down to a day and a half.

In 1697, according to an entry in the diary of Sir William Dugdale, under date of July 16th, a London and Birmingham coach, by way of Banbury, was then running; but such isolated references are quite obscured by the flood of light thrown upon coaching by the work of De Laune, *The Present State of London*, dated 1681. In his pages is to be found a complete list of all the stage-coaches, carriers, and waggons to and from London in that year. The carriers and waggons are very numerous, and there are in all 119 coaches, of which number between sixty and seventy are long-distance conveyances, the remainder serving places up to twenty or twenty-five miles from London. In that list we find that, although a marvellous expansion of coaching had taken place, some of the places already catered for in 1658 are abandoned. The Edinburgh stage does not appear, and nothing is to be found on that road farther north than York. The reason for the omission was, doubtless, that York, then relatively a more important place than now, had its own well-organised coaching businesses. Travellers from London for Edinburgh

would secure a place to York, and, arriving there, book again by a York and Edinburgh coach. The Edinburgh stage from London, once a fortnight, is, indeed, not heard of again until 1731.

Many of the coaches mentioned by De Laune went twice and thrice a week, and a large proportion of those to places not beyond twenty or twenty-five miles from London made double journeys in the day. Thus Windsor had no fewer than seven coaches, six of them in and out daily. The age, it will be conceded, was not without enterprise. But the omissions are striking; Okehampton, Plymouth, and Cornwall, included in the purview of the pioneers of 1658, are not mentioned. Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Leicester, Hereford and others were outside their activities. No one, it seemed, wanted to go to Glasgow; Manchester men were content to ride horseback; Leeds, now numbering some 430,000 inhabitants, and increasing by 2,000 a year, was a town of only 7,000, and the clothiers rode to York and caught the London coach there. To Bath and Bristol, however, there were five coaches; to Exeter, four; to Guildford, three; to Cambridge, Braintree, Canterbury, Chelmsford, Gloucester, Lincoln and Stamford, Norwich, Oxford, Portsmouth, Reading, Saffron Walden, and Ware, two each.

Despite the four coaches between Exeter and London mentioned by De Laune in 1681, the Mayor of Lyme Regis, having in October 1684 urgent official business in London, is found, in

company with one servant, hiring post-horses from Lyme to Salisbury. It is quite clear that if there had been a coach serving at the time, he would have caught it at Charmouth, a mile and a half from that little seaport; but there was, for some unexplained reason, a break in the service, and it was not until Salisbury was reached, sixty miles along the road, that he found a stage. The coach fare from Salisbury to London for self and servant was 30s., and he spent, "at several stages, to gratify coachmen," 4s. 6d.

With the existence of such a volume of trade as that disclosed by De Laune, it is not surprising to find that the scolding voices of opponents to coaching had by this time died down to a mere echo. Instead of reviling coaches, the writers of the age extolled their use and convenience. Thus Chamberlayne, in the 1684 edition of his *Present State of Great Britain*, the *Whitaker's Almanack* of that period, says: "There is of late such an admirable commodiousness for both men and women to travel from London to the principal towns in the country, that the like hath not been known in the world; and that is by stage-coaches, wherein any one may be transported to any place, sheltered from foul weather and foul ways, free from endamaging of one's health and one's body by hard jogging or over-violent motion, and this not only at the low price of about a shilling for every five miles, but with such velocity and speed in one hour as that the post in some foreign countries cannot make but in one day." Those

foreign countries have our respectful sympathy, for Chamberlayne in thus extolling our superiority was singing the praises of four miles an hour!

From the limbo of half-forgotten things we drag occasional references to coaches towards the close of the seventeenth century. In April 1694 a London and Warwick stage was announced to go every Monday, to make the journey in two days, "performed (if God permit) by Nicholas Rothwell"; and in 1696 the "Confatharrat" coach was already spoken of as a familiar object on the London and Norwich road. All we know of the "Confatharrat" is that it came to the "Four Swans," in Bishopsgate Street Within. Its curious name is probably the seventeenth-century spelling of the word "confederate," and the coach itself was, no doubt, run by an association, or "confederacy," of owners and innkeepers, in succession to some unlucky person who singly had attempted it and failed.

On some roads enterprise slackened. Thus, in 1700, the "Fly" coach to Exeter slept the *fifth* night from London at Axminster, where the next morning a woman "shaved the coach," and on the afternoon of the sixth day it crawled into Exeter. Forty-three years earlier it had taken only four days.

Nicholas Rothwell, of the London and Warwick stage in 1694, reappears in an extremely interesting broadsheet advertisement of 1731, announcing that the "Birmingham stage-coach in two days and a half begins, May the 24th."



BIRMINGHAM STAGE-COACH,

In Two Days and a half; begins May the
24th, 1731.

SET out from the *Swan-Inn* in *Birmingham*,
every *Monday* at six a Clock in the Morning,
through *Warwick*, *Banbury* and *Alesbury*,
to the *Red Lion Inn* in *Aldersgate Street*, *London*,
every *Wednesday* Morning: And returns from
the said *Red Lion Inn* every *Thursday* Morning
at five a Clock the same Way to the *Swan-Inn*
in *Birmingham* every *Saturday*, at 21 Shillings
each Passenger, and 18 Shillings from *Warwick*,
who has liberty to carry 14 Pounds in Weight,
and all above to pay One Penny a Pound.

Perform'd (if God permit)

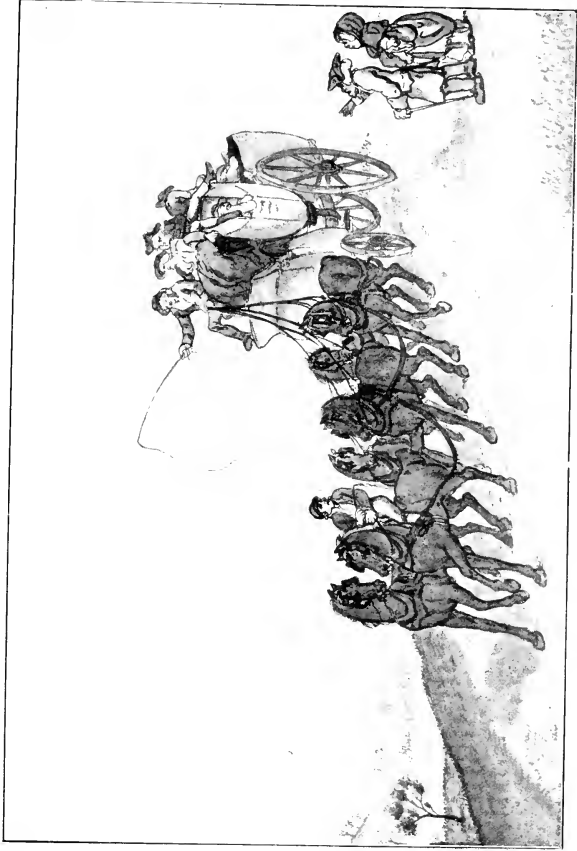
By Nicholas Rothwell.

The Weekly Waggon sets out every *Tuesday* from the *Nagg's-Head* in
Birmingham, to the *Red Lion Inn* aforesaid, every *Saturday*, and returns
from the said *Inn* every *Monday*, to the *Nagg's-Head* in *Birmingham* every
Thursday.

Note. By the said *Nicholas Rothwell* at *Warwick*, all Persons may be furni-
shed with a "By Coach" Chariot, Chaise or Hearse, with a Mourning Coach
and six Horses, to any Part of Great Britain, at reasonable Rates: And
also Saddle Horses to be had.

OLD BIRMINGHAM COACHING BILL.

Although we have no earlier information of this coach, it is probably safe to assume that this, like the advertisement of the York coach already quoted, merely advertised the beginning of a new season, and that winter was still largely, as it had been seventy-six years before, a blank in the coaching world. Rothwell was evidently established at Warwick, and seems to have been the first notable coach-proprietor, the forerunner of the Chaplins, Nelsons, Mountains, Shermans and Ibbersons of a later age. By his old advertisement we see that he catered for all classes of travellers—by stage-coach, private carriage, chaise, and waggon—and that he hired out horses to the gentlemen who still preferred their own company and the saddle to the coach and its miscellaneous strangers. Even the dead were not beyond the consideration of Mr. Rothwell, whose “Hearse, with Mourning Coach and Able Horses,” is set forth to “go to any part of Great Britain, at reasonable Rates.” Unhappily for the historian eager to reconstruct the road life of those times, this old advertisement is almost all that survives to tell us of Rothwell, and fortunate we are to have even that, for such sheets, as commonplace when issued as the advertisements of railway excursions are at the present time, are now of extreme rarity. It would appear, from the rude woodcut illustrating Rothwell’s bill, that his coach was of the old type, hung on leather straps and quite innocent of springs—the kind of coach that Parson Adams, in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*,



THE STAGE-COACH, 1783.

After Rowlandson.

outwalked without the slightest difficulty. It seems to be more up-to-date in the matter of windows, and to be a "glass-coach," if we may judge by the appearance of the window at which the solitary and unhappy-looking passenger is standing in an attitude suggestive of stomachic disturbance. There are no windows in the upper quarters of the coach, which in that and some other respects greatly resembles the vehicle pictured in 1747 by Hogarth in his *Inn Yard*.

Rothwell's coach is drawn by four horses in hand, with a postilion on the off horse of a couple of extra leaders. The practice of using six horses and a postilion is one to which we find allusion in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, written nine years later than the date of this Birmingham coach. The curious will find the description in the twelfth chapter of that novel, where Joseph, recovering from the murderous attack of two highwaymen, attracts the attention of the postilion of a passing stage-coach. "The postilion, hearing a man's groans, stopped his horses, and told the coachman he was certain there was a dead man lying in the ditch, for he heard him groan." (That postilion surely was an Irishman.) "Go on, sirrah!" says the coachman: "we are confounded late, and have no time to look after dead men." A lady, who heard what the postilion said, and likewise heard the groan, called eagerly to the coachman to stop and see what was the matter. Upon which, he bid the postilion alight and look into the ditch. He did so, and returned, "That there was a man

sitting upright, as naked as ever he was born.' 'O J—sus!' cried the lady; 'a naked man! Dear coachman, drive on and leave him!' ”

Rowlandson shows that in 1783 six horses were still used, and that a postilion continued to ride one of the leaders. It was about this same period that the generally misquoted remark about the ease of driving a coach-and-six through an Act of Parliament grew proverbial. It had originated so early as 1689, when Sir Stephen Rice, Chief Baron of the Irish Exchequer and a bigoted Papist, declared for James the Second, and was often heard to say he would drive a coach and six horses through the Act of Settlement. Later generations, knowing nothing of six horses to a coach, and unused to seeing more than four, unconsciously adapted the saying to the practice of their own times.

CHAPTER IV

GROWTH OF COACHING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

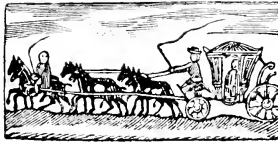
ALL this while the stages had gone their journeys with the same horses from end to end, and travel was necessarily slow. To the superficial glance it would seem that neither the dictates of humanity towards animals nor even the faintest glimmering perception of the possibilities of speed in constant relays had then dawned upon coach-proprietors; but it would be too gross an error to convict a whole class of stupidity so dense and brutal. It is not to be supposed that, at a time when ten-mile relays of saddle-horses for gentlemen riding post were common throughout the kingdom, the advantages of frequent changes and fresh animals were hidden from men whose daily business it was to do with coaches and horses. The real reasons for the bad old practice were many. They lay in the uncertainty of passengers, in the extreme difficulty of arranging for changes at known places of call, and, above all, in the impossibility of those coaches changing whose route between given starting-point and destination was altered to suit the convenience of travellers.

The first hint of quicker travel and of a better age for horses is obtained in this advertisement of the Newcastle "Flying Coach," May 9th, 1734:—

“ A coach will set out towards the end of next week for London, or any place on the road. To be performed in nine days, being three days sooner than any other coach that travels the road : for which purpose eight stout horses are stationed at proper distances.”

This, we may take it, was a rival of the old once-a-fortnight London and Edinburgh stage, travelling those 396 miles in fourteen days, and, as we infer from above, reaching Newcastle in twelve. At the same time John Dale came forward with a statement that a coach would take the road from Edinburgh for London, “ towards the end of each week,” also in nine days ; so that rivalries evidently existed on the great road to the north at that period. No conceivable change can satisfy everyone, and these accelerated services alarmed the innkeepers, who thought they saw their business of lodging and entertaining travellers thus doomed to decay. It was obvious that when the Edinburgh stage travelled an average of forty-four miles a day instead of a mere twenty-eight or twenty-nine, and lay on the road only eight nights instead of thirteen, innkeepers on that route must have lost much custom in the course of the year. Other innkeepers on other roads gloomily heard of these improvements, thought the times moved a great deal too rapidly, and talked of the good old days when travelling was safe and respectable, and an honest licensed victualler could earn a living. All these good folks were, no doubt, greatly relieved when this sudden burst of coaching enter-

prise died away, as it presently did, either because the proprietors had undertaken to perform more than they could do, or possibly for the reason that they had come to an agreement not to force the pace or cut the fares. Such rivalries and such subsequent agreements were in after years the merest commonplaces of coaching history, and if we seek them here we shall probably be by way of explaining the falling-off that left its traces twenty and thirty years later in the following announcement :—



THE EDINBURGH STAGE-COACH, for the better Accommodation of Passengers, will be altered to a new genteel Two-end Glass Machine, hung on Steel Springs, exceeding light and easy, to go in ten Days in Summer and twelve in Winter, to set out the first Tuesday in March, and continue it from Hosea Eastgate's, the Coach and Horses in Dean-street, Soho, LONDON, and from John Somervell's in the Canon-gate, Edinburgh, every other Tuesday, and meet at Burrow-bridge on Saturday Night, and set out from thence on Monday Morning, and get to London and Edinburgh on Friday. In the Winter set out from London and Edinburgh every other Monday Morning, and to get to Burrow-bridge on Saturday Night; and to set out from thence on Monday Morning, and get to London and Edinburgh on Saturday Night. Passengers to pay as usual. Perform'd, if God permits, by your dutiful Servant, HOSEA EASTGATE.

Care is taken of small Parcels, paying according to their Value.

It is noteworthy that the Sunday was still kept in this year of 1754 as a day of rest. The reference to fares, in the lack of antecedent information, leaves us in ignorance of what the passengers who paid "as usual" really did pay, but it seems that the coach itself was in that year something new and wonderful—a great improvement on what had gone before. The old conveyance, hung on leather straps and with unglazed windows, was discarded, and we have a "glass coach-machine," on steel springs, and with two ends, whatever they may have been. Also, the coach ran winter and summer. The rough woodcut accompanying this advertisement in the *Edinburgh Courant* for March 4th, 1754, and subsequent dates, shows us rather a coach built on the lines of the gentleman's private carriage of that age than a stage-coach. The boasted springs are duly indicated. The driver has four horses in hand, while a postilion, with a face like an agonised turnip, has a couple of leaders.

So much for 1754 on the Great North Road; but 1763 showed that retrogression was still the note of the time in that quarter, for the Edinburgh stage set out only once a month, and only when the weather was favourable did it get to its destination in less than a fortnight.

A feeble effort made about 1739 to expedite travelling on the Exeter Road seems also to have done little. The Exeter "Flying Stage" of that year, purporting to perform the journey in three days, generally took six. In 1752 it was

announced that the “ ‘Exeter Fast Coach,’ for the better conveyance of travellers, starts every Monday from the ‘Saracen’s Head,’ Skinner Street, Snow Hill.” This also, although it promised to get to Exeter in three days and a half, usually took six days in winter.

Its programme was thus set out :—

MONDAY.—Dines at Egham ; lies at Murrell’s Green.

TUESDAY.—Dines at Sutton ; lies at the “ Plume of Feathers,” in Salisbury.

WEDNESDAY.—Dines at Blandford ; lies at the “ King’s Arms,” in Dorchester.

THURSDAY.—At one o’clock, Exeter.

It carried six inside, but no outsides.

But let us be just to the coach-proprietors whose fate it was to work the Exeter Road at that time. In that very year a correspondent wrote to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* pointing out the dreadful character of that road. “ After the first forty-seven miles from London,” he said, “ you never set eye on a turnpike.” There were turnpikes, and, by consequence, well-kept roads, on the way to Bath, and he declared that every one who knew anything at all about road-travelling went to Exeter by way of Bath. As for the country along the Exeter Road, it was reputed to be picturesque, but the state of the road forbade any one making its acquaintance. “ Dorchester is to us a *terra incognita*, and the map-makers might, if they pleased, fill the vacuities of Devon and Cornwall

with forests, sands, elephants, savages, or what they please."

Meanwhile, manufacturing England was coming into existence, and the growing necessities of trade had brought about an increase of coaches in other directions. Thus Birmingham, whose first direct communication with London has already been shown in existence in 1679, and again in 1731, had set up a "Flying Coach" in 1742, followed in 1758 by an "Improved Birmingham Coach," with the legend "Friction Annihilated" prominent on the axle-boxes. This the *Annual Register* declared to be "perhaps the most useful invention in mechanics this age has produced." Much virtue lingered in that "perhaps," for nothing more was heard of that wonderful device.

It was not until 1754 that Manchester and London were in direct communication. The desire of the provinces to get into touch with the metropolis has always been greater than that of London to commune with the country towns, and thus we see that it was an association of Manchester men who set up the "Flying Coach," just as the citizens of Oxford and the good folks of Shrewsbury's desire to travel to London established conveyances for that purpose, and just as that early railway, the London and Birmingham, was projected and financed at Birmingham, and should, strictly speaking, have been inversely named. But hear what the Manchester men of 1754 said:—

"However incredible it may appear, this coach will actually (barring accidents) arrive in London

in four days and a half after leaving Manchester." The distance, it may be remarked, was 182 miles.

The ancient rivalry of Manchester and Liverpool was roused by this, and four years later the Liverpool "Flying Machine" was established, to travel the $206\frac{1}{2}$ miles between Liverpool and London in three days. The fare, at £2 2s., thus represents about $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ a mile. This was followed by the Leeds "Flying Coach" of 1760, advertised to do the 196 miles in three days, by Barnsley, Wakefield, and Sheffield, but actually taking four.

Another great centre of coaching activity at this period was Shrewsbury. Those who know that grand old town, seated majestically on its encircling Severn, that girdles the ancient blood-red walls with a flow as yellow as that of the Tiber, will have observed an ancient metropolitan air, an atmosphere of olden self-sufficiency, subtly characterising the place. It is complete in itself: within the double ceinture of river and hoary defensive walls it comprises something typical of each separate estate of the realm. The monarch and the governing idea are represented within that compass by the Castle and by the Council House, and all around are still to be seen the town houses of the old nobility and county families, neighboured by prosperous shops and smaller residences. Shrewsbury, like York and Edinburgh, is in fact an ancient seat of government, delegated directly from the Crown, once as vitally viceregal as the

Viceroyalty of India is now and much more so than that of Ireland for long years past has been. Shrewsbury remained the capital of the Marches of Wales until 1689, and the history of the Council that thence ruled the border-lands is still singularly fresh. Nor did it lose its importance even with the abolition of that body; for, more than elsewhere, the town, until the railways came—suddenly breaking up the old order and centralising everything in London—was a centre of social life for wide surrounding districts. The titled and gentle families of Shropshire, Herefordshire and North Wales who had resorted to the old Court of the Marches continued to adorn Shrewsbury, which had its own fashionable season and its own self-contained interests. The whole social movement of those surrounding districts was centred here, and at a time when the great manufacturing future of England had not dawned, creating vastly populated cities and towns, Shrewsbury was not rivalled as a coaching centre even by Bath. A Shrewsbury coach was in existence in 1681, but the roads between the Salopian capital and London proved too bad, and it did not last long, nor was it succeeded by any other coach until the spring of 1753. Stage-waggons were on the road in the interval between 1737 and that date, but they did not fit the requirements of the gentlefolk, who, when they did not ride horseback or drive in their own chariots to London, posted across country to Ivetsey Bank, where they caught the Chester and London stage.

With 1753 the continuous coaching history of Shrewsbury begins, in the starting of the "Birmingham and Shrewsbury Long Coach," which journeyed to London in four days, by the efforts of six horses. The distance was 152 miles, the fare 18s. The "Long Coach" was a type of vehicle intermediate between the "Caravan" of 1750* and the "Machine," established in April 1764. It was a cheap method of conveyance, one remove above the common stage-waggon. It set out once a week, and seems to have been so immediately successful that a rival and somewhat higher-class vehicle was put on the road as soon as the coachmakers could build it. It was in the June of that same year that the rival—"Fowler's Shrewsbury Stage-coach" was the name of it—began to ply to and from London in three and a half days; fare, one guinea inside, outside half a guinea. Thus they continued to run for thirteen years, without the intrusion of a third competitor. We are not told how these outsides were carried. Probably they were obliged to cling to the sloping roof, on which the athletic and adventurous found a fearful joy with every roll and lurch, while those who were neither agile nor imbued with the spirit of adventure grew grey with apprehension. Indeed, it was probably the freak of some wild spirit—perhaps a sailor or a drunken soldier—in seating himself on the roof that first gave coach-proprietors the idea that roofs might be used to

* P. 119.

carry outsides as well as to shelter the august occupants of the interior. We may be allowed to imagine the arrival of the coach that first carried these freakish persons on that dangerous eminence, and to picture the joy of the proprietor, who thereupon determined that, as these pioneers for the fun of it had arrived safely, there must be a commercial value in places on the roof. The thing was done. Three outsides sat on the front part, with their feet on the back of the driving-box, while one had a place on the box-seat with the driver, and room was left for three more on the hind, and most inconvenient, part of the roof, where, like Noah's dove, they found no rest for the soles of their feet, and had the greatest difficulty in maintaining their position.

If the "outsides" on Fowler's Shrewsbury stage of 1753 were not carried on the roof, they must have been carried in "the basket"; but as stage-coaches provided with this species of accommodation were generally stated in their advertisements to have "a conveniency behind," and the advertisement of this makes no such claim, we are free to assume that the roof was their portion. The "basket" was, however, already a well-established affair. It was a great wicker-work structure, hung on the back of the coach between the hind wheels by stout leather straps, and rested on the axle-tree. Originally intended to convey the luggage, it was found capable of holding passengers, who suffered much in it in order to ride cheaply. In the racy, descriptive

language of the time, this "conveniency" was known much more aptly as the "rumble-tumble." In this "rumble-tumble," then, the second-class passengers sat, up to their knees in straw. The more straw the better the travelling, for although the body of the coach had by this time been eased with springs, the basket was not provided with any such luxury, and anything in the nature of padding would have been welcome. Already, in 1747, Hogarth had pictured an inn yard with a coach preparing to start, and had shown a basket fully occupied, and two outsides above.

The coaches were by now hung much higher, and the original driver's seat had given place to a lofty box, from which the coachman had a greater command over his horses.

The general appearance of stage-coaches at this time has been eloquently described by Sir Walter Scott. They were covered with dull black leather, thickly studded with broad-headed nails, tracing out the panels. The heavy window-frames were painted red, and the windows themselves provided with green stuff or leather curtains which could be drawn at will. On the panels of the body were displayed in large characters the names of the places whence the coach started and whither it went. The coachman and guard (when there was a guard at all) sat in front upon a high narrow boot, often garnished with a spreading hammer-cloth with a deep fringe. The roof rose in a high curve. The wheels were large, massive, ill formed, and generally painted red.

In shape the body varied. Sometimes it resembled a distiller's vat somewhat flattened, and hung equally balanced between the immense back and front springs; in other cases it took the form of a violoncello case, which was, past all comparison, the most fashionable form; again, it hung in a more genteel posture, inclining on the back springs, in that case giving those who sat within the appearance of a stiff Guy Fawkes. The foremost horse was still ridden by a postilion, a long-legged elf dressed in a long green and gold riding-coat and wearing a cocked hat; and the traces were so long that it was with no little difficulty the poor animals dragged their unwieldy burden along. It groaned, creaked, and lumbered at every fresh tug they gave it, as a ship, beating up through a heavy sea, strains all her timbers.

In 1774 the proprietors of the "Original London and Salop Machine, in the modern taste, on steel springs," announced that, among other improvements, their coach had "bows on the top." Some consideration of this portentous improvement inclines us to the belief that these "bows" must have been guard-irons on the roof for passengers to hold on by, and to prevent them being thrown off. A little further consideration will perhaps bring us to the conclusion that those "bows" would not even then have been placed there had not some serious accident already happened. Such protection was not uncommon, as may be gathered from an account of a coach journey written by Charles H. Moritz, a worthy German

pastor who visited England in 1782. His narrative shows that those who were obliged to ride cheaply had a choice of the basket and the roof, and that although the roof then had no seats, it was provided with little handles, to hold on by. But they were of little use, and when the coach rolled like a ship upon a stormy sea the chances of being flung overboard were still as many as ever. But he, like others, having tried both basket and roof, preferred the latter, and returned to it, groaning with the shocks received in the "rumble-tumble."

Rowlandson's picture of a stage-coach in 1780 shows the same preference. Only one passenger is seen in the wickerwork appendage, while the roof, innocent of safeguards or seats, is covered with sprawling passengers who are content to take their chance of an involuntary flight, so that they escape the certain inconveniences of the "conveniency."

"I observe," says Moritz, "that they have here a curious way of riding, not in, but upon, a stage-coach. Persons to whom it is not convenient to pay a full price, instead of the inside, sit on the top of the coach, without any seats or even a rail. By what means passengers thus fasten themselves securely on the roof of these vehicles I know not; but you constantly see numbers seated there, apparently at their ease and in perfect safety. This they call riding on the outside, for which they pay only half as much as those who are within.

“Being obliged to bestir myself to get back to London, as the time drew near when the Hamburg captain with whom I intended to return had fixed his departure, I determined to take a place as far as Northampton on the outside. But this ride from Leicester to Northampton I shall remember as long as I live.

“The coach drove from the yard through a part of the house. The inside passengers got in from the yard, but we on the outside were obliged to clamber up in the street, because we should have had no room for our heads to pass under the gateway. My companions on the top of the coach were a farmer, a young man very decently dressed, and a blackamoor. The getting up alone was at the risk of one’s life, and when I was up I was obliged to sit just at the corner of the coach, with nothing to hold on by but a sort of little handle fastened on the side. I sat nearest the wheel, and the moment that we set off I fancied I saw certain death before me. All I could do was to take still tighter hold of the handle, and to be strictly careful to preserve my balance. The machine rolled along with prodigious rapidity over the stones through the town of Leicester, and every moment we seemed to fly into the air, so much so that it appeared to me a complete miracle that we stuck to the coach at all. But we were completely on the wing as often as we passed through a village or went down a hill.

“This continual fear of death at last became insupportable to me, and therefore, no sooner were

we crawling up a rather steep hill, and consequently proceeding slower than usual, than I carefully crept from the top of the coach, and was lucky enough to get myself snugly ensconced in the basket behind. ‘O sir, you will be shaken to death!’ said the blackamoor; but I heeded him not, trusting that he was exaggerating the unpleasantness of my new situation. And, truly, as long as we went on slowly up the hill, it was easy and pleasant enough; and I was just on the point of falling asleep, having had no rest the night before, when on a sudden the coach proceeded at a rapid rate downhill. Then all the boxes, iron-nailed and copper-fastened, began, as it were, to dance around me; everything in the basket appeared to be alive, and every moment I received such violent blows that I thought my last hour had come. The blackamoor had been right, I now saw clearly; but repentance was useless, and I was obliged to suffer horrible torture for nearly an hour, which seemed to me an eternity. At last we came to another hill, when, quite shaken to pieces, bleeding, and sore, I ruefully crept back to the top of the coach to my former seat. ‘Ah, did I not tell you that you would be shaken to death?’ inquired the black man, when I was creeping along on my stomach. But I gave him no reply. Indeed, I was ashamed; and I now write this as a warning to all strangers who are inclined to ride in English stage-coaches and take an outside seat, or, worse still, horror of horrors, a seat in the basket.

“From Harborough to Northampton I had a most dreadful journey. It rained incessantly, and as before we had been covered with dust, so now we were soaked with rain. My neighbour, the young man who sat next me in the middle, every now and then fell asleep; and when in this state he perpetually bolted and rolled against me with the whole weight of his body, more than once nearly pushing me from my seat, to which I clung with the last strength of despair. My forces were nearly giving way, when at last, happily, we reached Northampton, on the evening of July 14th, 1782, an ever-memorable day to me.

“On the next morning I took an inside place for London. We started early. The journey from Northampton to the metropolis, however, I can scarcely call a ride, for it was a perpetual motion, or endless jolt from one place to another, in a close wooden box, over what appeared to be a heap of unhewn stones and trunks of trees scattered by a hurricane. To make my happiness complete, I had three travelling companions, all farmers, who slept so soundly that even the hearty knocks with which they hammered their heads against each other and against mine did not awake them. Their faces, bloated and discoloured by ale and brandy and the knocks aforesaid, looked, as they lay before me, like so many lumps of dead flesh. I looked, and certainly felt, like a crazy fool when we arrived at London in the afternoon.”

CHAPTER V

THE STAGE-WAGGONS AND WHAT THEY CARRIED : HOW THE POOR TRAVELLED

WE have now arrived at the time when the goods traffic became a prominent feature of the road.

The precursor of all public vehicles was the carrier's waggon, a conveyance of hoary antiquity, intended in the first instance for the carriage of heavy goods, but finding room for those wayfarers who were too poor to own or hire a horse, or possibly too infirm to sit one even if their means sufficed. At least a hundred and fifty years before the earliest stage-coach was put on the road, the waggon, the poor man's coach, was creaking and groaning on its tedious way at a pace of little more than two miles an hour. The stage-waggon, in fact, came into use about 1500, and the first glimpse and earliest notice of the carrier's and stage-waggon business introduces us to a very celebrated waggoner indeed, by far the most notable of all his kind—none other, in fact, than Thomas Hobson, the carrier between Cambridge and London, the grand original of the Chaplin & Hornes, the Pickfords, the Carter Patersons, and Suttons of succeeding generations. Hobson's London place of call was the "Bull," Bishopsgate

Street Within. When the business was founded is not on record, but it was old-established and prosperous when he succeeded to it on the death of his father in 1568. Under the terms of his father's will he inherited, among other things, the vehicle with which the carrying trade was conducted, the "cart and eight horses, and all the harness and other things thereunto belonging, with the nag." It is quite evident from this that one cart or waggon sufficed for all the commerce between London and Cambridge at that time. If he did not choose to take these things, he was to have £30 instead, the equivalent of their value, which—taking into consideration the fact that the purchasing power of money at that time would be about six times that of our own—was therefore £180. The "nag" specified in the will was, of course, the horse ridden by the waggoner by the side of the eight-horse waggon team. In old prints of stage-waggons we see that the waggoner did not usually drive his team from the waggon holding the reins, but rode a pony, and, wielding a whip of formidable length, urged on the much-suffering beasts through mud and ruts.

Hobson senior had been a man of wealth and consideration, and his son increased both. In his father's lifetime he had gone continually back and forth with the waggon, and so continued to go until his death, January 1st, 1631, in his eighty-sixth year. He was, as his father had been before him, not merely a carrier between Cambridge and London, but the only one, and specially licensed

by the University. He conveyed the letters, too, and had a very lucrative business of letting out saddle-horses. In those days, before coaches had come into existence, and when able-bodied men, despising the slow progress of the waggon, rode horseback, his stable of forty horses, "fit for travelling, with boots, bridle, and whip, to furnish the gentlemen at once, without going from college to college to borrow," was in great request. From his determination to allow no picking and choosing, and his refusing to allow any horse to be taken out of its proper turn, first arose that immortal proverb, "Hobson's Choice, that or none"—in other words, no choice whatever. University witlings made great play with Hobson, and when at last he died, quite a sheaf of lyrical epitaphs on him appeared, from the well-known ones by Milton to the more obscure exercises of anonymous versifiers.*

The business of stage-waggoning obtained its first specific notice so late as 1617, when Fynes Morison, in his *Itinerary*, mentioned the "carryers, who have long covered waggons, in which they carry passengers from place to place; but this kind of journey is so tedious by reason they must take waggon very early and come very late to their innes, that none but women and people of inferior condition travel in this sort."

How early they were accustomed to start, and

* For a detailed notice of Hobson, with a portrait of him, see the *Cambridge, Ely, and King's Lynn Road*, pp. 10-12, 32, 140, 157-166.

how late would come to their inns, may be gathered from the great classic instance in Shakespeare, where the two carriers in the First Part of *King Henry the Fourth* are discovered in the innyard at Rochester preparing to set forth for London. It is two o'clock in the morning, and London but thirty miles away, yet it will not be earlier than "time to go to bed with a candle" before that gammon of bacon and those two razes of ginger are delivered at Charing Cross.

Shakespeare, of course, here wrote, not of the manners and customs of Henry the Fourth's time, but of what he had himself heard and seen, and what might so be seen and heard on any day, early in the morning, in the yard of any considerable hostelry in the kingdom. He has fixed for ever, in his deathless pages, the road life that existed when the sixteenth century was drawing to its close.

Contemporary with, but originating even earlier than, the stage-waggons were the pack-horses, which dated from a time when even the broad-wheeled wains would have sunk hopelessly in the mud of the best roads in the country. By pack-horse, at an earlier date than 1500, all goods, and even such heavy articles as building-stone, coals and timber, were carried, for the very eloquent reason that, before the passing of the first General Highway Act, in 1555, which was the first obligation upon the parishes to repair and maintain the roads, nothing had been done to keep them in repair for many centuries; and the parishes, with the best will in the world, could

not at once retrieve them from their desperate condition. Wheeled traffic had been unknown until the early stage-waggons appeared, and those few who travelled otherwise than afoot or on their own horses were content to mount the pack-saddle of a patient and long-suffering pack-horse, themselves only a degree less long-suffering and patient. Then the etymology of the words "travel" and "journey" was abundantly justified; for it was sorrow and hard labour to leave one's own fireside, and a day's journey was—what the word "journey" implies—the passing from place to place within the hours of daylight. No one dared travel the roads when night had fallen, and it was not until the eighteenth century had dawned that coaches began to run by night as well as day.

In far parts of the country and on the by-roads the pack-horse train lasted an incredible time. Wheeled conveyances of any kind were, generally speaking, impossible on any but the principal roads. The farmers and higglers who had occasion to transport heavier loads than it was possible for horses to carry, used a primitive kind of sledge, formed of tree-trunks, of which the light tapering ends formed the shafts and the heavy bodies of the trunks the runners. Thus the building materials were of old often carried or dragged, with much friction and waste of effort, to their destination. In Devon and Cornwall these truly savage makeshifts were called by the peculiarly descriptive name of "truckamucks."

When Smollett, the novelist, travelled from Glasgow to Edinburgh and on to London as a young man, in 1739, he rode pack-horse as far as Newcastle, for the simple reason that between Glasgow and the Tyne there was neither coach, cart, nor waggon on the road; and in Yorkshire, Cumberland, Devon and Cornwall, and the like extreme corners of the land, where remoteness from the world and the rugged nature of the country conspired to exclude wheels, the packman and his small but sturdy breed of laden horses alone kept the rural districts supplied with their barest requirements until the first years of the nineteenth century were come. The old packmen's and drovers' ways, narrow and winding to avoid the turnpike-gates that once took toll of all but the foot-passenger, may still be traced on the Yorkshire wolds, along the shoulders of the Westmorland and Cumberland fells, and by the rivers and moors of Devon and Cornwall. Often they are not even lanes, but only precipitous and rocky tracks, eloquent of those old times that are commonly pictured so rosy, but were really very grey and dour. Here and there the sign of the "Pack Horse" still survives, and marks the old houses of entertainment once frequented by the packmen of that vanished past. The "Pack Horse" at Chippenham and those two old houses at Turnham Green, the "Old Pack Horse" and the "Pack Horse and Talbot" were halting-places of the packmen who travelled the Bath Road. The last-named house is now little more than an ordinary

London "public," but it still displays a picture-sign, copied from an old original, showing a packhorse with a talbot by his side; the "talbot" being the old English hound, something between a foxhound and a bloodhound, a fierce creature who guarded his master's property from the thieves and dangers of all kinds that then befell so constantly along the roads, or even at the often ill-famed inns by the wayside.

An attempt to supplant the pack-horses between London and Shrewsbury was made in 1737, by the establishment of the "Gee-ho." Facts relating to this conveyance are of especial interest, because we are told the circumstances that led to it being put on the road. It seems, then, that until that year Shrewsbury had known no other than a pack-horse service, which set out from and came to what was then the "Pheasant," now the "Lion and Pheasant," Inn on Wyle Cop, in that town. A Mrs. Warner, a widow, was landlady, and apparently pack-horse proprietor as well. A shrewd fellow named Carter, a soldier who had been billeted at the inn, made love to the widow, married her, and managed the business. Let us hope they were both happy and successful. At any rate, Carter started the "Gee-ho" as the first conveyance to ply between Shrewsbury and London. It was a stage-waggon, drawn by eight horses, with two others in reserve to pull it out of those sloughs that might then be confidently expected on the way. It was advertised to go to or from London in seven, eight, or nine days

in either direction, according to the condition of the roads.

Smollett's description of how Roderick Random and Strap easily overtook the waggon journeying to London along the Great North Road naturally leads to an inquiry why, if being ill-provided with money and only lightly burdened with luggage, they, in common with others, preferred to pay for the doubtful privilege of going slower than they could easily walk. The reason, perhaps, lay partly in that lack of appreciation of scenery which characterised the period. Poets had not yet seen fit to rhapsodise upon the beauties of nature, and artists had not begun to paint them. Both were in thrills of the most exquisite rapture on the subject of shepherds and shepherdesses, but their Arcady was bounded by bricks and mortar. Strephon and Chloe wore silk and satin, red-heeled shoes and wigs, and patched and powdered amazingly. Theirs was a bandbox Arcady, a pretty bit of make-believe of the kind pictured by Watteau; and though they found much poetry in lambs, they knew nothing of the wintry horrors experienced by the genuine shepherds in the lambing season, and, indeed, nothing of nature outside the well-ordered parks and formal gardens of the great. All classes alike looked with horror upon natural scenery, regarded the peasantry as barbarians, and left the towns with reluctance and dismay.

With feelings of this kind animating the time, it is not surprising that even humble wayfarers, ill able to spare the money, should have sought the

shelter and the society that the interior of the stage-waggons afforded. Other reasons existed, little suspected by the present generation, whose great main roads, at any rate, are well defined and excellently well kept. No one, nowadays, once set upon the great roads to York and Edinburgh, to Exeter, to Portsmouth, Dover or Bath, need ask his way. It is only necessary to keep straight ahead. In those old days, however, when travellers could describe the visible road as being a narrow track three feet wide, *occasionally* rising out of the profound depths of mud and water on either side, no one who could afford to pay would walk, even assuming the very doubtful physical possibility of struggling through such sloughs afoot.

In 1739 two Glasgow merchants, going horseback from Glasgow by Edinburgh to London, found no turnpike road until they had gone three-quarters of their journey, and were come to Grantham. Up to that point they travelled on a narrow causeway, and met from time to time strings of pack-horses, thirty to forty in a gang, carrying goods. The leading horse of each gang carried a bell, to give warning to travellers coming from an opposite direction. The narrow causeway not affording room to pass, the horsemen were obliged to make room for the pack-horses and plunge into the mud, out of which they sometimes found it difficult to get back upon the road again. Those were the times when coachmen, often finding the old roads impassable, would make new routes for themselves across a country not merely strange

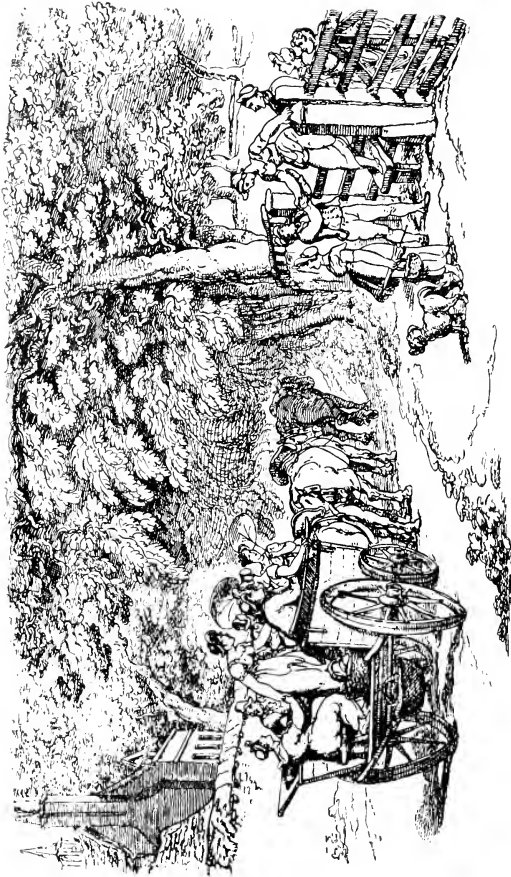
to turnpike roads, but still largely open and unenclosed. Travellers then dare not go alone, if only for a very well-founded fear of losing their way, just as Pepys, years before, often did when travelling in his carriage to Bath, to Oxford, Salisbury and elsewhere. He is found paying a guide 22*s.* 6*d.* to show him and his coachman the way between Newport Pagnell and Oxford; 3*s.* 6*d.* for another to guide him from Hungerford to Market Lavington, and, indeed, after he had experienced the awful seventeenth-century mischance of losing his way two or three times through having economised and neglected to provide this necessary aid, guides everywhere. Travellers then achieved what we moderns are apt to think wonderful things in thus losing themselves. Pepys actually missed his way on the Bath Road between Newbury and Reading, and Thoresby lost himself riding on the Great North Road between Doncaster and York in 1680; in his diary fervently thanking God that he found it again.

Although, by an early Act of William III.'s reign, the justices were ordered to erect guide-posts at the cross-roads, and road surveyors were to be fined 10*s.* if the provisions of the Act were not complied with, such posts (except perhaps on the road to Harwich, so often travelled by the Third William on his journeys to and from the Continent) were conspicuously lacking for many generations yet to come, and no one ever seems to have heard of country surveyors being fined for not performing the duty thus laid upon them. An

exception to this picture of an uncharted wilderness thus presented is found in the diary of Celia Fiennes, who in the last decade of the seventeenth century travelled through England on horseback, and especially remarked the Lancashire cross-roads between Wigan and Preston being furnished with "hands pointing to each road, with ye names of ye great towns on." The fact of her thinking the circumstance worth noting shows us how uncommon it was for roads to be signposted.

Only the waggoners who constantly used the roads could with certainty find their way; and so, and for fear of the highwaymen and the footpads and other hedgerow rascals to whom the smallest plunder was not despicable, the waggon was a welcome friend to the poor. Safety was thought to lie in numbers; although it is true that, in the moment of trial, even a waggonful of able-bodied travellers would commonly surrender their few valuables to the first demand of a single highwayman, whose pistol was probably unloaded, and, even if primed, generally refused to "go off" when fired. It is not unnatural to prefer to be robbed in company with a number of others, rather than to be the solitary victim. For these reasons, therefore, even the able-bodied and unencumbered often chose to tediously travel with the women, the infirm, and those whose luggage compelled. Smollett's humorous description of the stage-waggon and the follies and foibles of its very mixed passengers is the classic authority for this stratum of road life. The sham captain, really a

quondam valet, braggart before the timorous, but shaking with the fear of death upon him when the pretended highwayman appears; his wife, aping a gentility as mean as it is transparently false; the money-loving and peace-loving but satirical Jew; the lively Miss Jenny, and the waggoner, are all types, slightly caricatured, but true to the life of the period. Putting aside the question as to whether such people could be conjured out of his inner consciousness without some basis of fact, we must consider that Smollett, writing of his own time, would not for his own sake be likely to draw a picture which would seem a forced or unnatural representation of the wayfaring life of the period. Thus, when he makes his characters journey for five days in this manner, and brings them on the sixth to an inn where the landlord gives the meal they had bespoken to three gentlemen who had just arrived, we think we learn something of the contempt with which almost every one looked down upon passengers by stage-waggons. The gentlemen themselves said: "The passengers in the waggon might be d——d; their betters must be served before them; they supposed it would be no hardship on such travellers to dine on bread-and-cheese for one day." And the poor devils certainly would have gone without their meal had it not been for that good fellow Joey, the waggoner, who, entering the kitchen of the inn with a pitchfork in his hand, swore he would be the death of any man who should pretend to seize the victuals prepared for the waggon. "On this," says Smollett, "the



After Kowlandson.

THE WAGGON, 1816.

three strangers drew their swords, and, being joined by their servants, bloodshed seemed imminent, when the landlord, interposing, offered to part with his own dinner, for the sake of peace," which proposal was accepted, and all ended happily.

Such was the picture of travel by stage-waggon it was possible to present to the public in 1748 as a reasonably accurate transcript of road-life.

It was at that time the usual practice among a party of travellers by waggon to elect a chairman on setting out. The one thus set above his fellows arranged with the waggoner where they were to halt during the day, settled with the inn-keepers an inclusive charge for meals and accommodation, and was treasurer, paymaster, umpire, and general referee in all disputes. Thus was the ancient original idea of government in larger communities—government solely for the welfare of the community itself—reproduced in these poor folk.

The gradual replacement of the pack-horses by heavy waggons began on the most frequented roads about the third decade of the eighteenth century. Twelve Turnpike Acts for the improvement of local roads had been passed in the ten years between 1700 and 1710. They increased by seventy-one in the next ten years, and no fewer than two hundred and forty-five came into existence between 1730 and 1760, followed from 1760 to 1770 by a hundred and seventy-five more. The great number of five hundred and thirty Acts in seventy-five years shows both the crying needs

of the age and the energy with which the problem of road-improvement was grasped by Parliament. If the resulting betterment of the roads was not so great as it should have been, that was due rather to the unbusinesslike methods by which the turnpike trustees despatched their business, and not to the Government.

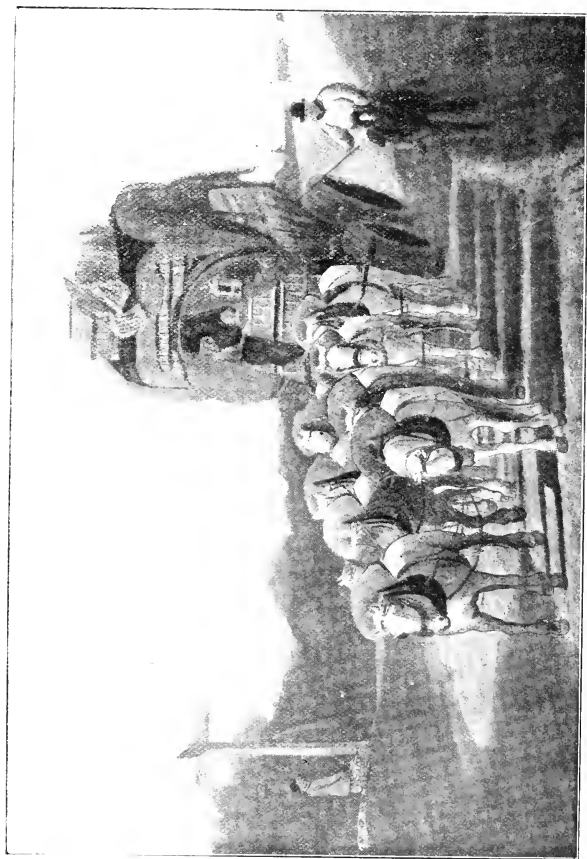
Aikin, writing of Manchester and its history, tells how the trade of that town, carried on of old by chapmen, owning gangs of pack-horses, began to increase in 1730, consequent upon the improvement of the roads. Waggon were set up, and the chapmen, instead of setting forth with their goods for sale, only rode out for orders, carrying patterns with them in their saddle-bags. Thus the commercial traveller, familiar in all the years between 1730 and the present time, came into existence. During the forty years from 1730 to 1770, says Aikin, the trade of Manchester was greatly pushed by the practice of sending these "riders," as they were called, all over the kingdom. The goods they sold by sample were delivered in bulk by the waggons.

By 1750, the gradual introduction of two classes of vehicles between the common stage-waggon and the stage-coach had begun. The first of these intermediate types was the Shrewsbury and London "Flying Stage Waggon," announced to begin flying from Shrewsbury, October 22nd, 1750, to reach London in five days, winter and summer. As Shrewsbury is 152 miles from London, this meant thirty miles a day. Welsh

flannels, and consignments of butter and lard and miscellaneous goods, shared this vehicle with the passengers. There was nothing in the build of this new comer on the road to distinguish it from the common stage-waggons, and it only progressed the quicker because, following the newly-established practice of the coaches of that period, it changed horses at places on the way, instead of making the whole journey with one—often tired and exhausted—team. The other type of vehicle was the “caravan” or “long coach,” the next step higher in the social scale. A “caravan” was put on the road between Shrewsbury and London at the close of 1750. It was an affair greatly resembling modern gipsy-vans, and was fitted inside with benches for eight, twelve, or even, at a pinch, eighteen persons. It was drawn by “six able horses,” and professed to reach London in four days, but often occupied the whole of five. The fare to London by “caravan” was 15s.—rather less than a penny-farthing a mile. A six-horsed conveyance answering to this description, but uncovered, is pictured by Rowlandson fifty-six years later, on a road not specified by him.

In April 1753 the “Birmingham and Shrewsbury Long Coach” began to ply between those places and London, completing the distance in three and a half days; fare 18s. Here, evidently, were several social grades; and when the Shrewsbury stage-coach of the same year, charging a guinea for an inside place, and the “Machine”

of 1764, with a limited number of seats at 30s., each came on the scene, the several degrees of contempt with which all these classes of travellers, from those at twopence-farthing a mile down to those others at a penny-farthing, regarded one another and the lowest class, whose shilling a day or halfpenny a mile was the lowest common denominator in stage-waggon travelling, must have been curious certainly, if not edifying, to witness. The usual alternative of a halfpenny a mile or a shilling a day gives about twenty-four miles as a day's journey for the common stage-waggon, and as the Flying Waggon was advertised to go at the rate of thirty miles a day, six miles a day was therefore the measure of the superiority in speed of one over the other. But the accumulated contempt of all those social scales for the occupant of the common waggon did not rest there, any more than it began with the passengers of the "Machine." Just as the lordly and gentle folk who had travelled in their own chariots looked down even upon the loftiest heights of stage-coach travelling, so did the poor folk of the waggons unload their weight of contempt upon those poorest of the poor, who, having nothing to lose, feared no one—except perhaps the parish constable, apt to be arbitrary and not always able to distinguish between a penniless but honest wayfarer and a rogue and vagabond. Frequently these travellers in the lowest stratum saw the highwayman approach, not merely without fear but with a certain pleasurable anticipation; because your



THE STAGE-WAGGON, 1820.

After J. L. Apress.

true knight of the road had a certain generous code of morals, and while he robbed the rich, gave to the needy—a thing perhaps counted to him for righteousness by that recording angel who effaced the record of Uncle Toby's hasty imprecation with a kindly obliterating tear.

The general increase of heavy traffic soon after the middle of the eighteenth century did not escape the notice of those responsible for the condition of the roads. Incompetent road-surveyors, ignorant of the science of road construction and employing unsuitable materials and unskilled labour, saw the highways they had mended with mud, road-scrapings and gravel continually falling into ruts and sloughs, often from twelve to eighteen inches deep. Seeking any cause for this rather than their ignorance of the first rudiments of construction, they naturally discovered it in the passage of the heavily-weighted waggons, and raised an outcry against them accordingly. To an age that saw no better method of mending the roads than that of raking mud on to them and throwing faggots and boulder-stones upon that basis, this seemed reasonable enough, and Parliament was at length persuaded to authorise discriminatory rates to be imposed by the turnpike trusts upon carts and waggons whose wheels were not of a certain breadth. The argument was that the broader the wheels, the greater would be the distribution of weight, and consequently the road would be less injured. It was an argument based, correctly enough, upon natural laws, and the age

was not educated to the point of seeing that roads should be made to the measure of the traffic they might be called upon to bear, rather than that the build of vehicles should be altered to suit the disabilities of the roads themselves. So, from 1766, a series of Turnpike Acts began, containing clauses by which narrow wheels were penalised and broad ones relieved. Tolls were not uniform throughout the country, but although those one Trust would be authorised to levy might, from some special circumstance, be higher than others, they ranged within narrow limits. Generally, a four-wheeled waggon drawn by four horses, with wheels of a less breadth than six inches, would pay a shilling on passing a turnpike gate; with wheels measuring six inches broad and upwards, the toll would be ninepence; and with a breadth of nine inches and upwards, sixpence. Not at every gate was payment of tolls made in those old days. Payment made at one generally "freed" the next, and sometimes others as well; but here again there was no general rule. Special circumstances made some trusts liberal and others extremely grasping.

A width of sixteen inches for waggon wheels was very generally urged and adopted, and thus it is that in old pictures of this period the great wains have so clumsy an appearance, looking, indeed, as though the wainwrights had not yet learned their business, and from ignorance built more solidly than the loads carried gave any occasion for.

In 1773, one James Sharp, of Leadenhall Street, advertised his invention of a "rolling waggon," whose rollers (in place of wheels) were of this breadth of sixteen inches, and proceeded to state that "two late Acts of Parliament" allowed all carriages moving upon rollers of that gauge to be drawn by any number of horses or cattle, and further, that they were allowed to carry eight tons in summer and seven in winter, and to pass toll-free for the term of one year from Michaelmas 1773, and after that time to pay only half toll. Clearly, then, in the great mass of legislation for roads and traffic there was then a limit existing for loads and for teams. It only remained for the wisdom of the time to enact laws giving a bonus to every waggon whose wheels exceeded a breadth of two feet—thus making every such vehicle its own road-repairer—for the absurdity to be complete. There had, indeed, already arisen a bright genius with a somewhat similar idea, for in 1763 Bourne published his design of a four-wheeled waggon whose front axletree was to be so much shorter than the hind one that the foremost wheels would make a track inside the hinder. The breadth of wheel, indeed, was not to be more than fifteen inches, but the combined breadth of all four planned thus would flatten out no less than a five-foot width of road, and the heavier the contents of the waggon, so much better for the proper rolling of the way. But this ingenious person took no account of the extra difficulty of haulage, and the consequently larger teams that would be

required for this engine of his. It never came into use, nor did the rival invention of another amiable theorist meet a better fate. This device set out to deal with the problem of soft and rutted roads by fixing heavy iron rollers under the frame of a waggon. While the vehicle progressed along good roads these rollers were not brought into contact with the ground, but as soon as the wheels began to sink into foul and miry ways, the rollers came into touch with the surface, and at the same time prevented any further sinking and flattened out all irregularities.

Turnpike roads, being then things "new-fangled" and unusual, were of course disapproved of by all that very numerous class who distrust any change. Doubtful of their own ability to hold their own in any order of things newer than that in which they have been brought up, *any* change must to them be for the worse. The waggoners to a man were numbered in this class, and, apart from the tolls to be paid on the new roads, objected to them as new. An entertaining contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1752 consulted "the most solemn waggoner" he could find between London and Bath. This was one "Jack Whipcord," who, like every one else, preferred to go round by "a miserable waggon-track called 'Ramsbury Narrow Way.' Jack's answer was, that roads had but one object—namely, waggon-driving; that he required but five feet width in a lane (which he resolved never to quit), and all the rest might go to the devil. That the

gentry ought to stay at home and be damned, and not run gossiping up and down the country. No turnpikes, no improvements of roads for him. The Scripture for him was Jeremiah vi. 16.* Thus," says the writer, "finding Jack an ill-natured brute and a profane country wag, I left him, dissatisfied."

We are not to suppose, from this imaginary "Jack Whipcord," that waggoners were generally of a dour and unpleasant nature. Indeed, the consensus of opinion to be collected from old-world literature shows that, as a class, they were pleasant and light-hearted. M. Samuel de Sorbière, a distinguished Frenchman who visited England in 1663 and has left a very entertaining account of his travels, paints a charming little cameo portrait of the waggoner who was in charge of the six-horse stage-waggon by which he travelled from Dover to Gravesend. The horses were yoked one before the other, and beside them walked the waggoner, "clothed in black and appointed in all things like another Saint George. He had a brave mountero on his head, and was a merry fellow, who fancied he made a figure and seemed mightily pleased with himself." "Joey," too, the waggoner already glimpsed in *Roderick Random*, was sprightly and light-hearted; and we have the evidence of that old English ballad, the "Jolly Waggoner," that men of this trade were conven-

* "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

tionally regarded as devil-me-care fellows, own brothers in disposition to sailors, always represented as jolly, even in the old days when rations were scanty and bad and rope's endings plentiful. This jollity is insisted upon, even by the old wayside signs of the country inns. Now and again you may find the sign of the "Jolly Anglers," while on the Portsmouth Road the "Jolly Drovers" is to be seen, and on the Exeter Road the "Jolly Farmer," a creature vanished from this country and utterly unknown these forty years and more; but only the waggoners and the sailors are usually known by that adjective. Rarely, indeed, is the sailor described in any other way. In a few instances he may be "Valiant," but ninety times in every hundred he is "Jolly."

According to the second verse of the "Jolly Waggoner," his cheerfulness was invincible:—

It is a cold and stormy night : I'm wetted to the skin,
 But I'll bear it with contentment till I get me to my inn,
 And then I'll sit a-drinking with the landlord and his kin.

Sing wo ! my lads, sing wo !

Drive on, my lads, gee-ho !

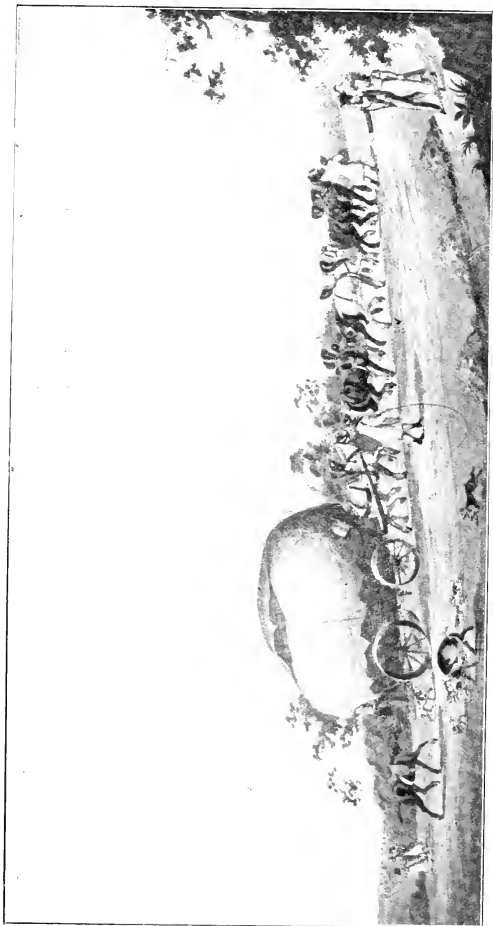
For who can live the life that we jolly waggoners do-o-o ?

He knew something of all kinds of weather, and met all kinds of men in his daily journeys, and thus early became something of a philosopher, looking forward for nothing beyond his nightly inn, in whose kitchen he was well known and esteemed, alike for his own qualities and the news and parcels he brought from the outer world on

the other side of the distant hills. With a sack over his shoulders and peace in his mind, he could greet the rainy days with joke and song, or endure even the wintry horrors of December and January with equanimity; yet when spring was come and grass grew green and the bare, ruined boughs of the trees began to be clothed again with leaves, not even the old heathen Greeks and Romans in their Floralia celebrated the coming again of the sun with more heartiness. His horses and himself were decked with ribbons on May Day, his sweetheart had some longed-for present from the Great City, and not even the blackbird on the hawthorn spray sang a merrier tune, as he drove his team along their steady pace.

It is not a little difficult to pronounce an opinion upon the fares which the poor folk paid by stage-waggon. Prices varied widely. On the Great North Road in 1780, between London and Edinburgh, the measure was, indeed, not by miles but by days; but as the journey took fourteen days, and the fare was a shilling a day, and the distance covered was 396 miles, we can figure it out at about twenty-eight miles a day at something less than a halfpenny a mile. Early stage-waggons to Cambridge, however, appear to have exacted three-halfpence a mile, and moved with incredible slowness, taking two and a half days to perform the fifty-one miles, and sleeping two nights upon the road. On the Bath Road the waggon-fare seems to have been something less than a penny a mile.

We have already seen something of the old waggon-life, as shown by Smollett: let us now inquire into the costs and charges of the journey, apart from the fare. How did these humble folk eat and drink, and how did they lodge for the night when the waggon came to its inn at sunset? Sometimes they slept in the shelter of the waggon itself, under the substantial covering of the great canvas tilt, snugly curled up in the hay and straw, and barricaded by the crates and boxes that formed part of the load—not an altogether uncomfortable, if certainly too promiscuous, a sleeping arrangement. At other times the stable-lofts of the inns formed their apartments. Landlords of reputable hostelries, mindful of the social gulf that (in the opinion of the insides) existed between the inside passengers of a stage-coach and those off-scourings of the country who rode on the roof or in the “basket,” did not commonly allow those belonging to that even lower stratum, the waggons, to sleep in their houses. A supper of cold boiled beef and bread in the kitchen, followed by a shake-down in the hay or straw of the stables, at an inclusive price of sixpence or ninepence, was their portion. Swift himself, that terrible genius of the eighteenth century, who knew the extremities of obscurity and fame, of penury and affluence, was, in his early days, of this poor company. When a young man, travelling from the house of his patron, Sir William Temple, at Moor Park, near Farnham, in Surrey, to see his mother at Leicester, he rode in the waggon, and slept at “the



THE ROAD WAGON : A TRYING CLIMB.

After J. Pollard.

penny hedge-inns," where they were not above letting a bed for the night to a young man so unusually particular as to pay sixpence extra for clean sheets and a bed to himself—an exclusive arrangement, it would appear, not within the everyday philosophy of those humble caravan-serais. He whom not only later ages, but even his contemporaries, unite in acclaiming a genius, generally chose to take his food with waggoners, ostlers, and persons of that station. The superfine Lord Orrery, who recorded these facts, and tells us that Swift "delighted in scenes of low life," says he "dined" with them; but if Lord Orrery had been as well acquainted with humble circles he would have known that the low people in them do not "dine" at all; they just "have dinner."

It is impossible to obtain more than a glimpse of the early carriers, and even the later stage-waggons were only occasionally advertised in the newspapers of the past. Thus, turning to Sussex, we only hear of "Thomas Smith, the Old Lewes Carrier," in a reference to him after his death. How many years he had jogged along the green Surrey and Sussex lanes on his weekly journeys between Southwark and Lewes we know not. He died in 1746, and his widow carried on the business, according to her advertisement in the *Lewes Journal* :—

"THOMAS SMITH, the OLD LEWES CARRIER, being dead, THE BUSINESS IS NOW CONTINUED BY HIS WIDOW, MARY SMITH, who gets into the

‘George Inn,’ in the Borough, Southwark, EVERY WEDNESDAY in the afternoon, and sets out for Lewes EVERY THURSDAY morning by eight o’clock, and brings Goods and Passengers to Lewes, Fletching, Chayley, Newick, and all places adjacent at reasonable rates. Performed (*if God permit*) by MARY SMITH.”

No mention yet, it will be observed, of Brighton, that little fisher-village of BRIGHTHELMSTONE which presently was to rival fashionable Bath. The waggon went no farther than Lewes; and the first public conveyance to Brighton appears to have been the “Brighthelmstone Stage” of May 1756, running as an extension of the “London and Lewes One-Day Stage.”

Speed was by no means sought upon these old waggon-journeys. Quite apart from their usual inability to go, under the most favourable circumstances, at more than about four miles an hour, they were exempt from passenger-duty, on all travellers carried, only when the rate of progression did not exceed that speed.

Thus, although the Brighton waggon owned by Tubb and Davis in 1770 had a rival conveyance put on the road in 1776 by Lashmar & Co., both continued at the old pace. Both went by way of East Grinstead and Lewes, and took three days to perform the fifty-eight miles, Lashmar’s waggon leaving the “King’s Head,” Southwark, every Tuesday at 3 a.m., and arriving at the “King’s Head,” Brighton, on Thursday afternoons. Goods

and parcels were carried at the rates of 2s. 6d. and 3s. per cwt.

Malachy Postlethwayt's *Dictionary of Trade*, a work published in 1751, gives some eloquent details on this subject of the carriage of goods. Comparing that year, when turnpikes had improved the roads, with the bad ways of thirty or forty years earlier, it is stated that where six horses could in former times scarcely draw 30 cwt. sixty miles, they could then draw 50 or 60 cwt. Carriage, too, was cheaper by 30 per cent. than before. In 1750 there were from twenty-five to thirty waggons sent weekly from Birmingham to London, carrying goods at from £3 to £4 a ton; thirty years earlier the cost had been £7 a ton. Between Portsmouth and London freights had fallen from £7 to £4 or £5; and between Exeter and London and other towns in the west of like distance from £12 to £8. Postlethwayt cited these figures with pride, but he argued that the heavy waggons wore out the roads, and that they did not pay sufficient toll. The manufacturers, he thought, got too much advantage out of these low freights, and although the public thereby could purchase goods more cheaply, they paid their savings all out again in the heavy repairs of the highway and the consequent extravagant highway rates rendered necessary. Railway rates, we may here remark, are a source of much bitter discussion to-day, but they are fifteen times less than the reduced rates of 1750.

Even in the last days of the road, when railways

had already begun to stretch the length and breadth of the land, the waggons on the less important highways continued very much as they had been accustomed to do; but with the second decade of the nineteenth century a demand for the quicker conveyance of goods arose on those great roads that gave access from the important manufacturing towns to London, or from London to the chief seaports. With this demand, in the improved condition of those roads, it now became for the first time possible to comply. On less frequented routes—roads leading to agricultural districts and sleepy old towns and villages that produced nothing for distant markets and wanted little from them—the common stage waggon and the flying waggon lingered. The Kendal Flying Waggon of 1816, pictured by Rowlandson, halting at a wayside inn to take up or set down goods and passengers and to change horses, lasted well on into the railway age; but in places nearer to and in more direct communication with the commerce of great cities, the type was early supplemented by later contrivances.

The first of these were the “Fly Vans,” of which the swift conveyances of Russell & Co., van proprietors, trading between London and the West of England, were typical. They were built on the model of the wooden hooded van seen in London streets at the present time, but considerably larger than now common. Russells had for many years continued a service of stage-waggons between the port of Falmouth and the Metropolis. Drawn



THE STAGE-WAGON, 1816.

By Rowlandson

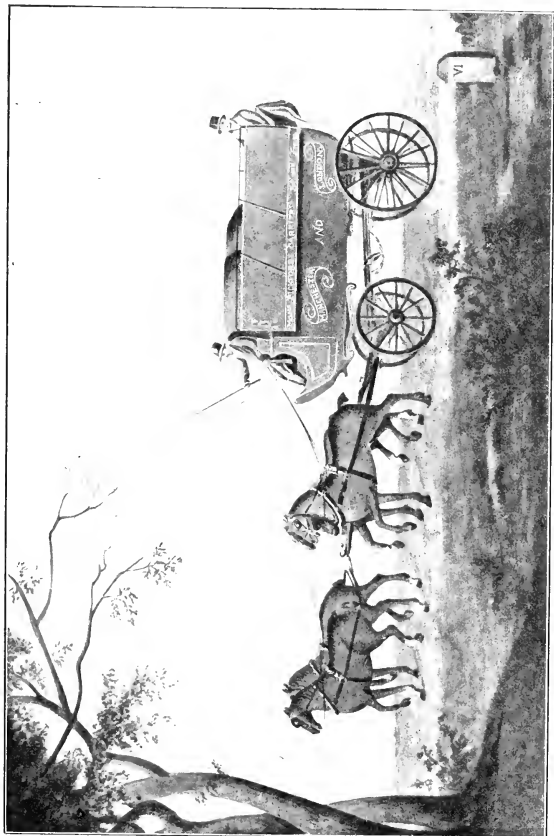
by the then usual team of eight horses, augmented by two, or even four, more on many of the hills that make the west-country roads a constant succession of ups and downs, they had brought heavy goods and luggage that distance in twelve days, at the rate of three miles an hour, carrying passengers at a halfpenny a mile. But with the coming of the nineteenth century they found the stage-coaches, with their "rumble-tumbles," beginning to carry people at a slightly higher fare, and performing the whole distance of 269 miles in three days and nights. Even the poorest found it cheaper to pay the higher fare and save the delays and expenses of the other nine days, and so Messrs. Russell found one branch of their trade decaying. They accordingly, about 1820, put their "Fly Vans" on the road, vehicles which did the journey in the same time as the ordinary stage-coaches of that period, and, running night and day, continued so to set forth and come to their journey's end until the railway came and presently made away with fly vans, stage-coaches and mails alike.

A sign of the times immediately preceding railways was the appearance of the heavy covered luggage and goods vans, exclusively devoted to that class of traffic and carrying no passengers. How the heavy goods of Birmingham and other great towns were then conveyed along the roads is shown in the curious and very interesting old painting, engraved here, of Pickford & Co.'s London and Manchester Luggage Van. The roads

between London and the great manufacturing towns at length became crowded with goods, and had it not been for the railways, they must at an early date have become altogether inadequate, and an era of great highway improvement and widening have set in, notwithstanding that quite two-thirds of the goods traffic at that time was water-borne, and went by those canals with which the genius of Brindley and Telford, and the enterprise of the Duke of Bridgewater and others, had half a century earlier intersected the trade routes and manufacturing centres of the country.

It is at once instructive and interesting here to glance at the figures prepared by the promoters of the London and Birmingham Railway, opened in 1838, by which they argued the pressing need of a railway, which should carry cheaper and quicker. They gave several sets of estimates, whose discrepancies are to be accounted for by the increasing volume of traffic; but, to reduce their figures to round numbers, it seems that in the year before the line was begun, the annual average of goods despatched between Birmingham and London was 144,000 tons, carried at rates of from fivepence to sixpence a mile per ton by the "Fly-boats" on the canal and by the vans and waggons. By canal the annual expenditure was £227,000, by road £113,000. Passengers, numbering 488,342, at an average of twopence a head per mile on the 109 miles, spent £447,646 in travelling.

To those who unfailingly see the wise direction of Providence in everything, it would seem that



PICKFORD'S LONDON AND MANCHESTER FLY VAN, 1826.

After George East.

Providence had thus raised up railway engineers and capitalists at the psychological moment ; but the views of coach-proprietors, coachmen, guards, ostlers, innkeepers, and the innumerable others depending in one way or another upon the road for a living, did not, it is to be feared, look so complacently upon the new era which in many instances ruined them. Nor, perhaps, did those who were financially interested in canals ascribe the new order of things to providential interposition.

That, indeed, is providential which advances one's own interests and preserves one's well-being, but misfortunes are generally given a very different ascription. The providential interpositions that benefited one class inflicted very great hardship and loss upon another. The canals that were, before the introduction of railways, very great and keen competitors with the waggons, were frozen up in severe winters, and all traffic along them stopped, and thus the whole of the carrying trade went by road, greatly to the advantage of the turnpike trusts and the owners of waggons. Indeed, severe winters, if unaccompanied by snow, were in every way advantageous to the waggons, because the frost-bound roads gave good going, while "open" winters made the highways a sea of mud and almost impassable.

Although with the coming of the railways the stage-waggons swiftly disappeared from such direct commercial routes as those between London and Birmingham and London and Manchester, this

ancient type of vehicle lingered amazingly on the purely agricultural roads leading to the Metropolis out of Kent, Sussex and Surrey. As the stage-waggon was the earliest of old road vehicles, so also it was the last; and even when the last coach came off the road, and people travelled only by train, there were still left not a few of the old waggons continuing their sober journeys, not in the least affected by the railways. They came to and set out from London very much as they had been used to do two hundred and forty years before, and resorted as of old to the ancient inns that lingered in such strongholds of the old road-faring interest as the Borough High Street, Aldgate and Whitechapel, and Bishopsgate Street. It is true they carried passengers no longer, for when railway travel came, and was cheap as well as speedy, there were none who could afford the time taken of old by waggon. It was cheaper to pay a railway fare, and thus save a day or even more. But with heavy goods it long remained far otherwise, and even into the 'sixties it was possible to see the lethargic waggons still ponderously coming to their haven out of Kent and Sussex at the "Talbot" in the Borough (only demolished in 1870), from the Eastern Counties to the "Blue Boar" or the "Saracen's Head" in Aldgate, or from the North to the "Four Swans," the "Bull," or the "Green Dragon," in Bishopsgate Street Within, precisely as they had done from the beginning, when Shakespeare was play-writing. They were built in the same fashion as of yore. The immense canvas-covered tilts had

not changed their pattern, and their dim old horn lanterns were genuine antiques; their wheels, as clumsy as ever they had been, shrieked for grease and racked the ears of the lieges as they had always done; and the lieges swore at the waggoners and the waggoners cursed back at them in strange provincial dialects, just as their respective ancestors had been wont to do for more generations than one cares to count. The Londoner little imagined—because his imagination on any subject is small—when he looked dully upon these old conveyances, and the old inns to which they came, that he was gazing upon a survival of the age of Elizabeth; and while he was thus failing to realise the exquisite interest of what he saw, the “common stage waggons,” as they were technically named by Act of Parliament, ceased altogether off the face of the earth, and nearly all the old galleried inns were swept away.

CHAPTER VI

THE EARLY MAIL-COACHES

LONG before the last quarter of the eighteenth century dawned, the time was ripe for Post Office reform in the carrying of the mails; but, as a matter of course, no one within that department saw any necessity for change, and although the Post Office revenue was suffering severely from correspondence being sent in a clandestine manner by stage-coach, the slow and uncertain old methods had been retained. Reform had, as always, to come from without, just as when Ralph Allen of Bath planned his service of postboys in 1719. He had, against much opposition, introduced his system of messengers riding with the mails at a speed of "not less than five miles an hour," then considered great expedition, and comparing very favourably with the average stage-coach speed of something less than four miles, including stops. Allen's postboys were at that time the fastest travellers on the road, with the exception of the highwaymen, whose blood mares, according to tradition, were faster still. No one could grumble at the course of post in those days on the score of comparison with the journeys made by other travellers; but, like many other reforms, Allen's

postboys, excellent at the beginning, did not wholly succeed in keeping abreast of the times. Roads improved: everyone and everything went at a much greater rate of progression, save the Post Office postboys, who for forty-six years continued to go at the same speed as that of their predecessors of an earlier generation. They were, indeed, sent out more frequently on certain routes on which business had increased, and on the more frequented roads the mails were, from June 1741, despatched six days in the week, instead of twice and thrice, as had formerly been the case; but up to the time of Allen's death, in 1764, speed remained what it had always been, and it was not until the following year that the postboys' regulation rate of travelling was raised by Act of Parliament from five to six miles an hour, inclusive of stops. The post-horses were, however, of the same inferior kind as of old. The best animals were, very naturally, kept back by the postmasters—who were generally the innkeepers also—for their customers, and for the Post Office the worst nags in the stable were invariably reserved. An Act of Parliament, backed by the power of the executive, is a very dread thing, but it has not the power of compelling a horse incapable of going more than a certain number of miles an hour to add another mile to his speed. The improvement could thus have been only nominal.

The Post Office officials in Lombard Street, where the General Post Office was then situated, were very well content for the public service to

be continued as of old. It would be idle to speculate how long the department would have lagged behind the times and seen the Post Office revenues being gradually eaten away by the growing practice of secretly sending letters by the stage-coaches, which had by this time attained a speed of about seven miles an hour, and in addition set out more frequently and at more convenient hours than the postboys. It would be idle thus to speculate, because, when the scandal was growing to noticeable proportions—when it was asserted that the Post Office lost not less than £80,000 a year by letters being conveyed by unauthorised persons, and when people grew indignant that “every common traveller passed the King’s Mail”—there came to the front a man with a plan to remedy what surely was the very absurd paradox that the Government strenuously reserved to itself the monopoly of letter-carrying, and yet provided no reasonable facilities for those letters to be conveyed, and idly watched thousands of pounds of that cherished revenue being annually diverted from their proper destination. This man with a well-matured scheme of reform was John Palmer, a native of Bath, born at No. 1, Galloway’s Buildings (now North Parade Buildings), in 1742. His father was a brewer and spermaceti-merchant, and proprietor of two highly prosperous theatres at Bath and another at Bristol. Intended by his father for the Church, his own inclinations were for the Army; but he was not suffered to follow his bent, and so was taken from school and placed



JOHN PALMER AT THE AGE OF 17.

Attributed to Gainsborough, R.A.

in the counting-house of his father's brewery. Wearying of that commercial routine, and still without success disputing the question of entering the Army, he set about learning the practical side of brewing, and worked among the vats and mash-tubs of his father's establishment. Then his health gave way, and signs of consumption rendered a rest and change of air necessary. Recovering at last and returning to Bath, he entered into the conduct of his father's theatrical enterprises, and at the time when he conceived his plan was the very busy and successful manager of all these theatres, for which his energy had secured Royal patents -- a license then necessary for the presentation of stage-plays. These patents were then the only ones enjoyed by theatres out of London.

Palmer was, therefore, no impecunious adventurer, but a theatrical proprietor and manager, accustomed to secure the highest talent for his houses in this resort of fashion. His native energy, that brought him success in beating up for talented actors and actresses all over the country, stood him in good stead when the idea of entirely remodelling the carrying of the mails occurred to his active mind. Nothing, indeed, short of the utmost persistence and determination could have surmounted the obstacles to reform that were placed in his way by the Post Office officials.

The mails he had perceived to be the slowest travelling in the kingdom, and he decided that they ought to be, and should be, the quickest. His own frequent journeys had shown him the

possibilities, and long observation at Bath had displayed how far short of these the postboys' journeys always fell. Thirty-eight hours were generally taken to perform the 109 miles between the General Post Office and Bath, at a time when travellers posted down in post-chaises in one day.

Other objections to postboys existed than on the score of insufficient speed. It was, he declared, in the last degree hazardous to entrust the mail-bags—as inevitably was often done—to some idle boy, without character, and mounted on a worn-out hack, who, so far from being able to defend himself against a robber, was more likely to be in league with one.

Post Office postboys, it should here be said, were, like the postboys who drove the post-chaises, by no means necessarily boys or youths. They included, it is true, in their ranks all ages, but the great majority of them were grown-up, not to say aged, men. Some people, indeed, recognising the absurdity of calling a decrepit old man a "postboy," preferred to give him the title of "mailman," by which name a postal servant who got drunk and delayed the Bath mail in 1770 is styled in a contemporary newspaper, which says, "The mail did not arrive so soon by several hours as usual on Monday, owing to the mailman getting a little intoxicated on his way between Newbury and Marlborough and falling from his horse into a hedge, where he was found asleep by means of his dog."

Instead of exposing letters to these and other



JOHN PALMER.

From the painting by Gainsborough, R.A.

risks, Palmer proposed that a service of mail-coaches should be established on every great road.

It was a bold scheme, and seemed to most of those to whom it was unfolded rash and unworkable. To quite understand this attitude of mind on the part of Palmer's contemporaries, both inside and outside the Post Office, it is essential to project ourselves mentally into those closing years of the eighteenth century, when no one travelled save under direful compulsion, when correspondence between sundered friends and relatives was fitful and infrequent, and when even business relations between the newly-risen industries of the great towns and the rural districts were carried on in what we now consider to have been a most leisurely and somnolent manner. The world went very well then for the indolent, and they resented any quickening of the pace; and that the average acute business men of that age considered the course of post reasonable seems evident when we consider that it was not from their ranks that this reforming project came, and that they are not found supporting it until the first mails had been put on the road and proved successful. *Then* that imagination which had been altogether lacking or dormant in business minds was aroused, and the great towns and cities not at first provided with these new facilities eagerly petitioned the Post Office authorities for mail-coaches.

Palmer contended that mail-coaches could be established at no greater expense than that of the postboys and horses, who cost threepence a

mile. At a time, he continued, when stage-coaches cost their proprietors about twopence a mile, it was quite certain that adventurers could be found to establish mail-coaches if the Government would consent to pay them at the same rate as the postboys, to exempt them from the heavy tolls to which ordinary traffic was liable, and to permit passengers to be carried to enable these speculative persons to earn a profit on their enterprise. The proposed exemption from toll was very reasonable when we consider how onerous were the turnpike charges on the Bath Road, typical as it was of others. The charges for a carriage and four horses between London and Bath were not less than 18s., or about twopence a mile.

These mail-coaches, he considered, should travel at about eight or nine miles an hour. They should carry no outside passengers, but were to be provided with a guard, who, for the better protection of the mails, should be armed with two short guns or blunderbusses. The coachman, too, should be armed, but his equipment was to be two pistols, for with his reins to hold with one hand he could not, like the guard, bring his weapon to the shoulder. The journey, for example, between London and Bath, it was thought, could be performed in sixteen hours, including stoppages; and this unusual expedition, together with the assured safety, would result in the projected coaches being well patronised by the public.

This plan was matured in 1782, and Palmer lost no time in securing the good offices of an

influential friend to bring it to the notice of the "Heaven-born Minister," Pitt, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. The time, however, was not propitious, for the ministry soon went out of office, and it was not until 1784, when he was again in power, that Palmer's plan obtained a trial. Pitt was heartily in favour of it, and carried it into effect against the unanimously adverse opinions of the Post Office surveyors, who resented one outside their own sanctified and anointed caste daring to suggest that the methods of the department were capable of improvement. One was, or affected to be, unable to see why the post should be the swiftest conveyance in the kingdom; and to another it appeared that for guards and coachmen to carry arms would be to encourage the highwaymen—who assuredly would continue to attack the mail—to a greater use than before of pistols, so that murder would be added to robbery and the country run with blood. In conclusion, they were all amazed that any dissatisfaction or desire for change should exist, and from that amazement proceeded to argue that they really did not exist. If (they said) the mails were not frequent enough or swift enough, there were always the expresses ready to be specially hired. Now, as at that time a letter going a hundred miles by mail would cost fourpence, and the cost of an express—at threepence a mile and a two-and-sixpenny fee—would for the same distance be 27*s.* 6*d.*, this surprise was not altogether unlike that of Marie Antoinette, who, hearing

that the people were starving for lack of bread, wondered why they did not eat cakes instead.

These official objections having been brushed aside at a Treasury conference held on June 21st, arrangements were made for a coach to run on the road from Bristol, through Bath, to London, pursuant to an order issued on July 24th, which stated that "His Majesty's Postmasters-General, being inclined to make an experiment for the more expeditious conveyance of mails of letters by stage-coaches, machines, etc., have been pleased to order that a trial shall be made upon the road between London and Bristol, to commence at each place on Monday the 2nd August next."

On July 31st, 1784, five innholders—one in London, one at Thatcham, one at Marlborough, and two in Bath—entered into an agreement to horse the coach down that ancient turnpike. They received threepence a mile for their services.

A conflict of testimony as to whether the first mail-coach started on August 2nd, 1784, or on August 8th, seems to be disposed of by the advertisement in *Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal* of July 31st in that year, although there is nothing in succeeding issues of that journal to show whether the service actually did or did not begin on the date announced:—

MAIL DILIGENCE.

To commence Monday, August 2nd.

The Proprietors of the above Carriage having agreed to convey the Mail to and from London and

Bristol in Sixteen Hours, with a Guard for its Protection, respectfully inform the Public, that it is constructed so as to accommodate Four Inside Passengers in the most convenient Manner ;—that it well (*sic*) set off every Night at Eight o’Clock, from the Swan with Two Necks, Lad-Lane, London, and arrive at the Three Tuns Inn, Bath, before Ten the next Morning, and at the Rummer-Tavern, near the Exchange, Bristol, at Twelve, . . . Will set off from the said Tavern at Bristol at Four o’Clock every Afternoon, and arrive at London at Eight o’Clock the next Morning.

The Price to and from Bristol, Bath, and London, 28*s.* for each Passenger . . . No Outside allowed.

Both the Guards and Coachmen (who will be likewise armed) have given ample Security for their Conduct to the Proprietors, so that those Ladies and Gentlemen who may please to honour them with their Encouragement, may depend on every Respect and Attention.

Parcels will be forwarded agreeable to the Directions immediately on their Arrival at London, etc. etc., and the Price of the Porterage as well as the Carriage, on the most reasonable Terms, will be charged on the Outside to prevent Imposition.

Any person having reason to complain of the Porter’s Delay, will oblige the Proprietors by sending a Letter of the Times of Delivery of their Parcels to any of the different Inns the Diligence puts up at.

Performed by WILSON & Co., London.
WILLIAMS & Co., Bath.

N.B. The London, Bath, and Bristol Coaches from the above Inns as usual.

Immediately beneath this advertisement it is amusing to see a counterblast, in the form of an announcement by Pickwick, Weeks, and other "Proprietors of the Coaches from Bristol, Bath, and London," who "respectfully beg leave to inform the Public that they continue to run their Coaches from the Bush Tavern in Corn Street, Bristol," and from other inns in that city and at Bath, "with equal Expedition to any Coaches that travel the Road." Stage-coach proprietors in general were, not unnaturally, alarmed and angered by the inauguration of a swift service of subsidised mail-coaches, not only claiming to perform their journeys in a specified time, but actually doing so under contracts providing for penalties when the official time-table was not kept. *They* were under no such obligations, and continually claimed to do things impossible to be performed, secure from penalties. "What time do you get to London?" asked a passenger of a stage-coachman. "Six o'clock, sir, is the proper time, but I have been every hour of the four-and-twenty after it," was the reply.

The first mail-coaches were merely ordinary light post coaches or diligences pressed into the service; but, unlike those of other and unofficial coaches, whose stages ranged from ten to fifteen miles or more, the horses were changed at stages varying from six to eight miles. In this way it was possible to attain a running speed of eight miles an hour, to destroy the old reproach that the mail was the slowest service in the kingdom,

and to set the pace to everything else on the road. Thus once again the Post Office commanded the utmost expedition, and to the mail-coaches those travellers flocked who desired the quickest, the most dignified, and the safest method of progression in that age.

The first results of the mail-coach system were of a very mixed nature. The course of post was, it is true, greatly accelerated, but the rates of postage were immediately raised, and although the added convenience was well worth the extra charge—which, after all, was much less than the surreptitious sending of letters by stage-coach had been—people grumbled. By the ordinary postboys the charge for a single letter had been a penny for one stage, twopence for two stages, and threepence for any higher distance up to eighty miles. Over that distance the charge was fourpence. The postboys' stages ranged from ten to as many as fourteen miles. Under the new dispensation the postage was raised at once to twopence the first stage, and the stages themselves were rarely more than seven or eight miles, and often shorter. Correspondence going longer distances enjoyed, it is true, a reduction ; for two stages cost threepence and distances exceeding two stages and not more than eighty miles were rated at fourpence.

The short-distance correspondence therefore paid from three to four times as much as under the old order of things, and long-distance letters a penny more ; but all alike shared the advantage of the mail-coaches' comparative immunity from

attack and their going every day, including even Sundays. One class of correspondents, indeed, suffered inconvenience for a time while reorganisation was in progress. These were the residents on the bye-roads and in the smaller towns not situated on the great mail routes. It is obvious that the coaches could not be made to go along the secondary and very ill-kept roads, and that, even could that have been done, it would not have been possible, in the lack of passenger traffic along them, to have found contractors prepared to horse the coaches at the price they gladly accepted on the main arteries of travelling. The postboys had, on the other hand, gone everywhere, and the complex system of bye- and cross-posts established by Allen and maintained by these riders was really, for that time, a wonderful achievement. Residents off the mail routes now began to miss the postboy's horn, and found their letters lying for days at the post-offices until they were called for. Instead of the post coming to the smaller towns and villages, those minor places had to send to the nearest post-office on the mail-coach road. These inconveniences only gradually disappeared on the organisation of a service of mail-carts from the post-towns to rural post-offices, collecting and delivering the cross-posts; and it was not until another ten years had passed that the bye-mails became, as well as the direct ones, what they should always have been, quicker than any other public conveyance on the roads. With this at length accomplished, the leakage of Post

Office revenues automatically disappeared, for it is not to be supposed that, when the mails were more frequent, cheaper, and more speedy than other methods, the public would resort to slow and more expensive ways of sending their letters.

The next mail-coach to be put on the road was the Norwich Mail, in March 1785; and in May of that same year the first of the cross-road mails was established. This was the Bristol and Portsmouth. It was followed in rapid succession by the long services from London: the Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, on July 25th; the London, Gloucester and Swansea; the Hereford, Carmarthen and Milford Haven, by Glasbury; the Worcester and Ludlow; the Birmingham and Shrewsbury; the Chester and Holyhead; the Exeter; the Portsmouth; and—on October 16th, 1786, in answer to the petition for a mail-coach along the Great North Road sent up by the cities and towns on that highway—by the York and Edinburgh Mail.

Palmer was not content with merely re-organising the inland mails; he was eager to see his plan adopted in France, and to this end opened up negotiations with Baron D'Ogny, the French Minister of Posts, in 1787. Correspondence between them, and between his secretary, Andrew Todd, and M. de Richebourg, was still proceeding in 1791, when the French Revolution put an end to all such things.

The success of his plan in England was no sooner assured than his position came up for

discussion. We must by no means regard Palmer as a mere sentimental reformer. Nothing could be wider of the truth. He thought he saw, in thus being of service to the public, an excellent opportunity of furthering his own fortunes. He had observed how great a fortune Allen had made by the posts being farmed to him, and although by this time the business of the Post Office was grown too huge to be let out at a rent, his acute mind, as we have seen, devised a plan that brought him little financial risk or outlay. His were the brains; the Post Office, and the contractors who horsed the coaches, took the responsibility and the risk, if any.

It was now only to be expected that he should be rewarded for his idea and for the way in which he had brought the plan into being. He was accordingly, but not until October 1786, appointed Comptroller-General, with a yearly salary of £1,500, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the net revenue in excess of £250,000; which sum represented the former Post Office revenue of £150,000 plus the £90,000 the newly-raised rates of postage had added to the year's takings.

It is not the purpose of these pages to enter into the long and pitiful story of the hatreds and jealousies that Palmer's appearance at the Post Office excited, nor does the subject in hand admit any extended study of Palmer's own character. When he went to the Post Office as Comptroller-General, he went with a determination to be unfettered in his actions, and expected to be

supreme in fact, although nominally responsible to the Postmasters-General. At this period the Post Office, which had staggered on from job to job from its very inception, and had been purged from time to time only to settle down on every occasion into a new era of corruption and theft of every degree, from the most pettifogging pilfering up to malversation of funds on a monumental scale, was riddled through and through with scandals. There had long been a succession of joint Postmasters-General from 1690, when Sir Robert Cotton and Mr. Thomas Frankland were appointed; and that double-barrelled office, although conducted by those first incumbents in an efficient and altogether praiseworthy manner, had long degenerated into a political appointment. Cotton and Frankland had been more than official figureheads. They had resided at the General Post Office, and were hard-working and conscientious servants of the public. Their successors degenerated into impracticable officers of State, who usually only took part in Post Office work to the extent of signing official documents they never read, and never actively interfered but to perpetrate some new job, or—for they commonly were violently jealous of one another—for the purpose of undoing some already existent scandal set agoing by their fellow Postmaster-General.

It was Palmer's misfortune to go to the Post Office at a time when these gilded figureheads were not perhaps more efficient, but certainly more interfering, than the generality, and, being

himself hot-headed and impatient of control, he very soon came to disagreement from them. Their suggestions he at first haughtily ignored, as in his opinion likely to injure his plans, and when those suggestions became commands, he entirely disobeyed them. The chiefs with whom he thus came into bitter conflict were at first Lords Carteret and Walsingham: the former a "job-master," as Palmer satirically styled him, of peculiar shamelessness and audacity; his colleague a man of probity, but with something of the formal prig in his constitution that irritated Palmer at last beyond endurance. Walsingham made a point of investigating everything. He may not have been a better man of business than Palmer, but he was a man of orderly methods, which Palmer was not. Palmer did things well, but in an unbusinesslike way; Walsingham must for ever be seeking precedents, calling for vouchers, and insisting upon official etiquette. All this was very poisonous to the new Comptroller-General, who found himself largely controlled instead of controlling. Carteret, being convicted by his colleague of a job, Palmer hotly thought his own honesty questioned when careless and unreported appointments solely on his own initiative were resented by his official superior. Thus affairs continued through six years of changes, in which Postmasters-General succeeded one another and returned like the changes of a kaleidoscope. But while other Postmasters disappeared, Walsingham, the stickler for form, remained. With others Palmer might

have found some way of compromise, but with Walsingham he could not do other than carry on a struggle for mastery. The end came when that peer had for his fellow the Earl of Chesterfield, who possessed sufficient humour by himself to be amused with Palmer's frettings against authority, but in conjunction with Walsingham could only follow his lead. Annoyed beyond his own powers of control (which, to be sure, were very limited) by the action of the joint Postmasters in referring to the Treasury an affair which he conceived to be a purely Post Office matter, concerning the mileage to be paid for the Carlisle and Portpatrick mail, Palmer forthwith suddenly stopped on his own authority the Falmouth, Bristol, Portsmouth and Plymouth mail-coaches, which were all being paid for at a higher rate than his superiors thought necessary, but which they had not agreed to discontinue. Questioned about this action, that had thrown the mails in the south-west of England into utter confusion, he insolently declared that what their lordships objected to on one road was surely objectionable on another; if they preferred mail-carts to mail-coaches they could have them. A violent quarrel then blazed up. Palmer charged the Postmasters-General with deliberately and capriciously thwarting his best arrangements. He would appeal to the Prime Minister against their interference.

The Postmasters desired nothing better; but Pitt, who had the greatest confidence in Palmer, long evaded the interview they sought with him

to procure his dismissal, and when at length they did win to his presence he made it quite clear that it was not in their direction his sympathies extended. Indeed, it is quite possible that the Comptroller-General would have seen his masters out of office while he retained his own, had it not been for the extraordinary and unexplained treachery of Palmer's own friend, Charles Bonnor, whom he had provided with a splendid post at the General Post Office. This man suddenly launched a pamphlet in which he accused his benefactor of delaying the London post in order to create popular demands for reforms Palmer himself desired to introduce, reforms that would place him in a position of higher authority. The Postmasters-General received the publication of this pamphlet with a well-simulated amazement, but the suspicion that they had themselves induced Bonnor to perform the part of Judas is inevitable, and is deepened by their subsequent action. Palmer, of course, suspended Bonnor, whereupon they asked the reason, and on Palmer refusing to give an explanation that must have been wholly unnecessary in fact, if not in actual form, they reinstated the man. Nay, more, when Bonnor repaired to my lords with the news that Palmer had refused to reinstate him, and had, in fact, ordered him with threats off the premises, they consented to read and to show to Pitt the private and confidential correspondence he had brought with him, addressed by Palmer to his former friend during a series of years, and containing not



M. J. J. CO. CO. CO.

THE MAIL-COACH, 1863.

From the engraving after George Robert Robinson.

a little compromising matter, proving how Palmer had been steadily bent on asserting his own authority and on denying that of the Postmasters-General.

The whole pitiful story is at bottom an indictment of the figurehead in public life; an exposure of the hoary custom of appointing political and ornamental heads to the overlordship of executive departments really ruled by permanent officials. My lords came and went as party fortunes willed. Palmer had officially no politics; all he desired was to perfect his already successful plan. Other Postmasters-General would have been content with their figureheadship, and have danced like any other Governmental puppets to the pulling of official strings; but Palmer's overlords declined to do anything of the sort, and if they could not organise or originate, found it at least possible to meddle and veto.

Palmer, ready at most times to do anything—to travel many miles, to expend his highly nervous energies in any other way than by letter-writing, made this one irretrievable blunder of a generous-minded man. He was accustomed to unburden himself on paper to the friend who already owed everything to him—and who by natural consequence hated him for it—and by so doing was, as we perceive, in the end undone.

The Postmasters-General were the sole eventual gainers by Bonnor's incredible perfidy, for that creature, by rare poetic justice, died at last in misery and want.

When at length they succeeded in obtaining another interview with Pitt and disclosed these letters, there was, of course, an end of Palmer's official career. But it was sorely against his will that the Great Commoner left the Comptroller-General to his fate. He saw that a great deal of the animus shown against him by my lords was due to their sense of the enormity of a person of his rank withstanding not merely Postmasters-General, but Postmasters-General who were also peers of the realm. He saw, too, that a peer with the dignity of his caste offended can descend to more despicable depths to avenge himself than a mere untitled person would plumb. The pity is that even Pitt could not ignore letters written in confidence and treacherously disclosed.

But, although Palmer was left to the mercy of his enemies, who instantly dismissed him, he did not go without acknowledgment. His salary and commission had by now reached £3,000 a year, and this sum Pitt continued to him as a pension from 1792, the date of his dismissal.

Palmer was now fifty years of age, and in his prime. He naturally was not content with this settlement, and moved the whole influential world to aid him, petitioning the House of Commons, and at length securing a committee to investigate his case. Sheridan, moving the appointment of this body, urged Palmer's claims with generous eloquence. He described how the reformer had formed the plan of a mail-coach service, and had introduced it to the notice of the Government,

entering into an agreement to receive a percentage in the event of success, and not one shilling if it proved a failure. "None but an enthusiast," he declared, "could have formed such a plan; none but an enthusiast could have carried it into execution; and I am confident that no man in this country or any other could have done it but that very individual, John Palmer."

The report of this committee, recommending an increased pension or a grant, was not adopted; but in 1801

Palmer himself entered Parliament and fought his own battles. He printed and circulated among the members and



ONE OF THREE MAIL-COACH HALFPENNIES STRUCK AT BATH, 1797.

in other circles a statement of his case, and in the course of eight years expended no less a sum than £13,000 in appeals for justice—in vain, and it was left for his eldest son, Colonel Charles Palmer, who succeeded him in the representation of Bath in 1808, to at last fight the question to a victorious issue. In 1813 he secured for his father an award of £50,000, and the continuance during his life of the commission on Post Office receipts originally agreed upon.

In the meantime, Palmer had been variously

honoured. Gainsborough, his neighbour at Royal Circus, Bath, painted his portrait; Glasgow merchants, members of the Chamber of Commerce in that city, had as early as 1789 presented him with a silver loving-cup, "as an acknowledgment of the benefits resulting from his plan to the trade and commerce of this kingdom"; and in 1797 three "mail-coach halfpennies" were struck by some now unknown admirer. They bear on the obverse a mail-coach, and on the reverse an inscription to him "as a token of gratitude for benefits received" from his system. A third tribute was the painting by George Robertson, engraved by James Fittler, and inscribed, curiously, to him as Comptroller-General, in 1803, eleven years after he had ceased to hold that position. He also received the freedom of eighteen cities and towns in recognition of his public services, was Mayor of Bath in 1796 and 1801, and represented that city in the four Parliaments of 1801, 1802, 1806, and 1807. He died at Brighton in 1818, in his seventy-sixth year. His body was conveyed to Bath and laid in the Abbey Church; but no monument marks the spot, and it is only recently that his residence at Royal Circus, and his birthplace in his native city, have been identified to the wayfarer by inscribed tablets.

The very earliest mail-coaches were ill made, and were continually breaking down. Although the coaches themselves were supplied by the contractors, and the Post Office was not concerned



J. Palmer

JOHN PALMER IN HIS 75TH YEAR.

From an sketch by the Hon. Matthew Jones.

in their cost, it was very closely interested in their efficiency; and so, early in 1787, Palmer had already represented to the contractors that the mails must be conveyed by more reliable coaches.

“The Comptroller-General,” he wrote to one contractor, “has to complain not only of the quality of the horses employed on the Bristol Mail, but as well of their harness and the accoutrements in use, whose defects have several times delayed the Bath and Bristol and London letters, and have even led to the conveyance being overset, to the imminent peril of the passengers. Instructions have been issued by the Comptroller for new sets of harness to be supplied to the several coaches in use on this road, for which accounts will be sent you by the harness-makers. Mr. Palmer has also under consideration, for the contractors’ use, a new-invented coach.”

This was a truly imperial way of remedying gross dereliction on the contractors’ part, but it had its effect in this and other instances, for it may be presumed that the harness-makers thus officially selected to replace the contractors’ ancient assortments of worm-eaten leather and cord were not the cheapest in the trade, and that those contractors very soon awoke to the fact that it would be more economical in future to provide new harness of their own free will, and from their own harness-makers, than under compulsion.

In respect of the type of coaches, as well as of their equipment in minor details, Palmer sternly

resolved to impose thorough efficiency. As he was very well assured that their defects arose from the cheese-paring policy of the contractors themselves, he decided that the Post Office must have a voice in the selection of the coaches, and, having discovered what he considered a suitable build, made it a condition of the service that it should be used. This officially-approved new type was a "patent coach" by one Besant. The contractors had no choice in the matter. Palmer, the autocrat, had seen that Besant's coaches were good, and willed it that they should use none others, and so to that fortunate patentee they were obliged to resort. He entered into partnership with Vidler, a practical coachbuilder; and thus at Millbank, Westminster, was established that mail-coach manufactory which for forty years supplied the mail-coaches to the mail-contractors. Besant and Vidler's terms were twopence-halfpenny a double mile. For this price the coaches were hired out to the contractors and kept in repair. The practice was for Vidler's men to take over the mail-coaches after they had entered the General Post Office in the morning, on the completion of their up journeys, and to drive them to Millbank, where they were cleaned and greased, and delivered to the various contractors' coach-yards in the afternoon.

On December 2nd, 1791, Besant died. He was, we are told, "an honest, worthy man, and the mechanical world sustains a great loss by his death. His ingenuity was in various instances

sanctioned by the Society of Arts, many of whose premiums were awarded to him."

However that may have been, and although to Palmer the patent coach of Besant may have seemed altogether admirable, there were many who condemned it and its patent springs. It is apparently one of this type that is pictured by Dalgety in his print of St. George's Circus, dated 1797. It is curious and interesting, as showing a transition between the old type of coach and a style yet to come. The fore boot is of the old detached type, but the wickerwork basket behind is discarded, and a hind boot may be observed, framed to the body. The coach is hung very high, and suspended at the back from iron or steel arms of the pump-handle kind. This seems to be the type criticised so severely by Matthew Boulton, himself an engineer, in 1798, when, describing a mail-coach trip from London to Exeter, he roundly condemned the patent springs:—

"I had the most disagreeable journey I ever experienced the night after I left you, owing to the new improved patent coach, a vehicle loaded with iron trappings and the greatest complication of unmechanical contrivances jumbled together, that I have ever witnessed. The coach swings sideways, with a sickly sway, without any vertical spring; the point of suspense bearing upon an arch called a spring, though it is nothing of the sort. The severity of the jolting occasioned me such disorder that I was obliged to stop at Axminster and go to bed very ill. However, I

was able to proceed next day in a post-chaise. The landlady in the 'London Inn' at Exeter assured me that the passengers who arrived every night were in general so ill that they were obliged to go supperless to bed; and unless they go back to the old-fashioned coach, hung a little lower, the mail-coaches will lose all their custom."

Some debated points respecting the early mails are cleared up in a series of replies by Palmer to questions put by the French Post Office in 1791, respecting the English mail-coach system. "What," asks M. de Richebourg, "is a Mail-coach?" and among other details we learn that "it is constructed to carry four Inside Passengers only, and One Outside Passenger, who rides with the Coachman." Here we perceive the beginning of the outsides.

Then the question is asked: "When there are no Travellers on the Mail-coaches, do they put-to the same number of Horses as when there are?" To this the answer was: "They are all drove with four Horses, sometimes, in Snow and very bad weather, with Six;—never less than four, whether they have Passengers or not." This disposes of the statements made that the early mails were two-horsed.

CHAPTER VII

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY : 1800—1824

THE period at which this chapter begins is that when outside passengers were first enabled to ride on the roofs of coaches without incurring the imminent hazard of being thrown off whenever their vigilance and their anxious grip were relaxed. It was about 1800 that fore and hind boots, framed to the body of the coach, became general, thus affording foothold to the outsides. Mail-coaches were not the cause of this change, for they originally carried no passengers on the roof.

We cannot fix the exact date of this improvement, and may suppose that, in common with every other innovation, it was gradual, and only introduced when new coaches became necessary on the various routes. The immediate result was to democratise coach-travelling. Exclusive insides, who once with disgust observed the occasional soldier or sailor dangling his legs in the windows, now were obliged to put up with a set of cheap travellers who, if they did no longer so dangle their common legs, being provided with seats and footholds, were always to be found on the roof, laughing and talking loudly, enjoying themselves in the elementary and vociferous way only

possible to low persons, and disturbing the genteel reflections of the insides. Let us pity the sorrows of those superior travellers, unwillingly conscious of those stamping, noisy, low-down creatures on the roof!

The revulsion of those sensitive persons led to the establishment of a superior class of coach, carrying insides only; and accordingly, we find the original improvement of seats on the roof bringing far-reaching consequences in its train. While democratising coaches, it at the same time necessitated another class, and thus directly brought about a numerical increase. The exclusive were thus enabled to keep their exclusiveness by going in such conveyances as that announced in the advertising columns of the high-class papers:—

FOR PORTSMOUTH.

*A New Carriage on Springs,
called*

THE LAND FRIGATE,

Sets out from the *Bell Savage*, Ludgate Hill, to the *Red Lyon* at Portsmouth, every Tuesday and Saturday, at 6 a.m. Fare, 15s. each Passenger. Ladies and Gentlemen are requested to Observe that the Frigate is elegantly sashed all round, and in order to preserve the gentility and respectability of the vehicle, no outside passengers are carried.

The period now under consideration was in other ways a very great and progressive one. In



MRS. BUNDLE IN A RAGE; OR, TOO LATE FOR THE STAGE.

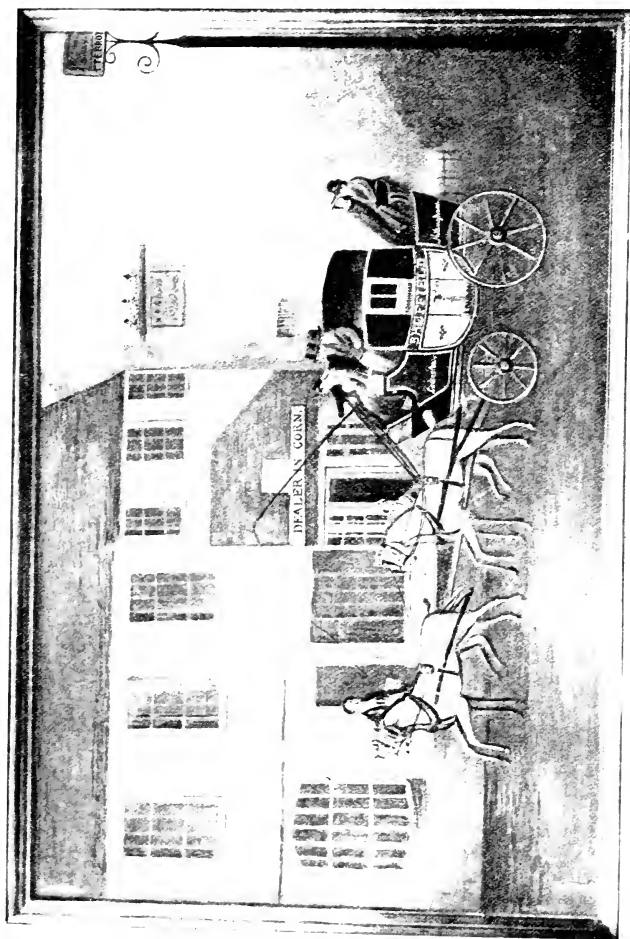
After Rowlandson, 1809.

this space of twenty-five years were included the two most significant advances in the whole history of the road—the introduction about 1805 of springs under the driving-box, and the shortening of the stages. Without either of them, the acceleration that resulted in the Golden Age of coaching, beginning in 1825, would have been impossible.

The placing of springs under the driving-box was due to the suggestion of John Warde, earliest of the coaching amateurs, who had been taught the art of driving a stage-coach by Jack Bailey, a famed coachman on the old “Prince of Wales,” between London and Birmingham. He had found the jolting received directly from the axle an intolerable infliction on a long drive, and urged coach-proprietors to provide springs. Said “Mr. Wilkins of the ‘Balloon’”—a character in Nimrod’s *Life of a Sportsman*—“they do say they are going to put the boxes of all stage-coaches on springs, but Heaven knows when that will be—not in my time, I fear. Our people say it won’t do; we shall go to sleep on them. No danger of a man doing that now, even if he should be a bit overtaken with drink.” Under these circumstances there was, as Mr. Wilkins went on to show, “a great deal of *hart* in sitting on a coach-box,” as well as driving four horses. “Your body must go with the swing of the box, and let your lines (loins, he meant) be as lissom as you can. It would kill a man in a week to drive as far as I do, if he did not do as I say.”

When it became clear to coach-proprietors that a coachman could drive a longer distance when his body was not racked so intolerably, they provided springs, and risked the remote chance of coachmen going to sleep on the box.

Another reform, humane to the horses and directly productive of increased speed and efficiency on the road, was the introduction of shorter stages. From those almost incredible times when a coach went from end to end of a long trip and returned with the same team, to those when the stages were twenty miles long constituted, no doubt, a great advance; but that was by this time no longer sufficient. The mail stages, as we have seen, rarely at the earliest times exceeded ten miles, and were often much less. The mails also travelled at night, a thing the stage-coaches did not in the old times dare attempt. In the early days of Pennant, and other chroniclers contemporary with him, the coaches inned every evening. None dared travel when the sun had set and darkness brooded over the land, for there were not only the highwaymen to be feared—and they still continued to increase—but the badness of the roads had constituted a danger even more dreaded. Now, however, roads—thanks to Post Office insistence—were greatly improved; and if the mails could go through the darkness, why not also the stages? Coincident with these things, great minds perceived that by changing horses every ten miles or so, and coachmen at intervals, a coach might, in the first place, be made to go



THE SHEFFIELD COACH, ABOUT 1827.

From a contemporary painting.

much faster, and secondly, might put into twenty-four hours of continuous running what had formerly been the work of three days. It is obviously easy to go over a hundred miles in the twenty-four hours even if you only go five miles in every hour. These great truths once perceived and acted upon, the coaching world was revolutionised.

No longer did coaching announcements propose to perform journeys in so many hours *if the roads were good*. They boldly promised that they would complete their course by a certain time, and altogether disregarded contingencies. By this time the "God-permits" had also become things of the past, and no proprietor was so old-fashioned as to announce that his coach would set out or arrive, "God permitting," as aforetime had been the cautious or pious proviso. They now "started" instead of "setting out," and arrived, as an irreverent wag observed, "God willing, or not."

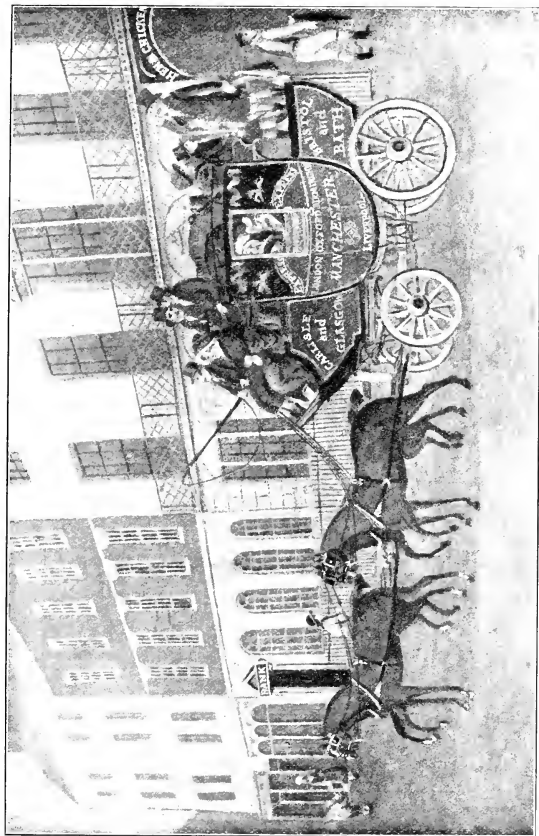
In fine, the world was made to go according to time-tables, and much faster than of old. Coaches actually, as an ordinary everyday thing, went at a quicker pace than an able-bodied man could walk, and it was no longer possible for a weary traveller when offered a lift, to decline with the *bonâ-fide* excuse that he was in a hurry; and so, continuing afoot, to arrive before the coach. Fielding shows us Parson Adams outwalking the coach, about 1715; but in this era the passengers just too late for the stage could by no means hope to catch it

up. Why, it commonly went at eight miles an hour, and often nine! Thus we see Rowlandson's anxious travellers, unable to attract the attention of the coach in front of them and equally unable to overtake it, left lamenting.

This, too, was the age of increased competition, when a continuous smartening-up alone kept some of the old-stagers going. Thus, in 1805, when three coaches left London every day for Sheffield, the quickest took over thirty hours. In 1821 it left the "Angel," Angel Street, St. Martin's-le-Grand, at 3.30 p.m., and arrived at Sheffield at 8 the next evening,—163 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles in 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours, or at the rate of 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles an hour, including stops. In 1824 it started an hour later and arrived at the same hour as before; and in 1827 was expedited by another half-hour. That was very poor travelling, and it is not surprising that after 1827 it is heard of no more. More strenuous rivals usurped the route.

Here we see that coach drawn up in front of a wayside hostelry,—the "Bull's Head"—at some unnamed spot. Let us not criticise the drawing of it too narrowly, for the painting whence this illustration was engraved was the work of the coachman, Alfred Elliot. He was coachman first, and artist afterwards.

Another result of competition was the gorgeous livery a coach on a hotly contested route would assume, and the number of places it would pretend to serve. In the illustration of the "Express" London and Birmingham coach—represented in



THE "BIRMINGHAM EXPRESS" LEAVING THE "HEN AND CHICKENS."

From a contemporary painting.

the act of leaving the "Hen and Chickens," New Street, Birmingham, and reproduced from a curious contemporary painting executed on sheet tin—an extraordinary number of place-names are seen; some those of towns this coach could not possibly have served. The explanation is that the "Express" made connections with other routes and booked passengers for them, whom they set down at ascertained points to wait for the connecting coach. This in itself, an early attempt at the through booking and junction system obtaining on railways, is evidence of the progress made towards exact time-keeping in this era.

De Quincey, as a mail-passenger, has a scornful passage reflecting upon the gold and colour that adorned these stage-coaches, which, being furiously competitive, could not afford to be quiet and plain, like the mails. "A tawdry thing from Birmingham," was his verdict upon the "Tally-Ho" or "Highflyer," that overtook the Holyhead Mail between Shrewsbury and Oswestry. "All flaunting with green and gold," it came up alongside. "What a contrast with our royal simplicity of form and colour is this plebeian wretch, with as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from the tombs of Luxor!" Precisely the same things might be said of omnibuses in our own days.

CHAPTER VIII

COACH LEGISLATION

“THE law,” said Mr. Bumble, “is a hass!” and scarcely ever has it appeared more asinine than in its dealings with the roads and road-traffic. Legislative traffic restrictions were very early introduced, originally on behalf of the highways; and not until the coaching age was well advanced did it appear necessary to intervene with enactments protecting the passengers as well as the road surface. There was perhaps no necessity to legislate against reckless driving in the early days of coaching; for, with the singularly bad state of the roads, the clumsy build of the original vehicles, and the exhaustion of the teams that drew them great distances without a change, it would have passed the wit of man to be a charioteer with the dashing methods attributed to Jehu, that Biblical hero, the son of Nimshi, who, we are told, “drove furiously.”

The first restrictions to be put in force were those levelled against the heavy road-traffic of the time of James I. By them, four-wheeled carts and waggons were, in 1622, absolutely prohibited, and loads above 20 cwt. forbidden: “No

carrier or other person whatsoever shall travel with any wain, cart, or carriage with more than two wheels, nor above the weight of twenty hundred, nor shall draw any wain, cart, or carriage with more than five horses at once." This was confirmed in 1629. It seems an arbitrary and merely freakish act, thus to interfere with the traffic of the roads; but we must remember what those roads were like, and consider that our ancestors were not irrational puppets, but living, breathing, and reasoning men, whose doings, when considered in relation with the times, the limitations that obscured their view, and the disabilities that surrounded them, were eminently logical. It is not easy to be wiser than one's generation, and those who are have generally been accounted geniuses by later ages and madmen by their contemporaries. Even when ideas are of the enlightened kind, they are not readily to be applied when greatly in advance of their era; for stubborn facts, difficult to remove or improve away, commonly delay the practical application of the most brilliant theories. If a seventeenth-century MacAdam had arisen to preach the gospel of good roads, instead of repressive regulations for bad ones, he would still have had to overcome the difficulty of finding road-metal in districts far removed from stone; and how he would or could have surmounted that impediment when all roads were bad and the transport of materials from a distance expensive and tedious, we will leave the reader to determine.

To look upon our forbears, therefore, as though they were strange creatures whose movements were not governed by as much common sense as our own would be absurd.

The reason for the regulations proclaimed in 1622 and again in 1629 was set forth in the statement that the four-wheeled waggons used up to that time had, with their excessive burdens, so galled the highways and the very foundations of bridges that they had become common nuisances.

The carriers and drovers and their kind were, in 1627, forbidden to travel on Sunday, under a penalty of 20s. By the terms of this Act, which began by stating that "the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday," was "much broken and profaned by carriers, waggoners, carters, wainmen, butchers, and drovers of cattle, to the great dishonour of God and reproach of religion," any of these persons travelling or causing their servants to travel or come to their inns on Sundays could be convicted on the evidence of witnesses, or on their own confession, at any time up to six months after the commission of the offence, and the magistrates could at their discretion award one-third of the penalty to the informer and two-thirds to the poor of the parish. Thus early did the informer, who was in later years to play so important a part, come upon the scene. The notion of a conscious-stricken carrier or drover confessing to the heinous crime of travelling on Sunday is amusing.

The next intervention was that of the Sunday Trading Act of 1676, a Puritanical measure whose

enactment in the licentious reign of Charles II. is still the wonder of students of social history. Had it been a measure originating with the Commonwealth, its appearance in the statute book could be readily explained, but, as matters stand, we are reduced to assuming that, although King, Court and Society might be vicious, yet Parliament, and England as a whole, were still deeply tinged with strict Sabbatarian sentiments. The Act forbade the sale or exposing for sale of any wares or merchandise whatsoever on the Sabbath day. Drovers, waggoners, horse-courers, butchers and higglers were not to come to their inns on Sundays, under a penalty of 20s.; and no work, except works of necessity and charity, was to be undertaken. The service in private families and at inns was allowed, and meat might be dressed on that day, and milk cried before 9 a.m. or after 4 p.m. But plying for hire and travelling were not then considered necessary on that day, and so enjoyed no special exemption. The cooking of meat and the selling of milk only enjoyed this Sunday franchise because milk and meat are perishable. It was this consideration that, in 1690, brought about an amendment by which the crying of that exceptionally perishable fish, mackerel, was legalised on the Sabbath.

Not a wheel wagged, therefore, on Sundays in the early days of coaching, and the tradition against Sunday travel long outlasted the legal disability; so that although mail-coaches were never a Sabbatarian institution, the stage-coaches on

that day were always few while coaching lasted. The tradition was weaker on the Brighton Road than elsewhere. That was a fashionable road, and fashion has ever been irreligious, leaving the people outside its ranks to be the bulwarks of the Seventh Day. Thus we find the first Sunday coach between London and Brighton established in 1792.

The Sunday Trading Act has never been wholly repealed, and it is still possible for sour and malignant persons to intervene, under the ready cloak of religious and Sabbatarian feeling, and to lay information against shopkeepers who open on Sundays, and so cause the tobacconists, the hairdressers and newsagents, who commonly continue their business on that day, to be summoned and fined for every such offence. The Act only generally comprehended hackney-coaches, but that term included the stages, which were thus penalised until 1710, when, by the 9th of Anne, c. 23, hackney-coachmen and chairmen might ply.

It is a curious and noteworthy point about this obsolescent Act that when an information is laid the police have no optional course. They must issue a summons, while the magistrates are bound to fine offenders on their being convicted. It depends, however, upon the character and the prejudices of the bench whether the penalty may be a merely nominal one, carrying an implied disapproval of the informer's action, or the full statutory fine of 5s. and costs. We here observe

the ill which it is still possible for the common informer to work, but the great days of these gentry are gone.

Parliament, never tired of legislating for roads and vehicles, produced in course of time a strange and bewildering medley of laws, often contradictory of one another. Among these Acts, those for the regulation of waggons were the most numerous. An early curiosity of the statute book in this connection is the Act of Charles II. forbidding carters and waggoners to drive six or more horses tandem. Already, it appears, the old prohibition of four-wheeled carts or wains, in 1622 and 1629, was obsolete. Then followed an Act of William III. expressly forbidding waggon-horses being yoked in pairs; but another of the same reign withdrew this prohibition, and, in allowing pairs, limited the team to eight animals. In the succeeding reign of Anne this limit was reduced to six in pairs, except uphill, when additional horses might be yoked on. The prohibition of horses going abreast points to the extreme narrowness of the roads in many parts of the country at that time, just as its supersession by the Act permitting pairs would appear to be a result of road-widening.

To make a digest of this whole series of enactments and the clauses repealed and re-enacted would not only tax the acumen and industry of a Parliamentary lawyer, but the result would be tedious. Let us, then, pass to the Act called, in Parliamentary jargon, "24th George II., c. 43." This came into operation July 1st, 1752, and took

off one of the six horses allowed to waggons by the Parliament of Queen Anne. No carriage or waggon drawn by more than five horses, except up steep hills, was permitted to pass through any toll-gate or toll-bar, unless the sum of twenty shillings over and above the usual tolls was paid; and any person taking off any horse from such vehicle, with intent to avoid the payment of the additional toll, was, on conviction of the offence, to forfeit £5 to the informer, who was given the right to levy a distress on the offender's goods if he could not recover the penalty in any other way. At the same time, no waggon was to pass which weighed, with its contents, more than three tons; and weighing engines were to be provided by turnpike trustees, to see that the law was not infringed. This was a very determined Act, but those who drew it were very well satisfied that, considering the comparatively few roads already turnpiked, its meshes could not be made small enough to catch those offenders who constantly carried weights up to five tons upon the roads and yoked up ten or twelve horses to drag the enormous load. It was obvious that the only thing the waggoners had to do in order to evade the law was—risking the chance of finding the way impassable—to turn aside on nearing a turnpike and to make a circuit along parish roads where no toll-houses existed. Accordingly, those who framed the Act inserted what was intended to be a very alarming and altogether disabling clause. It was made an unlawful act to drive off in this manner

into adjacent roads for the purpose of avoiding toll, and a penalty was set up for so doing. This was the forfeiting of one horse (not being the shaft or thill horse) and "all his gear and accoutrements." This phrase for harness strikes one as being magnificent, and almost raises the sturdy Suffolk "Punch" or the Lincolnshire earhorse to the status of a military hero.

No enforcement of this penalty can be found, but it is not to be supposed that it was never made, although, to be sure, the clause had loopholes sufficiently wide for the traditional coach-and-six to be easily driven through. Apart from the questionable legality of forbidding common roads to traffic, it would have needed no very able lawyer to successfully defend an offender charged with being on a bye-route "with intent to defraud" the tolls. Half a dozen sufficient explanations would have been ready. The waggoner might have missed his way; it might have been his best way—and so forth.

This Act, and others of like nature, especially exempted certain classes of waggons and carts, particularly agricultural vehicles; while his Majesty's War Office and military commanders might use waggons carrying any weight they thought proper and drawn by as many horses as might be thought necessary. The law was, in fact, framed to protect the roads against traders, who were thought to be profiting greatly by the growth of manufactures and not contributing sufficiently to the upkeep of the roads which it

was thought their excessive loads did much to wear out. The Acts had force in the country generally, but London and a radius from twenty-five to thirty miles were usually excepted.

A very lengthy and severe General Turnpike Act, embodying some of the provisions already detailed, with many new ones, was that of 1766. Preambles to Acts of Parliament are generally exaggerated statements of the necessities that procured the passing of the enactments to which they sometimes afford astonishing prefaces. They are, indeed, officially so recognised, and lawyers accordingly describe them as "common form." The preamble, however, to the Act of 1766 was an exact statement of affairs, and in saying that "the laws for the general regulation of turnpike roads are very numerous and in some respects ineffectual," it merely set forth a commonplace of the time.

For a number of years before the passing of this measure, lengthy and heated controversies had arisen on the subject of waggons and roads, and as a result it was generally conceded that wheels with narrow tyres and heavy loads cut up the highways into ruts, while broad wheels so distributed the weight that they greatly minimised that evil, or even, if they were broad enough, rolled the surface into a better condition than it was in before their passing. Inventive minds, rioting with theories not perfectly tested, went to extremes and produced extraordinary waggons with heavy iron rollers instead of wheels,

which would certainly have flattened out the most rugged of roads had it been possible for horses to have moved the enormous weight. As a result of much trial, the stage-waggons of the time were constructed with wheels whose breadth ranged from six to nine inches, and such vehicles enjoyed a remission of extraordinary toll in proportion to those measurements. From 1766, then, four-wheeled waggons weighing over three tons, with wheels less than nine inches in breadth, paid 20s. over and above the ordinary toll; all over six tons, irrespective of wheels, 20s.; and two-wheeled carts over three tons, 20s.; while waggons and carts so constructed with regard to long and short axletrees to front and hind wheels that, in conjunction with the breadth of their wheels, they rolled a track of not less than sixteen inches on either side, paid only half of the ordinary toll levied upon waggons with a nine-inch breadth of wheel. These provisions may perhaps seem a little complicated, but they were a great deal more so in actual working, for their chance of being always understood and fairly applied was small when administered by country pike-keepers.

The maximum length and width of waggons was specified by this Act, which declared it to be unlawful for any but timber-waggons to be of greater breadth than four feet six inches between the axletrees, or of a greater length than nine feet from the centre of fore wheels to that of the hind ones. No broad-wheeled waggon was to be drawn by more than eight horses, or two-wheeled carts

by more than five, in pairs; and narrow-wheeled waggons were not allowed more than four. A penalty of 20s. was indicated for harnessing an extra horse, in addition to the horse being confiscated. Additional horses might be used when the roads were covered with snow or ice, and it was left to the discretion of turnpike trustees to allow extra horses on steep hills, in which cases any number up to ten might be used for four-wheeled waggons, or up to six for two-wheeled; but trustees were to carefully specify those hills on which this indulgence was granted. Steep hills, consequently, for many years afterwards were generally seen with notices beside the road, where the horses might be attached. A post at the bottom announced in large letters, "Put On," and another, at the top, "Take Off."

Narrow-wheeled waggons were not to be drawn by pairs. Drag-irons or slippers to be flat, not rounded; penalty 40s. The owner's name and place of abode were to be painted on the most conspicuous part of each waggon or cart, with the words "COMMON STAGE-WAGGON," or cart, as the case might be. It was this enactment that for many years afterwards gave their characteristic appearance to the old stage-waggons, for the most conspicuous place on them was undoubtedly the canvas tilt, which was always painted as the Act directed, in very large lettering.

The Act was lavish with its pains and penalties. For using a waggon with a false name, or without a name, 40s. was the price. The driver of any

waggon with wheels not constructed according to law, or drawn by more horses than authorised, could be imprisoned, and powers were given to any person to apprehend any driver in such cases. If a driver, on coming to a toll-gate, unharnessed any horses or unloaded any part of his load with intent to deceive or defraud the turnpike authorities, he forfeited £5; while the owner paid the same sum in cases where waggons were loaded to excess, and the driver became liable to be committed for one month to a house of correction.

Among the clauses of this and other Acts it is especially forbidden to waggoners to sit in, or drive from, their waggons. They must either walk or ride beside them. They had, indeed, generally done so, as the portrait of old Hobson, on horseback, shows us, or the pictures and narratives of old road life by contemporary artists and writers sufficiently prove; but as the Acts especially decree that waggoners were not to ride on the waggons, the reason being that from such a position they could not maintain sufficient control over their horses, some of them must have done so, and perhaps have fallen asleep and so caused accidents, just as the slumbering carters and waggoners on their way to and from Covent Garden Market do now.

It now became the turn of the coaches to attract the attention of legislators. They obtained this doubtful favour because it had just occurred to the Revenue officials that, owing to the increased number of coaches running, and the larger number

of persons resorting to them, the duty on post-horses had not grown at its accustomed rate. The remedy ready to hand was a Stamp Office duty on stage-coaches, which was accordingly introduced in 1776, and four-wheeled coaches paid £5 per annum. The Revenue "vampires," as the coach-proprietors called them, turned again to this new source of income, and in 1783 levied a duty of a halfpenny a mile run by every stage-coach. Further measures were introduced two years later, when the duties were revised, and four-wheeled and two-wheeled coaches alike paid a five-shilling annual license, and a duty of a penny a mile. From this express inclusion of two-wheeled coaches, it would seem that some vehicles of that nature had been introduced to evade the previous duty; but coaching history is silent on the subject. The duty of a penny a mile was to be paid monthly, and seven days' notice to be given of any coach being discontinued.

So far the legislature had only taken notice of coaches when new sources of revenue were being sought; but an eye was already upon their doings, an eye that had noted the increasing accidents, due to overloading, reckless driving, and a variety of other causes. It was not an official eye that thus ranged over the roads of the kingdom and marked the broken limbs and contusions of the lieges, acquired by falling from the roofs of coaches, by collisions and upsets: it was the stern gaze, indeed, of one Richard Gamon, a private member of Parliament, who in 1788, in the face of much opposition

and ridicule, brought in a Bill to regulate stage-coaches. It is sad to think that even those who travelled largely by coach, whom Mr. Gamon desired to protect, made fun of his efforts, and, when his Bill at first failed to pass, rejoiced as greatly in the prospect of a continued free trade in broken necks and legs as ever the coach-proprietors themselves could have done. Some of this wit was very cheap stuff indeed. It largely consisted of torturing Mr. Gamon's name into "Gammon," and that done, the rest was easy. A morning newspaper found it possible to write thus:—

Whene'er a loaded stage drives by
 With more than it should draw,
 We view the outside group, and cry,
 "That's contrary to law."

But all the folks who clamour thus
 Are totally mistaken,
 For Gammon's Bill did never pass,
 So coachmen saved their bacon.

Richard Gamon was a member for Winchester in five several Parliaments. He had been a commissioner for salt duties, but resigned that office to enter the House. He was created a baronet in July, 1795, and died, aged sixty-nine, April 9th, 1818. His Act was not forgotten, for in his obituary notice it is duly stated that "with him originated that useful and humane law for regulating the number of outside passengers on stage-coaches."

What with public ridicule of his original Bill

and the petition of the coach-proprietors against it, Mr. Gamon and his legislative effort had, in one way and another, a stirring time. But in the same year he saw it pass into an Act, and two years later he procured an amended and strieter statute. So ridicule does not always kill.

It therefore became law that stage-coaches were not to carry more than six passengers on the roof or more than two on the box in addition to the coachman. For every passenger in excess the coachman was liable to a penalty of 40s., and if he was proprietor, or part proprietor, this penalty was raised to £4. The amended Act very materially altered this regulation. Coaches drawn by three or more horses were allowed only one passenger on the box and four on the roof, and those with fewer than three horses, one passenger on the box and three on the roof. If the pair-horse coaches did not travel farther than twenty-five miles from London, they might carry an additional passenger on the roof. The penalty for carrying excess passengers was severe, and ingeniously contrived in order to wholly suppress the practice. It was 5s. each for every supernumerary passenger, to be paid to the toll-keeper at every turnpike gate. This was a sure method, for an excess number would be instantly detected by pike-men eager for a chance to add to their income. The penalty for fraudulently setting down a passenger near a turnpike gate, and taking him up on the other side, with intent to evade this regulation, was of a different kind, but of equal severity. It was a

term of imprisonment, of not less than fourteen days or more than a month. The names of the coach proprietors were to be painted in legible characters on the doors of all the coaches, with the exception of the mails.

One section of the Acts of 1788 and 1790 had a special significance. It forbade coachmen permitting other persons to drive, under a penalty of from 40s. to £5. The amateur whip, of whom later writers complained so bitterly, had evidently already been taking coaching lessons on the road, with disastrous results. The practice was not stopped by the Acts or the penalty, for in 1811 the prohibition was renewed, and the fine raised. It was then to be anything between £5 and £10, at the discretion of the magistrates.

Coachmen were viewed all round, as it were, and their failings separately ticked off and provided against. No coachman was to leave his box without reasonable cause or occasion, or for an unnecessary length of time. Furious driving now being physically possible, and frequently indulged in, was legislated for, together with any negligence or misconduct resulting in the overturning of a coach or the endangering of passengers. A guard of a stage-coach who should fire off his piece unnecessarily, or for other than defensive purposes, on the road or in any town, forfeited 20s., a penalty enlarged to £5 in 1811, and including mail-guards.

The Act of 1806, introducing itself by stating that previous Acts were ineffectual and insufficient, started off by repealing the provisions of the older

ones, allowing only six outsides for four-horse coaches. They might now carry twelve outsides in summer and ten in winter, including the guard, but exclusive of coachman. In 1811 the number was reduced to ten throughout the year. The positions of the outsides were specified—one passenger on the box with the coachman, three in front of the roof, the remainder behind. Coaches with only two or three horses now carried five outsides, exclusive of the coachman; but “all stages called long coaches, or double-bodied coaches” might carry eight outsides, exclusive of coachman, but including the guard. Children in arms or under seven years of age were not to be counted, unless there were more than one, when two were to be counted as one passenger, and so on.

A curious section, bearing upon and corroborating what De Quincey and others have written upon the disdain and contempt of the insides for the outsides, is that which forbade any outside passenger to go inside or to remain inside without the consent of one at least among those already within; and when that permission was granted, the outsider was to be placed next the consenting passenger.

The height to which luggage might be piled on the roof of a coach was also carefully set forth. From March 1st, 1811, it became unlawful for any driver, owner or proprietor to permit luggage, or indeed any person, on the roof of a coach the top of which was more than 8 ft. 9 in. from the

ground, or whose gauge was less than 4 ft. 6 in. Coaches must then have been of an extraordinary height to need such a clause as this. The penalty for infringing it was £5. Luggage on ordinary stage-coaches was not to exceed 2 ft. in height, or three-horsed coaches, 18 in., with a penalty of £5 for every inch in excess. Luggage might be carried to a greater height if it was not, in all, more than 10 ft 9 in. from the ground. Turnpike keepers and others were given powers to have the luggage measured, and passengers themselves might see that it was done; and drivers refusing such measurements to be taken were to be fined, on conviction, 50s. Passengers, too, came in for their share. No passenger was to sit on the luggage, or the place reserved for it, under the like penalty of 50s.

Intoxicated coachmen came in for a maximum £10 penalty, or the alternative of a term of imprisonment not less than three months or not exceeding six; insulting coachmen, or others exacting more than the proper fare, or endangering passengers' lives, a maximum of 40s., or imprisonment of three days to one month. Mail-coach drivers, being more responsible officials, were awarded the heavier of the above penalties for any among a variety of possible offences—such as loitering, or hindering the conduct of his Majesty's mails to the next stage, or wilfully misspending or losing time, so that the mails did not travel at the rates of speed specified by the Postmaster-General.

Licences were to specify the number of persons inside and out the coaches were authorised to carry; and any running without a licence, or carrying passengers in excess, were to be fined £10 for each passenger or additional passenger, or double if the driver were also owner or part-owner. If the offending coachman could be proved to have carried the additional passengers without the knowledge of the proprietors, and if the proprietors derived no profit from it, they escaped the penalty, which then had to be borne by the coachman, with the alternative of imprisonment.

These regulations were notoriously broken with impunity every day in the year. Passengers sat on the luggage if they felt so inclined; coachmen got drunk, drove furiously, or allowed the deadly amateur to drive; luggage was stacked to alpine heights; guards discharged their blunderbusses everywhere from sheer wantonness or on joyful occasions; passengers were carried to excess; and, indeed, every provision of every Act was flagrantly violated, generally of malice aforethought, but not seldom from very ignorance and the sheer inability of coach-proprietors and the others concerned to keep themselves fully informed on all points. The waggoners especially found it difficult, with the best will in the world, to keep the law; and even the pikemen at the turnpike gates, who were the sworn enemies of all the users of the roads, but who were bound to comply with certain regulations, often heedlessly omitted the formulæ as by law established, and became liable to penalties.

This lengthy and confusing series of Acts brought into existence that contemptible parasite, the Professional Informer. By those provisions, which awarded sometimes the whole penalty, and in other cases the half or two-thirds, or merely one-third, at the discretion of the magistrates, to those persons who would discover these infringements of the law to the authorities, the Sneak became an institution, wholly supported by the involuntary contributions of the coaching world. Informers swarmed on every road, and their operations were conducted with a legal astuteness and business acumen that would have made the fortunes of these gentry if they had directed their talents into more reputable channels. For although Parliament had created the Informer, it is not to be thought that he was liked by any class. He was held to be a necessary evil, as from fear of him offenders might be made to mend their ways, and so the roads be preserved. The end, it was thought, justified the means employed. No one knew the Acts of Parliament through and through, inside out and up and down, as this detested class. Informers sometimes worked singly; at others they constituted themselves into firms, with offices and tame attorneys, and staffs of travelling spies, whose travelling expenses were well repaid, with a handsome profit besides, by the materials for informations which they had obtained on the roads. Indeed, it was stated that on certain routes the waggons paid annual sums to the informers, as a kind of quit-rent against prosecutions; for,

as an informer in a confidential moment was heard to declare, the Acts were so many and so conflicting that it was impossible to travel without a breach of the law.

The greatest of all informers was Byers, who combined the occupation with that of a small shopkeeper in the outskirts of London. The acts of Byers may be traced through many old files of newspapers, and even *then* you shall not discover his Christian name; for in those records it is generally "Byers again!" or "Byers appeared before So-and-so charging What's-his-name." Thus do we speak of the great in war, in science, in literature; for custom tells only of a Wellington, a Newton, or a Thackeray. We know their titles and Christian names, but suppress them to gain a grand and monumental simplicity. To reduce the argument to a logical conclusion, Byers was a greater than these, for we do not even know his baptismal cognomen. He is a classic now, for Barham accorded him the honour of an allusion and an explanatory note in one of the *Ingoldsby Legends*—the "Lay of St. Nicholas," where we read:—

The Accusing Byers "flew up to Heaven's Chancery,"
Blushing like scarlet with shame and concern.

The note describes him as "The Prince of Peripatetic Informers, and terror of Stage Coachmen, when such things were. Alack! alack! the Railroads have ruined his 'vested interest.'" Time has so dimmed the meaning of both the reference

and the explanation that modern commentators are generally puzzled by both. What he was we have stated; what became of him when railways ruined coaching and his business at once, we do not know. Some few details of his career have survived. He originally seems to have been in the employ of one Johnson, an informer, in 1824, when he obtained convictions against coachmen at Dover and Canterbury, and on the Brighton Road; but by the summer of the next year he had gone into the business for himself, and presently became the Napoleon of the profession. 1825 was a busy year with him. In August he summoned a coach-proprietor named Selby for that "on the 28th day of July he did suffer and permit a stage-coach belonging to him, and drawn by two horses only, to carry more than the usual number of passengers on the roof." Moreover, he was summoned again for not having his name painted on the door of the coach. After much cross-swearing and discussion, the Brighton bench fined the coach-proprietor £5 and 16s. costs.

In Bath, in the November of the same year, Byers laid so many as thirty-four informations. The penalties to which the unfortunate coach-proprietors and others were liable in this prodigious batch were estimated at £500, but the newspaper reports of that time do not tell us the total of the fines actually inflicted, so we are unable to form any idea of the profits realised by the enterprising Byers in this Western raid. The petty and tyrannical nature of the prosecutions

may be gathered from one instance before the Bathforum (for such was the style and title of the local bench) magistrates. A farmer was summoned for not having his Christian name and surname painted on the *right* or off-side of his waggon, and mulcted in 10s. and costs, while another for the same mistake in the position was fined 5s. and costs; the magistrates, in addition, holding that the strict letter of the law required not only the name of the owner and that of the town, but the street as well.

A great sheaf of informations was laid by him at Brighton in July 1827. William Blunden, proprietor of a stage-van, was summoned—not for carrying more passengers than he should, but for not having painted on his conveyance the number of passengers his licence entitled him to carry. A £5 fine was the result, of which Byers was awarded 50s. and costs. In another of his cases on this occasion the informer did not come off victorious. It was not his master-mind that had prepared the cases, but that of one of his hirelings, Aaron Rolland, and there was a fatal flaw in this particular one. It was a summons against Snow, the Brighton proprietor, for carrying passengers in excess; but, unfortunately for the prosecution, the coach was not plying for hire on that occasion, and Byers suffered defeat.

In this same year Byers was arrested and imprisoned for debt, but he was soon out again and prosecuting with redoubled energy. In November William Cripps, of the firm of Cripps &

Wilkins, coach-proprietors, appeared at his instance before the Brighton magistrates, charged with permitting a name other than that of the licensees to be painted on his coach. The name was that of the afterwards celebrated Henry Stevenson, of the "Age." It was placed there with an idea of securing patronage for the coach, and it was contended in court that forty names might so be painted on the panel of the coach, if the proprietors liked. But the bench held otherwise, and imposed two mitigated penalties of 50s. each with costs, it being the first offence.

In August 1830, Byers procured three fines of £10 each and costs in an overloading case against Francis Vickers. In this affair the methods of himself and his spies were disclosed, for it appeared that the spy was watching the coaches from the upstairs window of a public-house. But already, for some time past, one of Byers' men had set up for himself as a coachman's lawyer, and, coming from the opposition camp, of course brought with him a great deal of special knowledge. From this time Byers' business waned. The early steam-carriages of 1826 had foreshadowed the end of the coaching age, and when railways came the informers' business was ruined. True, they might still make a trifle out of the surviving waggons, and it was possible, now and again, to catch a pikeman not giving a ticket when toll was paid, or not having his own name painted on his toll-board as collector when he had succeeded some other pikeman; but the penalties for these

offences were, like the offences themselves, trivial. In short, informing ceased to pay its travelling expenses.

Among the many enactments for the protection of the public was one forbidding all four horses galloping at the same time. Mail-contractors, however, finding that they could not maintain the speed necessary to fulfil their contracts without galloping, generally secured a certain number of exceptionally fast trotters, for which they paid high prices, in order to have one in every team. Such an one was pretty widely known down the road as "the Parliamentary horse." Proprietors of fast day coaches, however, infringed this provision of the Act every day, as indeed every Act was continually infringed.

The last years of coaching were marked by a reduction in the duties on stage-carriages, long urged by the coaching interest, and introduced by the Act of August 24th, 1839. It was a grudging reduction, and came too late to be of much relief to an oppressed industry. Up to that date the mileage duty on passengers was on the graduated scale of $1d.$ a mile if licensed to carry four; $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ if licensed for six; $2d.$ for nine; $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ for twelve; $3d.$ for fifteen; and $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ for eighteen; whether running fully loaded or not. It was always open for proprietors to license for more or less, according to the season or their own requirements; but, on the other hand, if in view of a slack season they licensed for a small number and then on one of their journeys

took up additional passengers, they were liable, on conviction, to a heavy penalty. In addition, there was a duty of $1d.$ a mile on the coach itself. The concession of 1839 reduced this impost to a halfpenny a mile, and provided a graduated passenger duty by which a coach licensed for not more than six persons paid $1d.$ a mile; up to ten, $1\frac{1}{2}d.$; not more than thirteen, $2d.$; not more than sixteen, $2\frac{1}{2}d.$, and so on to the impossible number of twenty-two, when the license would be $3\frac{1}{2}d.$

According to a return made for 1838, the mileage duty paid on stage-coaches in England for that year was £166,625, showing a total mileage for those twelve months of 40,530,000. The Government thus apparently sacrificed £83,312 10s. in reducing the mileage duty by one-half; but the greatness of the sacrifice was more apparent than real, for already railways had begun and coaches were being discontinued on every hand, while a small railway passenger duty of one-eighth of a penny a mile made up for its smallness by the increase in travelling that railways brought.

Still later, the passenger duty on coaches was further reduced, and made $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ a mile on any number of passengers; while the annual stage-carriage license was reduced from £5 to £3 3s., and the licence for each coachman or guard from £1 5s. to 5s.

The harassed coach-proprietors, or those who still existed, were properly grateful for the

reduction made, for it just turned the scale in many coaching accounts, and so kept on those public conveyances where otherwise they would have been commercially impossible. The railway magnates, who had by that time become a power in the land, could afford to influence the Government in favour of these concessions, for the coaches had already been driven off the direct routes, and were no longer formidable competitors of the locomotive. They had, indeed, become merely feeders to the victorious railways.

CHAPTER IX

THE EARLY COACHMEN

WHEN stage-coachmen are mentioned, the mind at once flies to Mr. Tony Weller, a stout man with a red face and a hoarse voice proceeding from the depths of capacious shawls in which his throat is muffled. Such was the typical coachman at any time between the introduction of coaches and 1820, when a leaven of smartness and gentility began to be noticeable, and the time-honoured type to fade away.

Coachmen were generally fat for the same reason that postboys were thin: it was a necessity of their occupation. The postboys bumped their flesh away on horseback, but the coachman's sedentary occupation, and still more a tremendous capacity for drinking induced by the open-air life, caused him to accumulate fat to an immoderate degree. The typical coachman is pictured in Hood's ballad of John Day, who was

the biggest man,
Of all the coachman kind,
With back too broad to be conceived
By any narrow mind.

But while it would probably be safe to declare, without fear of contradiction, that there never was

such a thing as a fat postboy, it would be the very height of rashness to say that a lean coachman was unknown. There were many such, but the traditional coachman was a bulky person, helped up to his seat by the combined efforts of the stable-helpers; and Dickens, in picturing Tony Weller, fell in with the public humour, although already the type was become somewhat out of date.

The stage and mail coachmen were no exotics, but, like every one else, the product of their country and their times; and as those times changed, so did they. The evolution of the smart coachmen of the 'thirties can be followed, step by step, until progress, in the shape of railways, extinguished the species. The original floggers of six horses, who could only get along by dint of severely punishing those unhappy animals throughout the day, were not really coachmen in the later sense. They understood little of the art of coaching, and were merely drivers. From early morn to sundown they lashed the same horses along the rutted ways, with intervals for mending the harness—generally, according to the testimony of the time, the “rotten harness”; but those would have been wonderfully strong traces that could long have withstood the strain they were subjected to, and so they were probably not always so decayed as contemporary accounts would have us believe. Under these circumstances, and the generally hard and rough life they led, it is not to be wondered at that coachmen were originally a rough and brutal class of men. They cannot be paralleled nowadays.



"MY DEAR, YOU'RE A PLUMPER"; COACHMAN AND BARMAID.

After Rowlandson.

and the difference between them and the later ornaments of the box can only be understood by comparing a modern van-driver with the coachman of an aristocratic carriage—and then we should be doing injustice to the van-man.

As coaching progressed and twenty-mile stages replaced the day-long toil of the horses, not only did the six-horse give place to four-horse teams, but coachmen improved. There was need for such improvement, and all the science and resource of which they were capable were put to the proof. Mud, stones, ruts, sandy places to plough through, steep hills to lash his horses up to, and dangerous descents to hold them in, were the commonplaces of the coachman's career up to the dawning of the nineteenth century. The coaches, too, were heavy and clumsy, and harness now really was rotten, and had every now and again to be mended while the passengers waited with what patience they could command. Happily, time was not "of the essence of the contract," as the lawyers say, and half a day late was no matter at that period. But all these difficulties made the coachman of those times an expert in many things. He was not of that later kind, finicking in manner and dandies upon the box, but a great, weather-beaten, bluff and gruff creature, mummified in wraps; an expert in getting the last ounce out of his cattle, and ready with his whip, not always because he was brutal by nature, but because he had to thrash the wretched animals to get his coach along at all. The coachmen of those days wore their whips out

frequently, and a usual detail of their equipment was the dozen or more of whipcord points in the button-hole, ready to be spliced on—an operation they could perform with ease and efficiency with their teeth while driving. When even the double-thonged whip failed to rouse the poor brutes to super-equine exertions, the “apprentice”—a kind of cat o’ nine tails—was brought into use, and the wheelers thrashed with it. This engine of torture was in later years known familiarly as the “short Tommy,” and was kept in reserve on many provincial coaches. Among those familiar with coaching in its last years, some have asserted the use of this instrument up to the time when coaches themselves disappeared, and others deny it. Both were right and both wrong: on some roads it was on occasion brought forth, while on others it was unknown.

There were no smart coachmen before the introduction of mail-coaches. Before coaches carried the mails and the drivers became, in a sense, officials and persons of importance, wreathed around with a vague atmosphere of authority, your average driver took no sort of pride in himself. Nor, supposing the existence of one who fared the roads in smart attire, could he for long have kept so gay and debonair an appearance. The meagreness and uncertainty of his livelihood forbade it, and if those factors had been eliminated, there still remained the unutterable badness of the roads to discourage him, together with the longer spells of driving that these earlier men knew, which wearied them and rendered them careless

of details. Thus the stage-drivers of the era that preceded the classic age of the road wore clumsy hay-bands round their legs to protect them from the cold, and, together with their many layers of clothing, their top-boots encrusted with the mud of a month's journeys, and their general air of untidiness, were figures of fun, in sharp contrast with their brethren of a later day, who were certain of their employment, of their liberal and frequent tips, of good roads exceedingly well kept, and of their coaches and cattle being maintained in the pink of condition by a small army of stable-hands and helpers. The poor old fellows of a bygone age wore perhaps nothing but fold upon fold of "comforters" round their necks, while their linen did not bear inspection. The flower of the coaching age, on the other hand—the coachmen of the first quarter of the nineteenth century—wore the gayest and the neatest neckties as a finish to a neat and striking professional costume. They were artists alike in the management of their horses and in the folding of a tie. Never a journey but they had a posy in their buttonhole, and never an occasion when they were not spotlessly clean, in linen, top-boots, and costume generally. It was an unmistakable costume, and one familiar to us nowadays in its revival by modern coaching enthusiasts. Box-cloth coats, fearfully and wonderfully stitched in five or six rows, and decorated with buttons of an enormous size, together with white beaver hats, were the most outstanding items of this marvellous costume.

A reminiscient traveller, writing in 1831, lets some light into dark places. He said he was old enough to remember a certain West-country coach, which he took to be representative of others at that period. It always took ten, and sometimes twelve hours to do fifty-seven miles. "Now," he said, marvelling at the progress of the age, "it takes only six hours." Joe Emmens, the driver of this slow coach, was famous for never at any time turning away a would-be passenger, no matter how crowded his conveyance, which was often observed to be carrying seventeen out and nine in, with parcels and hampers tied to and suspended from all kinds of hazardous places. This did not, we sorrowfully acknowledge, argue zeal for his employers' interests, but only an inordinate appetite for those "short fares" which by ancient use and wont the coachman pocketed. The custom was as old as that of "tipping."

Tipping the coachman, a practice already mentioned, was early introduced. It originated, there can scarce be any reasonable doubt, with the very first stage-coach journey, and flourished exceedingly to the very last, when the guard as well came in for his share. The custom was originally known as "capping," from the coachman coming with hat or cap in hand for these contributions: a humble and beggarly method to which the later artists of the coachbox were wholly strangers. The later generation, it is true, removed their hats as a matter of courtesy when they "left you here," but their fee was no longer chucked negligently

into that headgear, as of old, but discreetly inserted into an extended palm, and received as of right.

The earliest stages of tipping showed the practice in a very logical and commonsense light, for although the later coachmen could be very surly and disobliging if they were not "remembered," they had not a tithe of those opportunities of being actively offensive which the older race of drivers enjoyed. The later generations of coachmen were more directly responsible. They worked to a timetable, on good roads, with fine cattle and perfect coaches; the older men stopped when and where they liked, and altogether had the comfort or discomfort of their passengers very largely in their hands. Thus they were to be conciliated and kept in good humour by a reasonable expectancy of vails. We first hear of tipping in 1665, in *The Committee*, Sir Robert Howard's comedy, where the vulgar committeeman's wife gives Toby, the coachman, something less than he expected. "By my whip," he says aside, "'tis a groat of more than ordinary thinness. Plague on this new gentry," he adds, with a sneer, "how liberal they are!"

"Tipping" grew and flourished extravagantly in after ages. The wealthy and the free-handed set the standard then, as they do now in these otherwise altered times, with the result that those who could not afford the outlay in which the richer indulged were generally insulted or neglected.

It was not often that the coachmen were so outspoken as the hero of the following tale. "What do you expect?" asked a passenger new to the road of him when collecting the customary tips at the end of his stage. That ornament of the box was blunt and frank: "Gents generally gives me a shilling; fools with more money than brains gives me half a crown," he said. What, in that case, could the passenger do but proclaim himself, in the amount of his gratuity, a "gent" with a superfluity of brains over cash, even though the coachman-philosopher was a loser to the extent of one-and-sixpence?

CHAPTER X

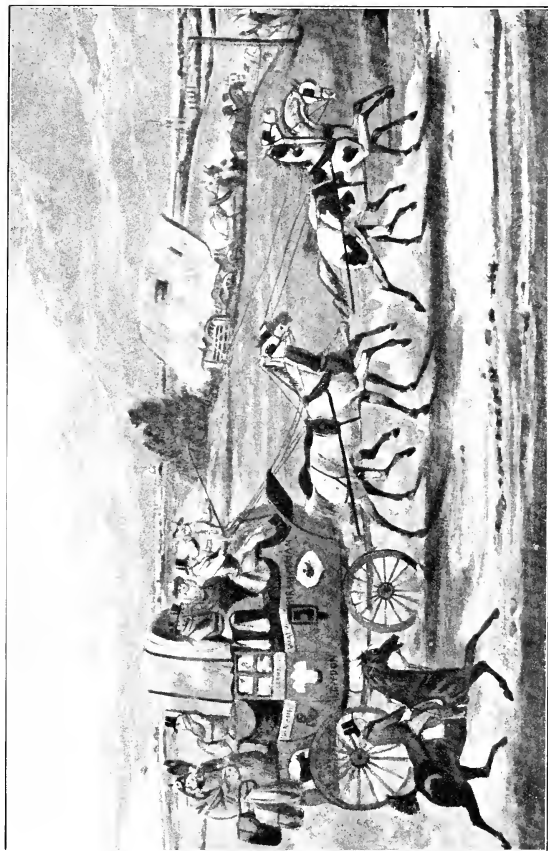
THE LATER COACHMEN

THE smart coachmen came into existence with short stages and the fast day-coaches, about 1824. They did not burst suddenly upon an astonished world—were not, like those insect-wonders, chrysalids in the morning and butterflies in the afternoon—but developed by insensible degrees. The first incentive to this improvement was, doubtless, that acquaintance with the moneyed sporting world which began when the country gentlemen ceased to travel horseback and took to going by coach, and thence, from passive passengers, developed an interest in driving; sitting beside the coachman and learning from him something of what those worthies now, for the first time in their lives, began dimly to perceive was an art, and not merely an ordinary wage-earning occupation. When Jack Bailey, of the old “Prince of Wales,” who taught old John Warde, the first of the amateurs, how to drive, tutored him, he wrought a greater revolution than he knew. Acquaintance with, and tutorship of, the growing ranks of the amateurs brought a strange alteration in themselves. They taught the young sprigs of nobility coaching, and their

pupils unconsciously initiated them in new manners of thought, speech and dress. The two classes strangely reacted on one another, for while the coachmen learned to discard top-boots and took to trousers, the amateurs thought it a fine thing to file their front teeth, so that they could splice whip-points and spit like the professionals, to wear the heavy "double Benjamins," clumsy and many-caped, that were necessary for the coachmen, and to be, in fact, as thoroughly "down the road" in dress, manner and talk as though they were professionals themselves. Each exaggerated the most remarkable features of the other, so that the coachmen became caricature gentlemen, and the gentlemen the most wonderful travesties of the coachmen.

An admiring critic of coaching in its last decade enlarged with great satisfaction upon the complete dissimilarity between the modern "artists" and the "workmen" of old time. Their change of character and appearance had kept pace with the improvements in the different points of their profession. No longer did one see the dram-drinking, gin-consuming, jolly-looking rotundities of yore. Instead of those honest, wet old souls, the "ribbons" were handled by pinks of perfection, turned out at all points like gentlemen, and in character also like gentlemen, tasting nothing but their glass of sherry from end to end of a journey.

But side by side with these improvements upon the old order came what were known to our



THE OLD "PRINCE OF WALES" BIRMINGHAM COACH.

After H. Allen.

grandfathers as the "flash men," who, at the extremity of ill-assumed gentility, were probably more objectionable than the rough-and-ready old fellows of an earlier generation. The flash coachman flourished very rankly indeed at Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, and other great commercial centres. He always dressed in the extreme of fashion, and perhaps a little in advance of it. His silken stock was swathed higher up his neck, his gold (or gilded) scarf-pin was bigger, his waistcoat had a more alarming pattern, his hat was more curly in the brim than others, and in his conversation and manners he dotted the "i's" and crossed the "t's" of his betters. He was, in fact, an unconscious caricature of those among the upper classes who took an interest in the road, and was a very loud, insufferable and offensive person, who, it was said, "had a missus at both ends," smoked a dozen real Havannahs in a hundred miles, and hardly thanked you for half a crown. Such men imposed upon many of the good commercial folks of those trading towns who were foolish enough and inexperienced enough to take cigar-smoking for superiority and overdressed insolence for the hallmark of gentility; and these fellows became, in consequence, the curse of the roads. Borrow has, in his *Romany Rye*, a very vigorous chapter on their kind, but errs in so far as he seems to consider that they, and they only, formed the "stage-coachmen of England."

"The stage-coachmen of England, at the time

of which I am speaking, considered themselves mighty fine gentry; nay, I verily believe, the most important personages of the realm, and their entertaining this high opinion of themselves can hardly be wondered at: they were low fellows, but masters at driving; driving was in fashion, and sprigs of nobility used to dress as coachmen, and imitate the slang and behaviour of the coachmen, from whom occasionally they would take lessons in driving, as they sat beside them on the box, which post of honour any sprig of nobility who happened to take a place on a coach claimed as his unquestionable right; and these sprigs would smoke cigars and drink sherry with the coachmen in bar-rooms and on the road; and when bidding them farewell would give them a guinea or a half-guinea, and shake them by the hand, so that these fellows, being low fellows, very naturally thought no small liquor of themselves, but would talk familiarly of their friends Lords So-and-so, the Honourable Misters So-and-so, and Sir Harry and Sir Charles, and be wonderfully saucy to any one who was not a lord or something of the kind; and this high opinion of themselves received daily augmentation from the servile homage paid them by the generality of the untitled male passengers, especially those on the forepart of the coach, who used to contend for the honour of sitting on the box with the coachman when no sprig was nigh to put in his claim. Oh! what servile homage these craven creatures did pay these same coach fellows, more especially this or t'other act of brutality

practised upon the weak and unoffending—upon some poor friendless woman travelling with but little money, and perhaps a brace of hungry children with her, or upon some thin and half-starved man travelling on the hind part of the coach from London to Liverpool, with only eighteen-pence in his pocket to defray his expenses on the road; for as the insolence of these knights was vast, so was their rapacity enormous; they had been so long accustomed to have crowns and half-crowns rained upon them by their admirers and flatterers that they would look at a shilling, for which many an honest labourer was happy to toil for ten hours under a broiling sun, with the utmost contempt; would blow upon it derisively, or fillip it into the air before they pocketed it; but when nothing was given them, as would occasionally happen—for how could they receive from those who had nothing? and nobody was bound to give them anything, as they had certain wages from their employers—then what a scene would ensue! Truly, the brutality and rapacious insolence of English coachmen had reached a climax; it was time that these fellows should be disenchanting, and the time—thank Heaven!—was not far distant. Let the craven dastards who used to curry favour with them, and applaud their brutality, lament their loss now that they and their vehicles have disappeared from the roads.”

Here the Borrovian fury overreaches itself, and fails to convince the reader of that brutality of

a whole class he would fain have you believe in. Were the later coachmen, indeed, moulded in so unvarying a form? Assuredly not, for character still survived in the individual before the railway age dawned, and nowhere was more marked than on the box-seat. The sole person convicted of brutality in that attack is Borrow himself, consigning all the objects of his dislike to misery and want.

Such men might have been found; but we have only to mention old Thomas Cross, the dreamy, poetical, shiftless, other-worldly coachman of the "Lynn Union," the Wards, and John Thorogood, on the Norwich Road, to see that the road was not handed over entirely to ruffians of the kind Borrow draws. But in all coachmen reigned an autocratic spirit, born of their mastery over four horses. In some this was expressed by contemptuous replies when passengers unqualified for the task endeavoured to talk about coaching and horsey matters; in others it was manifested by a far-away and unapproachable meditation or contemplation—or perhaps even vacuity of mind—like that of some Indian fakir dwelling upon the perfections of Buddha; beside which many a box-seat passenger felt a mere worm.

It was difficult to penetrate this professional reserve. A remarkable character of this type was John Wilson, who drove the "Everlasting" coach between Wolverhampton and Worcester; a coach so called because, at a time when all the direct routes were being abandoned to railways, this

cross-country journey was left open and unchallenged for many years. John, in addition to being a coachman, was host of the “King’s Head,” a minor house in Bell Street, Wolverhampton, but was a taciturn and grumpy individual. He drove only at the jog-trot of eight miles an hour, and so had no excuse on that score for silence. He cherished the greatest dislike to being questioned, and his replies, especially to strangers, were of the briefest and surliest. On the occasion of the British Association visiting Dudley in 1849, a gentleman residing at Worcester, being very anxious to attend the meetings of so learned a body, secured a box-seat on the “Everlasting” to Dudley. John was the coachman on that occasion. The historian of it is the passenger himself:—

“‘A nice mild day, coachman,’ I said, as he mounted and took the ribbons.

“‘Tis, sir.’

“(After a pause of five minutes.) ‘What time do you get to Dudley?’

“‘Eight o’clock.’

“(A quarter of an hour’s pause.) ‘Capital crop of turnips this year, coachman.’

“‘Ees.’

“(A pause of twenty minutes, varied only by some long yawns from the coachman, and some responsive ones from myself.)

“‘I say, driver, can you tell me who’s dead at that house?’

“‘Don’t know. ’Niver inquires about nothing—yaw—haw—a-haw,’ yawning prodigiously.

“Here a passenger pointed out to ‘coachey’ a covey of partridges in an adjoining field, and asked him if he knew the price of birds at Worcester.

“‘No,’ says he, ‘I don’t—yaw-he-haw; but fresh herrings at Wolverhampton be mighty cheap at thirty a shilling.’

“Another quarter of an hour’s profound silence, and we arrived at the ‘Crown,’ Ombersley. Seeing the fate that awaited me, of being linked to this dreary fellow for a journey of nearly thirty miles, I proposed to him a gentle stimulant, and expressed my apprehension that he was considerably out of condition.

“‘Well, then, I’ll ha’ some brandy, I s’pose,’ he replied, with as much politeness and satisfaction at this sixpenny treat as a porker may be supposed to entertain on his first introduction to a bucket of grains. Too soon, however, I found this investment of my capital was more than useless—the man with the whip would not be drawn out. His horses, too, seemed to be under the influence of the same stupifying medium, jogging along at a rate which rendered our arrival at Dudley a probability somewhat remote.”

John, oddly enough, was succeeded by another Wilson, but not a relative. William Wilson was the direct antithesis to his predecessor, and when the “Everlasting,” belying its proud name, went off the road before the advance of the Great Western Railway from Oxford to Worcester, he left pleasing memories.

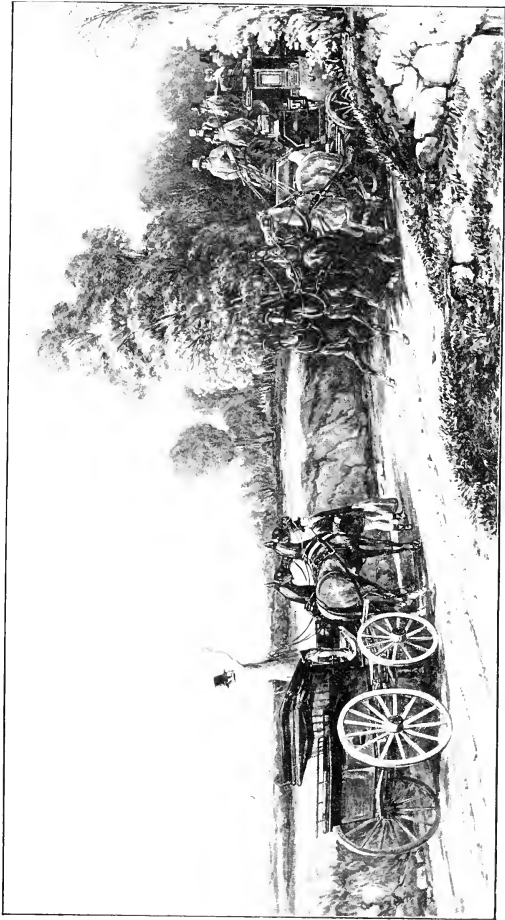
Jo Walton, on the Cambridge Road, was a notable whip of the smarter kind. No unwieldy stout man he, but tall and slim, faultlessly dressed, and one of the best coachmen that ever drove. The railway spoiled him in mid-career, but not before the very knowing gentlemen who wrote for the sporting periodicals of the age had made his a classic figure. The Cambridge Road alone was Walton's ground. He drove the "Safety," and then the "Times," in six hours; but it was not until he succeeded to the box-seat of the "Star of Cambridge" that he came into notice. That coach performed the fifty-two miles between the "Belle Sauvage" and the "Hoop" at Cambridge in five hours. With fifteen minutes deducted for breakfast on the way, and another fifteen for changing, this gives four hours and a half actual running, or a speed of nearly eleven and three-quarter miles an hour: an incredible rate of progress, but vouched for by a contributor to the *New Sporting Magazine* in 1833.

Jo Walton drove the "Star" double, every day except Sunday, leaving the "Hoop," at Cambridge at 7 a.m., reaching London at noon, and setting forth again for Cambridge the same afternoon. This feat of driving over a hundred miles a day he continued until the railway by degrees caused the splendour of the "Star" to wane.

The Cambridge Road has, of course, many dead level stretches, and Walton was sometimes known to put the coach along a certain five miles in twenty minutes. Yet, according to the enthusiastic

chronicler of these things, he was among the safest of coachmen—a testimony not supported by the fact that he twice upset the “Star” between Royston and Buntingford. His determination to keep his time was, we are told, superior to all mercenary considerations or regard for the “short pocket.” Thus, although he pulled up on one occasion when hailed on the road by a gentleman in a phaeton, saying he “might as well have this half-crown as not,” he drove off again because the passenger did not come instantly.

He was, according to the admiring testimony of the time, a fixture on the box—nothing could throw him off. A scientific punisher of refractory horses, too; accompanying the corrective discipline of the whip with much grim humour. Passing through Buntingford one day, the chestnut near leader attempted to bolt into a public-house. “I didn’t know your friends lived *there*,” said Walton. “Come, come, now you are got into this coach you must give up low company,” and two slashing strokes of the whip followed. Walton, it was said, had the temper of an emperor and a tongue as fluent and free as that of a bargee. The story was told that he refused to pull up for a passenger who had lost his hat, and that the passenger thereupon pushed Walton’s off, compelling him to halt; but that tale was either untrue or the passenger unacquainted with Walton. It was not likely that any one who knew him would have taken such a liberty. We are not told what became of that impulsive passenger.



IN TIME FOR THE COACH.

After C. Cooper Henderson, 1848.

The characteristics of coachmen had every opportunity of being well impressed upon box-seat passengers down the long monotonous miles, and their peculiarities have accordingly been well preserved in travellers' recollections. One choice spirit, who drove the Leeds "Union" from the "George and Blue Boar" in Holborn to Eaton Socon, let his leaders down in Biggleswade street, so that they broke their knees. He observed that they had made a terrible "fore paw," but whether that was conscious or unconscious humour remains uncertain.

A sharp distinction was drawn between London and provincial coachmen, and between coachmen on main roads and those on by-ways. Yorkshire by-roads, in particular, were regarded by coaching critics, from Nimrod downwards, with contempt, alike for their coaches and coachmen. Thus, one tells in 1830 of a dirty coach in Yorkshire, drawn by a team of "tike" horses known to the coachman by the names of Rumbleguts and Bumblekite, Staggering Bob and Davey. On the cross-roads of that many-acred shire the coachmen changed with every stage, and cleaned and harnessed their own horses. They were, in fact, in those remote parts, a hundred years behind the age, and one might in the nineteenth century have studied the manners and customs of the early eighteenth. The same thing was noticed by Hawker in 1812, on the Glasgow and Carlisle road, where the stage-coachmen resembled "a set of dirty gipsies," driving but one stage each, and then looking after their horses.

Those country hands were not in general very great respecters of rank or station. The London coachmen were civil, had a peculiar humour about them, and did not consider themselves *quite* the equal of the box-seat passenger who sat beside them; but the provincial performer poked one in the ribs when he wanted to say anything, and perhaps nearly ejected one from the box by his "knowing" jerk of the elbow when he considered emphasis necessary to point his remarks. The old six-inside coaches survived here long after they had been forgotten in most other parts of the country, often driven by a coachman as comfortable as a "drop" of gin could make him, and drawn by horses as weak as the water he forgot to put into his last tumbler. In such an ominous combination, the passengers involuntarily repeated the prayer in the Litany for "all travellers by land."

Drunken coachmen are heard of in the old coaching annals, and accidents caused by them when in that state stand on record, but they are comparatively few. It was not so easy a matter to make a seasoned coachman—even one of only a few years' experience—drunk. The capacity of coachmen for drink was marvellous. As throwing some light upon it, a meeting with Harry Ward at the "White Hart," Andover, may be instanced. He was then on the famous "Quicksilver" Devonport Mail.

On this occasion it was a cold winter's night, and Ward was waiting for the "Quicksilver" to come up, and to take his stage.

“How many brandys-and-water does that make to-day?” asked a passenger who had just stood him one, hot.

“This is the twentieth,” replied Ward. (A glass of brandy-and-water then cost 1s.)

He was not regarded by his contemporaries as an intemperate man, and was never known to be the worse for drink; but he felt called upon to explain those twenty glasses, and said, “You soon get it blown out of you, crossing Salisbury Plain.”

This was in 1837, and Ward was then only twenty-four years of age. “Youthful depravity,” some might say, and surmise an early and unhappy end. But facts controvert such views. Harry Ward, who had already, in 1833, driven on the London and Glasgow Mail, and was then the youngest coachman on the road, was also among the steadiest, and owed his transference to the Devonport “Quicksilver” to that already established reputation. To his last days—he died in 1894, in his 81st year—he was proud of the fact that he never had an accident on any road.

Coachmen seem never to have been averse from loading their coaches to their fullest capacity, except in one particular. Barrels of oysters, kegs of spirits, hampers of game, and such heavy and bulky things, seem never to have roused objections; but they nursed a grudge against literature, for when the quarterly reviews were published and magazine-time came round, and the fore and hind boots of the night coaches were crammed with the damp sheets just issued from the press,

they discovered that the weight severely tried weak teams over long stages, *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviewers prided themselves on their literary weight, which was an unknown quantity to the coachmen, who cursed them for their avoirdupois.

These old Automedons rarely took a holiday, and when they did were at a loss how to use it. Like London omnibus drivers of the present time under similar circumstances, they generally spent their off-time in riding on some other coach and criticising the driving. The postboys were alike in this respect. One of the fraternity—Tom King, of the “Crown,” at Amersham, spent his holiday in a most peculiar manner. He had had the honour, on one occasion, of driving “Farmer George” post, after hunting with the Royal Staghounds, from Amersham to Windsor; and to the end of his life he would do no work on the anniversary of that day. After breakfast he repaired to the same yellow post-chaise, and sat in it till nightfall, on the seat his Sovereign had occupied. Throughout the day he refreshed himself liberally with pots of ale, and if he took his pipe from his lips at intervals, it was only to replace it with a key-bugle and to play “God save the King.” His master humoured his fancy, and visited the post-chaise with many others during the day, to see Tom indulging in these quaint Pleasures of Memory.

CHAPTER XI

MAIL-GUARDS

WHEN Palmer first introduced his plan of mail-coaches he proposed that, while the contractors supplied coaches and horses and the men to drive them, the guards should be the servants of the Post Office, and should, considering the dangers of the roads, be retired soldiers, who, from their past training and habits of discipline, would be reliable servants and men capable of defending the mails against attack. This advice was not followed, and the first mail-guards were provided by the contractors, who employed such unsatisfactory men that in a very short time the Post Office was obliged to make the position of a mail-guard a Post Office appointment and the guards themselves servants of and directly responsible to the Department.

Placed on this footing, they were by no means fellow-servants with the coachmen, but their official superiors, and not properly concerned in any way with the passengers or any unofficial parcels or luggage. In practice, however, they took part in all these things, and although the coachmen were technically under their orders, it was only when ill-assorted and quarrelsome men

came together on one coach that any disputes arose.

Mail-coaches had not long been established before the guards, those protectors of his Majesty's mails, presuming upon their position, became the tyrants of the road. Pennant, writing in 1792, tells how, in his district of Wales, "the guards, relying on the name of royalty, in the course of the Irish road through North Wales, committed great excesses. One, on a trifling quarrel, shot dead a poor old gatekeeper. . . . In Anglesey another of these guards discharged his pistol wantonly in the face of a chaise-horse, drawing his master, the Rev. John Bulkeley, who was flung out and died, either on the spot or soon after. These guards shoot at dogs, hogs, sheep, and poultry as they pass the road, and even in towns, to the great terror and danger of the inhabitants." As with the mail-guards, so with the mail-coachmen. "It has been a common practice with them to divert themselves with flinging out their lashes at harmless passengers, by way of fun. Very lately, one of these wretches succeeded so well as to twist his lash round a poor fellow's neck in the parish where I live. He dragged the man under the wheels, by which one of his arms was broken."

Not only Pennant complained of the early mail-guards. The country in general went in terror of them and their lethal weapons, the bell-mouthed blunderbusses which they carried to protect the mails and were wont to discharge at random as they went along. It was, with some

pardonable exaggeration, said that the Post Office had conferred a licence for indiscriminate slaughter upon them; for not only were they armed against attack, but during the wars with France (and we were always fighting the French in those days) the Postmaster-General issued a kind of commission to mail-guards to shoot any prisoner of war breaking parole. To promote zeal in this direction, a reward of £5 was offered for every prisoner so winged or killed. Prisoners of war were plentiful then, and in Edinburgh Castle, on Dartmoor, and at "Yaxley Barracks," near Norman Cross, on the Great North Road, were to be counted in thousands. At Yaxley, as also perhaps at other places, they were often allowed out on parole, with the understanding that they were not to leave the high road and were not to remain out after sunset. It is not on record that any prisoner was thus shot, but many inoffensive rusties were wounded by guards sportively inclined, or—with what St. Paul calls a "zeal not according to discretion"—eager to earn the reward offered.

The mail-guards were, indeed, very dangerous fellows to the law-abiding subjects of the King, however innocuous they may have been to the law-breakers. We may dismiss the cutlass with which they were armed. Not much damage could be accidentally wrought by that; but the blunderbuss was a terror to nervous passengers by the mail, for when the guard sportively loosed it off at the wayside sparrows, or at the ploughman busy against the sky-line, it

exploded with the roar of a cannon, and some of its slugs generally whistled unpleasantly past the ears of the outsides or pierced their tall beaver hats. The guard, in fact, was a person to be shunned when he took his blunderbuss in hand, either for practice or examination; for it was not only dangerous as a gun, but was furnished with a bayonet which, folding back on a hinge against the barrel, was released by touching a powerful spring. How many persons were accidentally slain or mutilated by the guards' awkward handling of this infernal contrivance we shall never know.

It was not, however, until 1811 that anything was done to stop this indiscriminate shooting on the part of the guards; but in that year an Act of Parliament came into existence which forbade the firing of their blunderbusses except for defence, and instituting a penalty of £5 for breaking this new law.

Meanwhile the position of mail-guard had become a dignified and desirable one, often obtained through Parliamentary and other influence brought to bear upon the Postmasters-General. Here, for example, is a copy of a letter of recommendation, unfortunately undated, but showing the methods in vogue:—

“ To their Lordships
“ the Postmasters-General.

“ MY LORDS,—

“ The bearer of this, John Peters, is very well known at the General Post Office, and is

desirous of becoming a Mail Guard, he is 23 years of age, and we believe (*sic*) him to be a Sober, Steady Man, and deserving of the Situation.

“ We are,

“ My Lords,

“ Your Lordships’

“ Obedient Servts.,

“ CALTHORPE ;

“ RD. SPOONER, Banker, Birmingham ;

“ THOMAS ATTWOOD, Banker, Birmingham.”

It was not the salary that made the position of a mail-guard so well worth having. He received only 10s. 6*d.* a week from the Department, and his uniform of trousers, top-boots, scarlet coat, frogged across the front of the body with gold lace, and a gold-banded black tall hat with a cockade. Out of his miserable half-guinea he had to himself provide the cost of oil for the hand-lamp in front of his seat on the dickey, and to pay the stable-helpers who cleaned his tools and tool-box, oiled and reloaded every day his blunderbuss and pair of pistols, and performed a variety of odd jobs that took five shillings a week out of his pocket. He obviously could not exist on his pay : how, then, did he live ? That is a question soon answered. A mail-guard going a long distance—anything from a hundred to a hundred and fifty miles was a usual spell—generally looked for half a crown each from inside passengers and two shillings from the outsides. If you could not afford so much he would do with less, but then you lost the touch of the hat that accompanied the larger sum,

A full coach produced 16s. in tips; or, if the trip did not boast so good a waybill, guard and coachman by prescriptive right divided all short fares below 3s. A "good mail"—that is to say, a mail on one of the great direct roads—loading well, would produce sometimes as much as from £300 to £500 a year in tips and fees for services rendered to passengers and others. A guard's income depended mainly upon his attention and civility to passengers, but there were many other sources. Before 1831 the sale of game was absolutely prohibited, yet a great trade was done in it, with the mail and stage-guards as intermediaries, and there can be no doubt that the coaches afforded every opportunity that poachers could desire of marketing the birds and ground-game that fell to their guns or nets in the darkling midnight woods.

Country squires knew this very well, and threatened and fumed without ceasing, but they or their keepers never by any chance saw those roadside scenes familiar enough to passengers on the up-mails; when, passing at midnight by some dense woodland bordering the road, a low whistle would be heard, and the coach would pull up while a couple of men handed a sack over to the guard, who, thrusting it into the hind-boot and stamping the lid down, called out "Good-night!" and the journey was resumed without comment. The curious or suspicious might connect such an incident with another which often happened on entering London. "Jack," the guard would sing out, "Mr. Smith wants his luggage left at so-

and-so," and the coach would be brought to a momentary halt outside some public-house, and the sack, from whose neck the inquisitive might perhaps have seen something remarkably like pheasants' tails projecting, handed to an expectant porter. Any interested person following that porter would observe that the sack was delivered at the nearest poulterer's.

A guard pocketed half a crown each for all bankers' parcels he was entrusted with; he was purveyor of tea and fish and buyer of meat to a hundred villages down the road; netted many a guinea from the lawyers in those days before ever the Judicature Act was thought of, when every answer filed in Chancery must needs be filed by special and sworn messenger; had a penny each for all letters picked up on the way, when post-offices were few and far between; was entrusted with great sums of money for payment into the London banks; and purchased wedding-rings for half the love-sick swains in a county. Every one knew him, trusted him, and fed him, and if he was a prudent man he had no difficulty in making money at express speed. One guard, it is recorded, was so earnest a fishmonger that he used the Post Office bags to carry his fish in, greatly to the disgust of the clerks, who found themselves smothered in scales and surrounded by a decidedly ancient, as well as fishlike, smell. They complained to the Postmaster-General, who reprimanded the delinquent, and with a quite unintentional pun observed that the "sole" reasons

of his not being dismissed were his good character and long service.

The guard of the Southampton Mail had long been suspected of smuggling, and at last the Customs officers at that port determined to search the mail. They accordingly attempted to stop it one evening, but the guard himself levelled his blunderbuss at them, swearing he would blow out the brains of the man who should lay a hand upon the horses or seek to search "His Majesty's Royal Mail," and so he got off, with the hind boot stuffed to bursting with excisable but unexcised goods in the nature of spirits and tobacco. A long correspondence between the Postmaster-General and the Commissioners of Customs arose out of this incident, each official jealous of his own Department's rights as only Government officers can be; but the Postmaster-General, although declaring himself an enemy to smuggling, was indignant at the idea of the mail being searched and possibly detained; and although warning the guard, approved his conduct. It needs no great imaginative powers to picture that guard embarking upon a colossal smuggling scheme after finding himself thus secured from being searched.

Although the mail-guards were as a body a brave and devoted class of men, determined to do their duty and to carry his Majesty's mails in the face of all difficulties of snowstorms, winds, and floods, yet they gave Thomas Hasker, Chief Superintendent of Mail-coaches, a good deal of trouble. They numbered 268, and he exercised

the supreme control of them. Complaints continually reached him from one quarter or another of the mails being late, of the guards being impertinent, and of the hind-boot, sacred to the mail-bags, being used by the guards as a receptacle for things quite unauthorised and unofficial. To stop some of these practices he was obliged to issue this notice, which reads somewhat curiously nowadays: "In consequence of several of the mail-guards having been detected in carrying meat and vegetables in the mail-box, to the amount of 150 pounds weight at a time, the superintendents are desired to take opportunities to meet the coaches in their district, at places where they are least expected, and to search the boxes, to remedy this evil, which is carried to too great a length. The superintendents will please to observe that Mr. Hasker does not wish to be too hard on the guards. Such a thing as a joint of meat, or a couple of fowls, or any other article for their own families, in moderation, he does not wish to deter them from the privilege of carrying."

Loading the roof with heavy or bulky articles was a thing he could not allow as a usual thing. "Such a thing as a turtle tied on the roof, directed to any gentleman once or twice a year, might pass unnoticed, but for a constancy cannot be suffered."

In one respect the lot of a mail-guard did not compare favourably with that of his plebeian brethren on the stage-coaches. He rode throughout the night in a solitary position on the little

seat on the hind-boot called the "dicky," with the two outsides on the front part of the roof facing away from him. It was a rule for many years strictly enforced that the outside passengers of a mail-coach should be limited to three: one on the box-seat beside the coachman, and the other two with their backs to the guard, as described. It had its origin in the fear that, if more were allowed, it would be an easy matter for desperadoes to overpower coachman and guard, and to rob the mail. For the same reason, the only means of access to the hind-boot, in which the mails were stowed away in those early days, before the expansion of mail-matter caused the roof to be piled up with great sacks of letters and packets, was by a trap-door at the top, carefully locked, and on which the guard had his feet placed during the whole of the journey. Any infraction of the rule against allowing a passenger on the hind part of the coach was sure to bring instant dismissal, and for permitting an extra passenger on the roof the guard was fined £5.

But some of the joys of a mail-guard's life are recounted in the old verses:—

At each inn on the road I a welcome could find;
 At the Fleece I'd my skin full of ale;
 The Two Jolly Brewers were just to my mind;
 At the Dolphin I drank like a whale.

Tom Tun at the Hogshead sold pretty good stuff;
 They'd capital flip at the Boar;
 And when at the Angel I'd tippled enough,
 I went to the Devil for more.

There I'd always a sweetheart so snug in the bar ;
At the Rose I'd a lily so white ;
Few planets could equal sweet Nan at the Star,
No eyes ever twinkled so bright.

I've had many a hug at the sign of the Bear ;
In the Sun courted morning and noon ;
And when night put an end to my happiness there,
I'd a sweet little girl in the Moon.

To sweethearts and ale I at length bid adieu,
Of wedlock to set up the sign ;
Hand-in-Hand the Good Woman I look for in you,
And the Horns I hope ne'er will be mine.

Once guard to the Mail, I'm now guard to the fair,
But though my commission's laid down,
Yet while the King's Arms I'm permitted to bear,
Like a Lion I'll fight for the Crown.

Something of the old mail-guard's welcome is reflected in those lines. That he was, in the eyes of the country folk a highly important personage admits of no doubt, and that, even among the upper classes, he was a trusted emissary and purveyor of news is equally sure. He was, in fact, news embodied. Winged Mercury might, in the ancient world, and may be now, the personification of intelligence, hot and hot ; but from 1784 until the first railways began to outstrip the mail-coaches, the mail-guards were the better type. They brought the first rumours of joy or sorrow, of victory or defeat, down with them on the Royal Mail ; and as we were warring almost incessantly all over the world during the mail-coach era, few were those occasions when the advent of these official carriers was not awaited with bated breath.

The tale has often been told how the mail-coaches, carrying down with them the news of Trafalgar, of Vittoria, and—culminating victory—of Waterloo, went down into the country wreathed with laurel and flying jubilant flags, and how the guards, hoarse at last and inaudible from continual shouting, resorted to the expedient of chalking the words “Glorious Victory” in large letters on the dickey, for the villagers to read as they dashed along the roads. Often, under these circumstances, a mail-guard was journalist as well, for when he could string sentences together with a fair approach to grammar, his contributions to the provincial press were welcomed and well paid for.

The duty of a mail-guard, besides the primary one of protecting the mails, for which he was provided with a blunderbuss, a pair of pistols, and a cutlass carried in a case, was to see that time was kept according to the official time-bill handed to him. For the purpose of checking speed on the road, and of keeping to that time-table, the Post Office furnished every one of its guards with an official time-piece enclosed in a wooden box in such a way that it was impossible for any one to tamper with it, or to alter the hands, without being discovered. These clocks were regulated to gain or lose so many minutes in twenty-four hours, according to the direction in which the coach travelled, in order that local time might be kept. The timepiece was invariably carried in the leather pouch with a circular hole cut in it that all mail-

guards wore, so that the time could instantly be seen.

To every guard the superintendent supplied a list of instructions comprising twenty-six items. Prominent among these was the obligation to date and sign the time-bill correctly at every place, or to see it signed and dated by the postmasters on the way. How this was always accomplished in snow and wind and rain, with numbed fingers, is not easily understood. Often the time-bills must have been reduced to something like pulp by the time the trip was ended.

It was also the guard's duty to report any horses unfit for service, and any defective harness, and to see that the coaches were in proper condition. He was urged to look to the lamps, to behave with civility to the passengers, and to sound his horn on several occasions and in certain contingencies duly specified.

Besides these ordinary official duties there were the extraordinary ones, in the case of a breakdown or in the event of a snowstorm. The guard had his tool-box and an assortment of spare parts at hand, so that he could help the coachman in effecting roadside repairs to harness or the coach itself; and when, from snowstorm or any other cause, the coach could be driven no farther, it was the guard's duty to impress one of the mail horses and ride to the next stage, or to secure post-chaises or saddle-horses, and personally convey the mail-bags. No matter what became of the passengers, his first care was for His Majesty's mails.

Coachmen, although not the servants of the Post Office, were fined heavily for being late, and for stopping at unauthorised places, and the guards were fined as well for allowing them to do so. To one guard, who had been severely reprimanded for not keeping time, and excused himself by saying he could not get the passengers away from their dinner, Hasker said, "Stick to your time-bill, and never mind what passengers say respecting waiting over-time. Is it not the fault of the landlord to keep them so long? Some day, when you have waited a considerable time (suppose five or eight minutes longer than is allowed by the bill) drive away and leave them behind. Only, take care you have witness that you called them out two or three times. Then let them get forward how they can."

Beyond his weekly half-guinea, an annual suit of clothes, and a superannuation allowance of seven shillings a week, a mail-guard had no official prospects. It is true he might rise to become a travelling inspector of mails, when he would receive up to £100 a year, with 15s. a day travelling expenses. But inspectorships were naturally few, and in any case it is not conceivable that a guard on a "good mail" would ever have exchanged places with an inspector, who certainly drew the higher salary but acquired no tips.

It has already been shown that guards did very well indeed on the mainroad mails, and could very well have afforded to take the situation without any salary at all, or even, like waiters at modern

restaurants, to pay for the privilege of receiving fees and tips. The salary was, in fact, merely a nominal retaining-fee, to give the Department a hold upon them. But there were a number of cross-country mails that were not nearly so profitable as those that ran direct from London, and it is to be feared that their guards did not always do so particularly well. Nor even did those on the great mail-coaches keep their handsome incomes at the last. Railways impoverished many a mail before they were finally withdrawn, and it was then that the guards agitated for higher salaries. Their perquisites had reached the vanishing-point, and at last the Post Office agreed to a new scale of pay. From 1842 the guards were to receive from £70 to £120 a year, according to length of service, but at the same time were forbidden to receive gratuities. This looks like a concession made by some malevolent humorist, for already most of the mails had been withdrawn.

But mail-guards were, as a class, more fortunate than their brethren of the stage-coaches when railways ran them off the road. It is true that they keenly felt the loss of the great popularity they had enjoyed, and more keenly still did they miss the very handsome incomes they in many instances had made; but as officials directly employed by the Post Office, it was incumbent upon that Department to find them employ or to pension them. No such assured future could, or did, cheer the lot of the coachmen of the mails, or the coachmen or the guards of the stages.

The mail-guards in many instances were drafted to the great railway stations, where they assisted in despatching the mails by railway. Most prominent among all whose career was thus diverted was Moses James Nobbs, who died in 1897, half a century after the road as an institution came to an end.

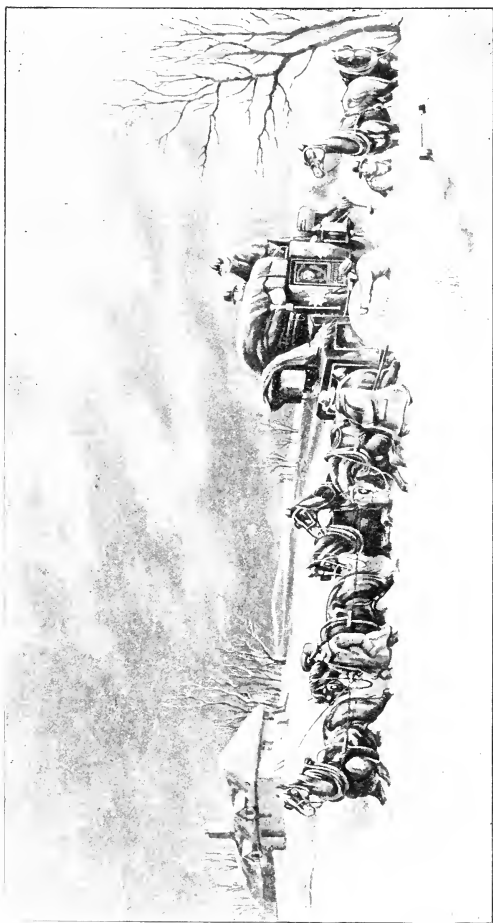
The career of this old servant of the Post Office is, from a variety of circumstances, exceptionally interesting. He was born on May 12th, 1817, at Angel Street, Norwich, and was the son of a coachbuilder. Entering the Post Office service on June 27th, 1836, as guard of the London and Stroud Mail, he was shortly transferred to the Peterborough and Hull Mail, and then to the Portsmouth and Bristol. In 1837 he was on the new Exeter Mail, just started, on the accession of Queen Victoria, to go through Salisbury and Yeovil—170 miles in $18\frac{1}{4}$ hours, doing the journey to Exeter in two minutes' less time than the famous "Quicksilver" mail, which with this year varied its route and, avoiding Salisbury and Yeovil, went by the slightly shorter route through Amesbury and Wincanton. Nobbs went the whole distance, resting the following day. The following year found him as guard on the Cheltenham and Aberystwith Mail, on which he remained until 1854—sixteen years of nightly exposure on a route one hundred miles long, through the difficult and mountainous districts of mid-Wales. One of his winter experiences may be given as a sample,

“We had left Gloucester,” he says, “and all went on pretty well until we came to Radnor Forest, where we got caught in such a snow-storm that it was impossible to take the coach any farther, so we left it. I took the mail-bags, and with the assistance of two shepherds made my way over the mountains. It took us five hours to get to the other side, to an inn at Llandewy. There we met the up-guard, Couldery, who took my guides back again. It was not many hours before the abandoned coach was completely covered with snow, and there it remained buried for a week. Well, Couldery, it seems, fell down in the snow from exhaustion, and had to be carried by the two shepherds to the ‘Forest’ inn, on the other side of the mountain, and there he remained for some days, to recover. I had to proceed with my bags, so I got a chaise and pair from Pen-y-Bont and another at Rhayader, but was unable to take that very far owing to the snow. There was nothing for it but to press on again



MOSES JAMES NOBBS, THE LAST OF THE
MAIL-GUARDS

on foot, which I did for many miles, until I came to Llangerrig. There I found it was hopeless to think of going over Plinlimmon, and was informed that nothing had crossed all day; so I made up my mind to go round by way of Llanidloes, and a night I had of it! I was almost tired out and benumbed with cold, which brought on a drowsiness I found it very hard to resist. If I had yielded to the feeling for one instant I should not be telling these tales now. When I got about eight miles from Aberystwith I found myself becoming thoroughly exhausted, so I hired a car for the remainder of the journey, and fell fast asleep as soon as I got into it. On arriving I was still fast asleep, and had to be carried to bed and a doctor sent for, who rubbed me for hours before he could get my blood into circulation again. I had then been exposed to that terrible weather for fifty hours. Next day I felt a good deal better, and started back for Gloucester, but had great difficulty in getting over the mountain. I had the honour of receiving a letter from the Postmaster-General complimenting me on my zeal and energy in getting the mail over the mountain. Even when there was no snow; the wind on the top of Plinlimmon was often almost more than we could contend with. Once, indeed, it was so strong that it blew the coach completely over against a rock; but we soon got that right again, and always afterwards took the precaution of opening both the doors and tying them back, so that the wind might pass through the coach."



STUCK FAST.

After C. Cooper Harrison, 1843.

On another occasion Nobbs and the mail escaped in a miraculous manner. The snow had been falling for many hours on Plinlimmon, and it was a fearful night. They safely passed the summit at Stedfa-gerrig, but, after going down for a mile, lost their way in a dense combined fog and snowstorm. A post-boy was riding one of the leaders, but he took the coach over a precipice about sixty feet deep, and Nobbs and the coachman performed two somersaults in the involuntary descent. When they reached the bottom they blessed that same snowstorm which they had been regarding in quite another light, for the drifts made a soft and safe resting-place. There were only two passengers, who were, of course, riding inside on such a night. They were greatly cut by the breaking of the glass, and two horses were killed. But in two hours the coach was righted, and, having found an old Roman road in the hollow and harnessed the two remaining horses, they drove off, and actually succeeded in reaching Cheltenham in time to catch the up London mail.

When the Cheltenham and Aberystwith Mail came off the road, in 1854, Nobbs was appointed travelling inspector to the Post Office on the Great Western Railway between Paddington and Exeter, and was shortly afterwards transferred to Paddington, where he remained for the rest of his official career, superintending the receipt and despatch of the mails until retired and pensioned off in 1891, under the Post Office regulations. He had

thus performed fifty-five years' service, and had seen the business of the Post Office grow from the one hundredweight of mail-matter in his charge on the Cheltenham and Aberystwith Mail at Christmas 1839, to the twenty tons despatched from Paddington on Christmas Eve 1889.

A very curious experience fell to the lot of this veteran in 1887, when a revival of the old days of the road took place, in consequence of the Post Office deciding to send the London and Brighton Parcel Mail by horsed van along that classic highway instead of by rail. By the Post Office agreement with the railway companies of 1882, the year when the Parcel Post was introduced, the companies were given 55 per cent. of the total receipts; but as it presently appeared that this was an extravagant proportion, and that the parcels could be conveyed by van along the road at a much smaller cost, the road service now in force was at length inaugurated, on June 1st, 1887.

To Nobbs, as the oldest guard in the service, fell the distinction of acting in that capacity on the Brighton Parcel Mail on its trial-trip. Again he wore the gold-banded hat and the scarlet coat, and sentimental souls not only provided one of the old timepieces, but included a blunderbuss in the equipment, while an even more enthusiastic admirer of the bygone days produced a key-bugle, so that Nobbs might play "Auld Lang Syne." He tried, but the attempt was not a success. The results were feeble, in

consequence, as he explained, of his having lost his front teeth.

Nobbs died, May 18th, 1897, in his eighty-first year, at Uxbridge. His portrait is one of the cherished items in the Post Office Record Department.

One of those who, for some reason or another, was not continued in Post Office employment was an odd character popularly called "Cocky" Murrell, who for many years afterwards was a solicitor's clerk at Downham Market, Norfolk. "Cocky" he was called from his prodigious amount of bounce. He had formerly been guard of the mail between Ely and King's Lynn, and though not much taller than the horn he blew, assumed as much authority as though he had been the Postmaster-General himself.

CHAPTER XII

STAGE-COACH GUARDS

NOT every stage-coach carried a guard, and largely to that omission was due the prevalence of accidents in the last years of coaching. When we find guards first mentioned in old stage-coach advertisements, shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century, they were provided strictly for the purpose their name indicates—to guard the coaches against attack; and when such dangers grew more remote they were generally discontinued on day-coaches. Thus very often, except on long-distance stages, even the smart day-coaches carried no guard, and when they did, his functions were not so much to safeguard the coach in the original sense as to help the coachman by skidding and unskidding down hill, and to look after the way-bill and the passengers' luggage. It was when no such useful functionary was carried, and when the coachman, combining the parts, descended from his box, and leaving the reins in charge of a passenger, or often merely resting them on the horses' backs, went to explore the contents of the boots, or alighted for some other necessary business, that the horses often started off on

their own accord and wrought disaster to coach and passengers.

In early days, when horses were either not changed at all on a long journey, or went twenty-mile stages, nothing was less likely than that they would bolt. All they wanted to do was to lie down and die. But in the golden age of coaching, when well-kept teams working sometimes only six- or eight-mile stages were usual, that coach-proprietor who, from motives of economy or for any other reason, omitted to provide a guard, should have been made criminally responsible for any accidents caused by that omission.

As a rule the guards of mails and stages went from end to end, being responsible for the contents of the way-bill. These spells of from ten to fifteen hours' duty were naturally very tiring, and they generally rested the following day, or, if in London, took the opportunity of executing those varied commissions—from the filing of a Bill in Chancery to the matching of silks—of which every guard had plenty always in hand.

An outstanding specimen of a stage-coach guard is the figure of George Young, of the Leeds "Union." An excellent whip, as well as guard, he was a man of a peculiar versatility of genius, and as an entertainer of company on the roof of a coach was probably unequalled in his day. He transacted business commissions for the better class of jewellers and attorneys,

was fond of all kinds of sport, a successful bookmaker, a good shot, went coursing, and at horseracing was as keen as any tyke in broad Yorkshire. Not insensible, either, to the charms of the P. R., he introduced some noted bruisers in his day, and was an intimate friend and companion of Tom Spring. When not actively engaged, he was always ready to take the ribbons for a friend who wanted a holiday or had urgent private affairs to attend to; and the tooling of the teams, no matter how refractory, never suffered in dignity from his manipulation. He was, take him for all in all, perhaps one of the most original and perfect specimens of the old-fashioned, cheery, story-telling, and loquacious sort who ever blew a horn, kissed a pretty barmaid, pulled a sluggish team out of a difficulty, or chaffed a yokel on his way to market.

This paragon among guards met his death in April 1825, dying at the "Red Lion," Pontefract, of mortification resulting from an accident. It seems that, to make room for an extra passenger, he had given up the guard's seat, and went to sit beside the coachman, who already had a passenger on the box. In order not to inconvenience the coachman's driving, he sat on the edge of the seat, with one of his legs dangling over the side, and so when the coach gave a lurch, was thrown off and his thigh broken.

Bob Hadley, guard of the "Unicorn" coach between Manchester and the Potteries, was of

the eccentric kind, sporting an odd kind of headgear which went by the name of the "Hadley Tile," and was as well known in his circle as the "D'Orsay Hat" was in fashionable London. "It resembles," said a contemporary, "an umbrella in extent, and Bob, as he luxuriates under its broad leaf, looks like an ourang-outang under a banyan-tree. Some of his contemporaries having adopted his taste too closely, he has been under the necessity of extending its brim about four inches, which puts all competition at defiance, and he now presents an unique specimen. To put himself still further beyond the reach of envious competition, he has enclosed his delicate person in a complete suit of plaid, from his thorax to his trotters, and is now as complete an original as is to be found in any zoological collection in the Kingdom."

It was in the very nature of their work that the "up" and "down" coachmen and guards should never meet, save in that moment of passing one another on the road. Like the little man and woman of the old-fashioned weather-gauge—the one coming out and the other going in, as fine or wet weather willed it—they could not, in the ordinary routine, possibly enjoy one another's society. An exception was annually made on the Holyhead Road, when a hundred coachmen and guards were bidden to a feast at the "Green Man," Dunchurch. They managed to find substitutes for their places on the box, or on the guard's seat, for the occasion, and

usually sat down to the half of a fat buck from the Buccleuch estate adjoining that village.

The festival of September 1834 was a memorable one. According to a contemporary, the anticipation of the tuck-out had kept them on the *qui vive* for a week, and it was not a little amusing to see them nearing the point of attraction on the evening and night before; in some cases two, and even three, being perched on one coach and making the welkin ring with notes of their bugles, in solos, duets, or trios, to the no small interruption of the peaceful slumbers of wayside hamlets, whose inhabitants, from the constant din of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," fancied the Duke of Wellington, at least, was on the road.

The guards of the Manchester "Red Rover" were particularly on their stilts, and, having met for the first time on the same vehicle in musical fellowship, continued practising every tune they did know and did not know, from the time they quitted Highgate until they entered Dunchurch, at about 3 a.m., when they took leave of the coach with the splendid finale of "We won't go Home till Morning," leaving the harassed passengers with the chance of an odd wink for the remainder of the journey. "We ought," says the historian of these things, "as faithful reporters, to state that Bob Hadley and his chum on the 'Rover' occasionally rested their pipes with a cigar or a song; and in the latter attempt Hadley was certainly second

best, for no raven in a chimney-pot could have more barbarously murdered the airs of Rossini—so much to the horror of a lady outside, who was herself a bit of a musician, that she fancied she had by accident got upon the railway, and taken her seat in a cattle train, in one of the private boxes set apart for the accommodation of four-footed squeakers.”

The dinner on this occasion was of the most substantial description, and, for want of a better, Bob Hadley was put in the chair, a distinction his modesty would have induced him to decline; but the voices of the company were unanimous, and on mounting his perch he returned thanks on his bugle in the favourite hunting air of “Old Towler”; which, as “on that day,” or a few days before, a stag was supposed to have died, was considered extremely appropriate, and was applauded accordingly. Whether a stag had died or not seemed subsequently to have become a matter of doubt, for the chairman, after carving the “noble haunch,” and coming to the foot, which was enclosed with a profusion of curled writing-paper, was not a little surprised to find the hoof, instead of being *cloven*, to be *entire*. A noted farrier present swore it was the hoof of a young donkey! This the landlord positively denied, but upon a jury being summoned to decide the question, the hoof was found to have mysteriously disappeared, and the point remained for ever unsettled; although it was freely hinted that the guard of the

“Emerald,” jealous at being shut out from the feast, had conveyed the haunch away and substituted for it the hind-quarter of a deceased “Neddy” he had imported from Wolverhampton.

One of the most daring deeds ever related of a guard was that well-nigh incredible one told of the guard of the famous “Tantivy” :—

“We had just entered Oxford from Woodstock,” says Lord William Lennox, “when suddenly the horses started off at an awful pace. What made matters worse was that we saw at a distance some men employed in removing a large tree that had fallen during the storm of the previous night across the road near St. John’s College. The coachman shook his head, looking very nervous, while the guard, a most powerful man, stood up, prepared for any emergency. On we went, the coachman trying in vain to check the galloping steeds, and we had got within a few yards of the critical spot when the guard, crawling over the roof, managed, somehow or another, to get on the footboard, when, with a spring, he threw himself on the near wheeler, and with a giant’s clasp checked the horses at the very moment the leaders were about to charge the tree. Down they came, but the guard never yielded an inch, and, with the assistance of the country people near at hand, the leaders regained their legs, without the slightest damage to man, horse, coach, or harness. A subscription for our gallant preserver was got up on the spot.”

The last twenty years of the coaching era were remarkable for the development of musical ability on the part of the guards, both of the mail- and stage-coaches, who, relieved from their old-time anxieties and fears of highwaymen, kept their blunderbusses safely stowed away, and, turning their attention, like so many scarlet-coated Strephons, to the ballad-music of the moment, became expert practitioners on the key-bugle. That instrument came over from Germany in 1818, and for a time pretty thoroughly displaced the old "yard of tin" the earlier guards had blown so lustily. The new generation developed a passion for this strident kind of minstrelsy. Like the hero (or is it heroine?) of the "Lost Chord," their "fingers wandered idly over the sounding keys," and although many were expert players and, unlike the organist in that song, *did* know what they were playing, the jolting of the coaches must often have discomposed their harmony to some extent, so that the passengers could not always boast the same knowledge.

Piccadilly, one of the chief starting-points in London, was in this manner a highly musical thoroughfare at the period now under review. Ten guards, blowing ten different tunes at once, produced, we are told—and can well believe—a wonderful effect; and the roads became excruciatingly lively when every gay young blood of a guard learned to play "Cherry Ripe," the "Huntsman's Chorus," "Oh! Nanny, wilt Thou

gang wi' Me ?" and half a hundred others. The passengers, like that famous young lady "with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes," had music wherever they went. Let us hope they appreciated their good fortune to the full.

The Post Office looked with a cold glance upon these proceedings, and forbade mail-guards to play the key-bugle. Those officials therefore purchased them secretly, and snatched a fearful joy by producing them when clear of London streets, and playing, loud and long, such airs as "The Days when we went Gipsying, a Long Time Ago," and "Sally in our Alley," to the great admiration of the country joskins. The performances of expert players were said to be delightful, and no doubt they quickly reaped in tips a harvest from what they had expended on their instruments.

It is on record that a guard on the Chester Mail, with the fear of God or public opinion before him, always used to honour the Sabbath Day by playing the "Old Hundredth" as the coach passed through town and village, reserving his secular tunes for the secluded highway.

Cornets-à-piston began to rival the key-bugle in the last years of coaching, and the hurly-burly grew terrific. To what lengths this progressive din would have been carried had not the coaching age itself come to an end let us not seek to inquire; but when the coaching revival of 1863 and succeeding years brought back some of the old sights and sounds of the road, key-bugles and their like were very properly voted bad form, and the

older coach-horn regained and still retains its ancient ascendancy. Those other instruments and all their possibilities are left to modern beanfeasters and Bank-holiday merrymakers, who, as the suburban Londoner knows only too well, do not fail to take full advantage of them.

What became of the stage-coach guards? Some of them were killed, and thus never experienced the bitterness of finding their occupation gone. There is an inscription in the churchyard at Great Driffield, Yorkshire, to one who ended thus:—

TO THE MEMORY OF
THOMAS RUSSELL,

Guard of the "Wellington," who lost his life by
 the Coach being unfortunately overturned at
 Nafferton, September 9th, 1825.

Aged 36 years.

Praises on Tomb Stones are but vainly spent;
 A Man's Good Name is his best Monument.

This Stone was erected by his Companions in Friendship.

Less noticed by gossips on old coaching days than the coachmen were, their ending is more obscure, but it may be supposed that, like those occupants of the box-seat, many of them settled down as landlords of small inns in towns they had known when they travelled the road.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE COACHES WERE NAMED

“What’s in a name? Little enough, by the fact that people travel by the Thame coach, the Hitchin chaises, and the Crawley stage.”—*Old Coaching Essay*.

It was not until quite late in the coaching era that proprietors began generally to adopt the practice of naming their coaches. In early days there was little or no occasion to do so, for when there were only two or three coaches on the most frequented roads, no difficulty existed in distinguishing between them. One might be the old original stage; another, somewhat better built and more up-to-date, would be the “Machine”; another yet, fastest of all, the “Fly,” or the “Flying Machine.” The earliest named coach of which we have any record was the “Confatharrat” London and Norwich stage, mentioned in 1695. As we have already seen in these pages, this was an old-time way of spelling the word “Confederate,” and the coach was one probably owned and run by a syndicate, who shared the risks and the profits. Before competing coaches began to multiply and hustle one another in the struggle for public support, proprietors were content to announce “a coach,” or “a stage-coach,” to run, and took no trouble to characterise their vehicle in any

more attractive fashion. But when an opposition took the road, the vehicles so curtly named became "commodious," "easy," "elegant," and anything else you like in the commendatory kind. The next stage in this development was to appeal to the sentiment of old customers and to endeavour to retain their favour, not usually by increased speed, lower fares, or better accommodation, but by describing an old-established coach as "the original." Passengers, who did not lay so much stress upon sentiment as upon personal comfort, were generally well-advised to book seats by the new opposition coaches rather than by the "originals," which had the defect of being old-fashioned, and perhaps, in many cases, worn out. Surely in no other business was rivalry so bitter and unrelenting as in that of coaching, and the annals of the road afford occasion for a sigh or a smile as one reads the furious denunciations levelled by one coach-master against another in their old advertisements. This contention started in the very first years of the Brighton Road. In 1757 James Batchelor extended his old Lewes stage to Brighthelmstone (as Brighton then was known). He took two days to perform the journey. Five years later appeared a certain J. Tubb, allied in partnership with S. Brawne, with intent to drive Batchelor off the road. They advertised, in May 1762, a "Lewes and Brighthelmstone Flying Machine, hung on steel springs, very neat and commodious," to do the journey in one day. This presumption aroused Batchelor, the old

incumbent, to extraordinary energy, for, the very next week, he started a "new large Flying Chariot," and—reduced his fares! This reduction of fares seems to have struck Mr. Tubb as an exceedingly mean and contemptible move, and he rushed into print with a very long and virulent advertisement in the *Lewes Journal*, desiring "Gentlemen, Ladies, and others" to "look narrowly into the Meanness and Design of the other Flying Machine to Lewes and Brighthelmstone in lowering his prices, whether 'tis thro' conscience or an endeavour to suppress me. If the former is the case, think how you have been used for a great number of years, when he engrossed the whole to himself, and kept you two days upon the road, going fifty miles. If the latter, and he should be lucky enough to succeed in it, judge whether he won't return to his old prices when you cannot help yourselves, and use you as formerly."

To this Batchelor rejoined with an appeal "to the calm consideration of the Gentlemen, Ladies, and other Passengers, of what Degree soever." This appeal was chiefly the time-honoured one, that his coach was the original, and therefore deserved support: "Our Family first set up the Stage Coach from London to Lewes, and have continued it for a long Series of Years, from Father to Son and other Branches of the Same Race. Even before the Turnpikes on the Lewes Road were erected, they drove their Stage, in the Summer Season, in one day, and have continued

to do ever since, and now in the Winter Season twice in the week." The Lewes and Brighton Road seems, however, to have been long enough and broad enough for both Tubb and Batchelor, for they both continued until four years later, when Batchelor died, and his business was sold to Tubb, who took a partner, and himself in due course experienced the bitterness of a rival on the road, prepared with better machines, a speedier journey, and lower fares.

About this time, when hatreds and rivalries were seething in the south on this then comparatively unimportant road, the Shrewsbury and London road, on its several routes, by way of Birmingham and Coventry, or by Oxford and Banbury, was, as befitted so important a highway, the scene of a much keener and more protracted strife between opposing confederations of coach-proprietors, and in consequence coach nomenclature grew with the rapidity of melons under a glass frame. It should be noted here that coaching did not progress evenly all over the kingdom, but was more advanced on some roads than others. Thus, although the era of "Machines" and "Flying Machines" did not properly dawn until after 1750, yet on the Bath Road we already find a "Flying Machine" in 1667. Just as, nowadays, those people who happen to reside on a branch line of some great railway are commonly fobbed off with the second-hand rolling-stock and other offscourings of the main line, so the inhabitants along the lesser

roads had to be content with a mere "stage-coach," while the great trunk roads were thronged with "machines" and "post-coaches."

In 1753 the Shrewsbury "Long Coach" and "Stage Coach" were started, and long continued; but from 1764 things changed swiftly. In that year the "Machine" began. The next spring it had become the "Flying Machine," and in 1773 its success had raised up a "New Flying Machine," soon re-christened the "New Fly." To the challenge of this "New Fly," fitted, according to its proprietors, "quite in the modern taste" and with steel springs, the owners of the "original London and Salop Machine" replied, not only with the boast of being pioneers in days of old, but (much more to the point) advertised that their conveyance also was in the modern taste and fitted with springs; and, moreover, pointed out that the Coventry route, taken by it to London, was shorter than that by Oxford, taken by the rival firm.

"Machine" seems to have been a favourite description for coaches at any time between 1754 and the beginning of the nineteenth century. If the term had any specific meaning at all, and was anything more than a vague, grandiose way of advertising an ordinary stage, it must originally have indicated a vehicle just in advance of the usual ruck. The Bath "Flying Machine" was probably of lighter build than the other coaches, and the Edinburgh "new genteel, two-end glass coach machine, on steel

springs," of 1754, was doubtless only a somewhat neater example of a stage-coach than many then in use on that route.

The next development was the "Diligence," conveying only three passengers and going at the express rate necessary to cover the distance between Shrewsbury and London in one day. It went three times a week, and charged some four shillings less than the "Flying Machine." Rivalries on this road had by this time quite outgrown custom. In 1776 there were three distinct coaches between Shrewsbury and London, but they could not all pay their expenses, and so were gradually taken off altogether, or ran less frequently. The "Diligence," which more than any other had forced the pace, was itself discontinued.

"Diligence" had now become a very popular name for fast coaches, as speed was understood in those times. It derived from across the Channel, where conveyances known by this title had already supplemented the ordinary slow-going stage-coaches, called *carrosses*; but the importation of the word into this country in connection with stage-coaching was absolutely inexcusable, for already our "Post Coaches" and "Light Post Coaches" had begun to give the travelling public an idea of quick transit.

The English "Diligence," as originally built and run upon the roads, was nothing more nor less than a light coach, to hold three inside passengers only, facing in the direction the

coach travelled. It, indeed, greatly resembled, if even it was not identical in every particular with, the post-chaises of that time, themselves built to hold three persons, and by that measure of accommodation helping to prove every day and upon roads innumerable the truth of the old adage which declares that "Two's company; three's none." If, in fact, we come to the conclusion that post-chaises were sometimes used as "Diligences" and on other occasions as post-chaises, we shall only be giving the proprietors of coaches and chaises their due credit of being clever business men, suiting their stock to the needs of the hour.

Between the appearance of the Shrewsbury "Diligence" and the opening of the nineteenth century, "Diligences" abounded. The first mail-coach was a "Diligence." It is not to be supposed that they were all fast; and indeed, so early did the impudent slow coaches assume the title, in order to deceive the public, that it soon became a synonym for laziness and unpunctuality, and so far were they in many cases from being light coaches carrying only three passengers, that references to them in the literature of a hundred years ago mention as many as six, or even eight persons.

The word "diligence" in some subtle manner conveys a very true idea of these coaches. There is in it something soothing and trustworthy. In some vague way it radiates a calm atmosphere of plodding virtue and slow-going innocence, to

which your dashing but breakneck "Tally-ho's!" and "Comets" are entirely strange. The "mind's eye, Horatio," pictures in the progress of a Diligence a patient toiling against difficulties, rewarded in the end by the happy issue of an arrival at one's inn, weary perhaps with long hours of travel, but still sound in body; an ending not always so comfortable when travelling by the swift "Tally-ho's" and "Comets" aforesaid. Then, too, when "Diligence" became shortened into "Dilly," as it very soon was, the title grew in a sense poetic. The "Derby Dilly," which, faithful among the faithless, would appear to have remained really and truly a Diligence, has in fact been celebrated in verse by no less an one than Canning, in the lines contributed by him to the *Loves of the Triangles*:—

So down thy hill, romantic Ashbourne, glides
 The Derby Dilly, carrying* three insides.
 One in each corner sits and lolls at ease,
 With folded arms, propt back, and outstretched knees;
 While the press'd Bodkin, pinch'd and squeezed to death,
 Sweats in the mid-most place, and scolds, and pants for
 breath.

Canning's vivid picture of travelling by Dilly describes in an unapproachable manner the peculiar defects of its construction.

* It is worthy of note that these lines are generally misquoted. But the misquotations are improvements upon the original; as, in fact, the best known misquotations are. The usual version runs, "So down thy vale," and substitutes "The Derby Dilly, with its three insides" for the original clumsy line, which fails to scan.

There were those ingrates who, contemporary with the Diligences, did not appreciate them very highly. They valued speed more than safety. "You should have called it the Sloth," said the traveller at the Hawes Inn, somewhere about 1790, referring to the "Hawes Fly, or Queen's-ferry Diligence," which then plied between Edinburgh and the shores of the Forth; "why, it moves like a fly through a glue-pot."

It is now necessary to turn aside for awhile to contemplate the final debasement of the Diligence, which in 1835 became, in the hands of Mr. George Shillibeer, something very like an omnibus. In 1829 he had introduced a line of public vehicles running from Paddington to the City, and had himself named them "omnibuses"; but in 1835 he appeared with a long-distance vehicle which he put on the Brighton Road and named "Shillibeer's Improved New Patent Diligence." By this, three classes of accommodation were provided: the "Coupé or Chariot," to convey three persons, at £1 1s. each; behind it, in a separate compartment, the "Omnibus," to hold eight, at 16s.; and the "Exterior," as he somewhat grandly named the roof, accommodating an indefinite number at 10s. each. Shillibeer was a great advertiser, and gave this, as well as his omnibuses, due publicity. He was inordinately fond of advertisements cast in a metrical form, and accordingly his tame poet was made to grind out a set of halting verses which fully describe the beauty and convenience of his master's new enterprise:—

In this age of novelty, railroads and steam,
And of ships in the air, of which some people dream,
For the safety and comfort of travellers of sense,
Shillibeer starts for Brighton a new Diligence.

This elegant carriage (Shil's taste is well known)
Has been built by himself, on a plan of his own,
And the world may be challenged, 'tis no vain pretence,
For a conveyance to equal his new Diligence.

At Charing Cross daily, at ten may be seen
Three grey horses abreast, his trinity team,
And all will allow he has spared no expense
For a splendid set-out to his new Diligence.

First comes the Coupé, just suited for three,
Where the King, Queen, and Princess Victoria might be,
For Royalty, even, could take no offence,
So splendid and handsome is the new Diligence.

Here seated, as if in a chariot, the fare
May the prospect survey, and enjoy the fresh air,
And the ladies in order their ringlets dispense,
In due form at the glass in the new Diligence.

Then comes the Omnibus, four on each side,
In safety and comfort eight persons may ride,
And in six hours' time, when started from hence,
They at Brighton arrive in the new Diligence.

Through Clapham and Mitcham and Reigate the route,
By Crawley, and Cuckfield, without any doubt,
Far the most pleasant road, in every sense,
To the Royal Clarence Hotel runs the new Diligence.

As economy now is the rage of the day,
One guinea a seat is the price in coupé,
The fare in the omni, sixteen shillings expense,
Outside, half a sovereign, on the new Diligence.

I have only to add that the public will find
Extreme expedition, with safety combined,
And most civil attention, avoiding offence,
To the patrons of Shillibeer's new Diligence.

Poor Shillibeer, however, came to an unfortunate crisis in his affairs in this very year, when the omnibuses he put on the road between London and Greenwich had been running in ruinous competition with the new London and Greenwich Railway, and had brought him so very low, financially, that he was unable to meet the demands of the Stamp Office for the duty payable on the vehicles. The Office seized his omnibuses, and presumably his Diligence as well, for we hear nothing more of it, and his mellifluous songster no longer enlivened the pages of the public prints with his rhymes. There was a Diligence on the Brighton Road in the following year, but it was owned by another firm, who made a better performance, for their conveyance did the journey in $5\frac{1}{4}$ hours, and the fares were much cheaper. Passengers by coupé paid 16s., by second class 12s., and outsides only 8s.

Meanwhile, "Post Coaches" and "Light Post Coaches" were at the head of the coaching hierarchy. Introduced long before mail-coaches came into being, they were then the most expensive and exclusive, as they were also the speediest, of public conveyances, and ranked next after the post-chaises. They were expensive chiefly because they provided only limited accommodation; originally only three or four inside, and one or two out, with no luggage, except small trunks or parcels. The term "Post" had no reference to the Post Office, but was intended to give at once an idea of speed and

an approach to that absolute privacy only obtained by specially hiring a post-horse or a post-chaise. Indeed, the earliest Post Coaches not a little resembled a post-chaise hired by a party of friends for the journey. In securing a seat by post-coach, the traveller, in view of the limited accommodation, mathematically reduced his chances of meeting and journeying with vulgar and objectionable characters; while the higher fare tended to produce the same effect by eliminating all but those who were rich enough to afford the cost, and were therefore, by an easily understood process of reasoning, likely to be cleanly and well-mannered. How highly objectionable the company in a stage-coach might and could be we have the testimony of many travellers to tell, from Dean Swift to John Wesley and Macready, the actor. Their trials and experiences are mostly recorded elsewhere in these pages; but two examples may take their place here to illustrate the reason why Post Coaches flourished so greatly.

Let us, then, hear Wesley:—

“I went,” he says, “to Norwich (from London) in the stage-coach with two very disagreeable companions, called a gentleman and gentlewoman, but equally ignorant, insolent, lewd, and profane.

“*July 21st, 1779.*—(From Coventry) I took coach for London. I was nobly attended: behind the coach were ten convicted felons, loudly blaspheming and rattling their chains; by my

side sat a man with a loaded blunderbuss, and another upon the roof."

The felons, "behind the coach," would ride in the basket, which was without springs. Their chains would necessarily rattle, and considering the discomfort of ten manacled men, jammed together, without seats, and jolted over bad roads, it is not surprising they "blasphemed."

Macready travelled in 1811 by the Liverpool stage, from Birmingham to London. He says:—

"I got into the coach; its odours were many, various, and unpleasantly mingled, and the passengers, a half-drunken sailor and an old woman, did not impress me with the prospect of a very pleasant journey. The pace at which the vehicle proceeded made me doubt whether it would ever reach London, and its creakings and joltings seemed to augur a certain overturn." This objectionable conveyance took five hours to accomplish the eighteen miles between Birmingham and Coventry, and only reached London at five o'clock the next evening.

But there is no subject upon which it is more rash to generalise than that of coaching history. One road might be thirty or forty years in advance of another, and Diligences and Post Coaches mean things very different in one part of the country from conveyances similarly named, but of different construction and capacity, running in other districts. In 1782, for example, there was a self-styled "Post Coach" running between London, Maidenhead, and Marlow, which

certainly did not fully answer the description given above; although, from the evidence of the very curious old painting, it still retained a certain elegance, in spite of carrying outsides, and owning that vulgar appendage, a "basket," behind. This Post Coach, which in the contemporary painting bears its name, starting-point, and place of destination plainly to be seen, is first heard of in 1773, running daily from the "King's Head," Old Change, at noon. What the fare was to Marlow we have not been able to discover, but to Maidenhead, distant from the City 31 miles, it was 5s.

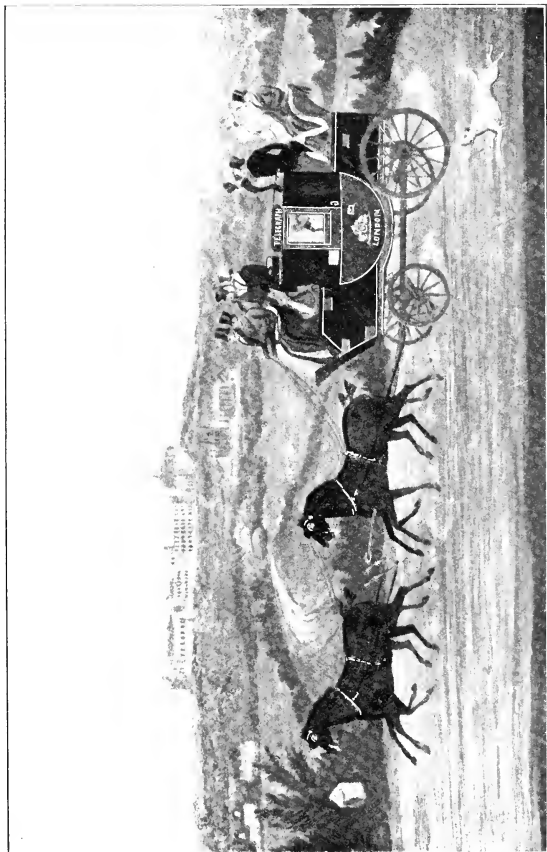
"Accommodation" coaches abounded all over the country from about 1800. They were generally slow coaches, with ample room, travelling along the roads in leisurely fashion, and stopping anywhere and everywhere, to pick up passengers and luggage. The nearest parallel to them nowadays is the slow, stopping, long-distance train, which halts at every little wayside station and sees the express flash by at sixty miles an hour.

Thus far we have recorded chiefly the titles by which types of coaches were known. We now come to coaches individually named. Early among these is the "Rockingham," London and Leeds stage, established in 1781, and continued until the railway came to Leeds, in 1841. Rockingham was, indeed, a name to conjure with in Yorkshire, and there were at least two other coaches with that name running on branch

roads from Leeds. The "True Blue" was the name of the old Leeds, Malton and Scarborough coach, originating in the same year as the "Rockingham," and lasting three years longer. Three others ran between Leeds and Wakefield, Knaresborough and Selby, and Leeds and Bradford. "True Britons," too, were plentiful in the broad-acred county of Yorkshire, where politics and patriotism kept parties at fever heat and divided even travellers into parties to such an extent that an ardent supporter of the "Buffs" would almost rather walk or post than journey by a "Blue" coach; while a True Blue Tory inn-keeper would deny accommodation to a Buff Whig (supposing in the first instance that the Whig had so far forgotten what was due to his faction as to seek shelter there) and think nothing of the custom lost.

In 1784 the "Expedition" coach is first mentioned as running between London and Norwich, by way of Newmarket and Thetford. The "expedition" consisted in going 108 miles in $17\frac{1}{2}$ hours, including stops, or a net running speed of about seven miles an hour.

"Balloon" coaches were first heard of in 1785, when a plentiful scattering of that name over the country proved how deep an impression had been made upon the public mind by the balloon ascents of Lunardi in the previous year. A stone monument marks the spot beside the Cambridge Road, near Ware, on which that aerial traveller descended after his first flight



THE "READING TELEGRAPH," PASSING WINDSOR CASTLE.

After J. Pollack.

in this country; and the coaches long carried an echo of the wonderment then excited. Coach-proprietors had, indeed, by this time begun to see the commercial advantage of impressing the public with a sounding name. Already, by long use and wont, ears had become blunted by the name of the Flying Machines, which had fallen unmeaningly upon several generations accustomed to liberally discount the absurd pretension. No one at this time, it is safe to say, ever received a mental impression of flying when a flying coach was named. The name had become a mere convention. The Balloon was therefore a god-send to coach-proprietors who, in naming their conveyances after it, succeeded for a while in reviving an outworn figure of speed, and thus again suggested the idea of their coaches gracefully navigating the empyrean, rather than painfully staggering along the rutty roads.

The "Defiance" coaches bring us closer to the great Augustan era of smart coaches and great emulation along the road. The earliest coach of this name was put on the Leeds and Hull road in 1784, and became the parent of many more. Extraordinary ingenuity was used in the selection of "telling" names, supposed to instantly discover the character of a coach to travellers. The various "Highflyers," for example, spoke to sporting men of a speed that might be neck or nothing. The typical sportsman would book by the "Highflyer," the "Vixen," "Spitfire," the "Flying Childers," "Lightning," or "Rapid,"

while the typical parson would go by the "Regulator," the "Reliance," or, best of all, if opportunity offered, by the "Good Intent."

It is curious to note in how arbitrary a geographical manner these names were distributed. It is no use seeking a "Highflyer" in the history of the Brighton Road. "Highflyers" were Yorkshire products, and almost exclusively confined to the Great North Road and its affluents. There, indeed, they were numerous. The old original of the name was started in 1788, and kept the road between London and Edinburgh until 1840. There were at least six others.

"Telegraph" coaches, however, were not peculiar to any one road or district. Introduced about 1781 on the Leeds and Newcastle road, there were two others in Yorkshire, and in 1805 and 1811 "New Telegraph" and "Telegraph" coaches were on the Brighton Road. In the 'twenties a "Southampton Telegraph," a "Manchester Telegraph," and a "Reading Telegraph" flourished; while beyond all others in their fame and exploits were the immortal "Exeter Telegraph," started in 1826 by Mrs. Ann Nelson, of the "Bull," Aldgate, to travel the 173 miles between Piccadilly and Exeter in 17 hours, and the "Manchester Telegraph" day coach of 1833, doing 186 miles in 18 hours. Before the advance of the Great Western Railway brought the "Exeter Telegraph" off the road, it had cut down the length of the journey by three hours. Coaches rejoicing in this name—a



THE EXETER MAIL, 1893.

After J. A. Atkinson.

synonym for speed—were necessarily the fastest on the road, but they did not, of course, obtain the title from the electric telegraph, invented only in 1838. It was derived from the system of semaphore signalling, the quickest method of communication then known, by which messages were signalled between London and the coast, from lofty hills even yet marked on the Ordnance maps, “Telegraph Hill.” Of how inconceivably swift telegraphy would in a comparatively short time become, the old coach-proprietors could have had not the remotest inkling, but they did not suffer from excess of modesty, and had the instantaneous signalling of electricity been known in their time, it would by no means have deterred them from christening their coaches in impudent rivalry with it.

The “Exeter Telegraph” was put on to compete with another, and equally famous, coach, the Devonport Mail, generally known in coaching annals as the “Quicksilver.” This celebrated mail started about 1820. Passing through Exeter, it went on to Plymouth and Devonport, and performed the whole journey in 21 hours 14 minutes, an average speed, including stops, of 10 miles $1\frac{3}{4}$ furlongs an hour. “Quicksilvers,” of course, became fashionable on other roads after the fame of this performance had spread.

Our great wars with France and Spain gave coaches a plentiful crop of titles, taking a higher note than merely that of party. The victory

of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson, in 1805, produced innumerable "Nelsons," "Lord Nelsons," and "Trafalgars," only rivalled in popularity by the "Wellingtons" and "Waterloos" ten years later. Even Blucher was honoured, in a coach named after him. Coach-proprietors, in fact, were keen to seize the popular incident of the hour, the hero of the day, or the name of the local magnate, to reflect a certain glory upon, or bespeak affection for, their enterprises. Even the "Union" coaches, which were christened in honour of that great political event, the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and were from that date to be found on almost every great road, and in incredible numbers on the bye-roads, paled their lustre before those named after the naval and military heroes, or the glorious victories of the hour.

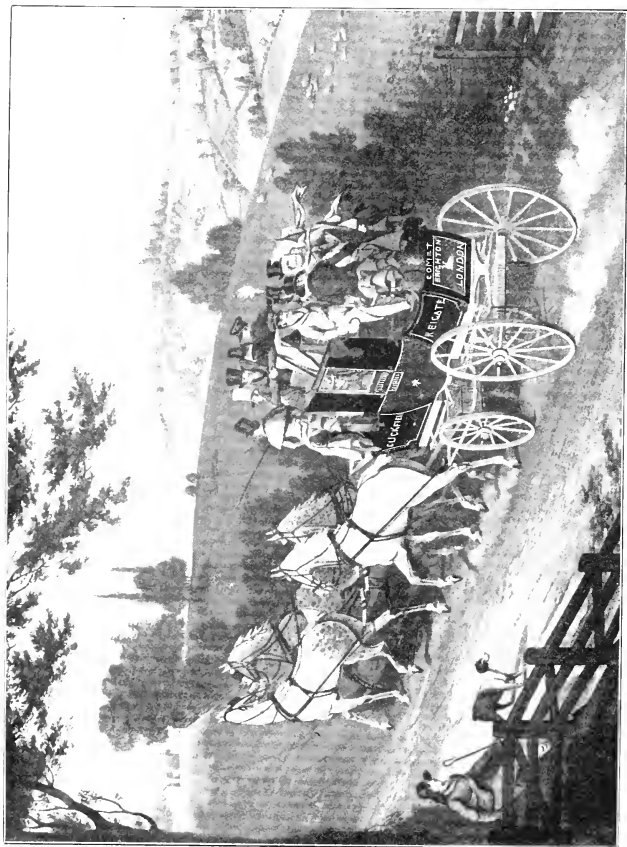
But when the glamour of the great achievements won on land and sea by generals and admirals and by our soldiers and sailors had waned, as it speedily did when peace came and the nation was called upon to pay the bill, it is to be feared that the "Wellingtons" and "Nelsons" did not run so frequently with a full way-bill as they had done, and that opportunist coach-proprietors in many cases renamed them in styles that more exactly fitted the humours of the time. When the comets of 1811 and 1818 appeared, flaming in the heavens, to excite the wonderment of the learned and to terrify the ignorant, the coach-proprietors were early in

the field to take advantage of the event, and "Comet" coaches, intended to strike the public fancy with an idea of swift travelling, appeared on the main routes with amazing unanimity.

The Brighton "Comet," established in 1815, ran until 1840, when the London and Brighton Railway was opened. It experienced a good many mishaps in the course of those twenty-five years. On September 2nd, 1815, when it had arrived at Castle Square, Brighton, and had discharged most of its passengers, the coachman turned it so sharply that the front wheels became locked, and in the endeavour to release them the coach was overturned. The careless coachman was himself seriously hurt, and a lady, an inside passenger, and a gentleman on the outside much bruised; but a Mr. Walker, who had just mounted the coach, had his leg broken. The "Comet" evidently went through Epsom, for it was there that another accident happened to it in later years. That coach carried no guard, and the coachman had, therefore, to act that part, as well as drive. He climbed down to take up a passenger, and while doing so the horses backed the coach into a bank and caused it to fall over. A lady travelling outside had her ribs broken. A third accident was due largely to the interference of a passenger, who met his death in consequence. The "Comet" had on this occasion nearly completed its down journey, when, at Patcham, the reins became entangled in some unexplained manner. A

Mr. Schraeder, who was on the box-seat, travelling to Brighton to join his family, made an effort, despite the protests of the coachman, to get down to disentangle them, when he fell between the box and the horses, and the coach ran over him. The "Comet" ran to the "Swan with Two Necks," in Lad Lane, and seems, from Pollard's spirited picture, to have been an exceptionally smart coach.

The great era of coaching, with its attendant competition, opened about 1820, and from that time the "Defiances," the "Celerities," the "Rapids," "Expresses," "Reindeers," "Darts," "Stags," and "Antelopes" increased; while fiercely militant titles, such as those of the "Retaliator," the "Spitfire," "Vixen," "Fearless," "Dreadnought," and "Invincible" reflected the extraordinary bitterness and animosity with which that competition was conducted. The reverse of this unamiable feature is seen in the names—breathing a spirit of goodwill, or at least of meekness, reliability, and inoffensiveness—of the "Amity," the "Live and Let Live," "Hope," "Endeavour," the "Give and Take," "Reliance," "Safety," "Regulator," "Perseverance," "Good Intent," and "Pilot" coaches. It is probable that some of these titles were given by small proprietors, anxious to disclaim rivalry with more powerful men. Others were intended to secure the patronage of the old ladies and the timorous, and all those to whom coach travelling, with its many accidents and hairbreadth escapes, was a disagreeable necessity.



THE BRIGHTON "COMET," 1886.

After J. Pollard.

To reassure the old ladies of both sexes such coaches as the "Patent Safeties" were introduced. Many of those so called were neither safe nor patent, but an exception must be made in the case of the coach invented and patented in December 1805 by the Reverend William Milton, Vicar of Heckfield, near Reading. This gentleman, who yearned for a larger sphere of action than that provided by his rural parish, and apparently did not find his duties sufficient to occupy his time, studied the subject, and produced a book in whose pages he sets forth the design of his coach and its superiority over anything that had hitherto appeared on the road. His principle not only consisted in lowering the body of the vehicle upon its axles, so reducing the centre of gravity, but in addition provided a luggage box in the rear of the coach, hung so low that it was only fourteen inches from the ground. His idea was to carry the luggage thus, instead of on the roof, so rendering it less top-heavy, and indeed, according to his theory, making the luggage act as ballast, so that the heavier the coach loaded, the safer it would be. Nor was this all. As a protection against overturning in the case of a wheel coming off, he provided what he called a small "idle wheel," fitted to the axle a short distance inside each running wheel. In the event of a wheel flying off, the coach would only dip slightly, and run on the "idle wheel" until the coachman could bring the whole affair to a stop.

Of course this inventive clergyman found

the greatest indifference among coach-proprietors towards his patent safety coach. His book reflects the disappointment he felt, and he enlarges upon the folly of men who had, time and again, been heavy losers in paying compensation claims by injured passengers, and yet would not try the merits of a vehicle which would save them in pocket and in anxiety. He at last gave an order to a firm of coach-builders, had one built to his own design, and prevailed first upon one of the London and Reading proprietors, and then the owners of a Stroud coach, to try it. The general feeling seems to have been that it was safe, but slow, and did not possess so easy a draught as that of the usual build. To these arguments he replied by saying that his luggage-box, providing room for more goods and luggage than carried on ordinary coaches, was generally filled with heavy consignments sent by the Stroud clothiers, and that the heaviness of draught was due to that cause. But explanations of weight, demonstrations of safety, and even the recommendations he had procured from a Parliamentary Committee, were useless, and Milton's Patent Safety Coach was never more than a fugitive occupant of the road.

But still the public, horrified by the increasing number and the disastrous nature of the accidents that strewed every road with groaning passengers, were intent upon being carried safely, and so various attempts were made to reassure them. So many accidents had happened on the Brighton

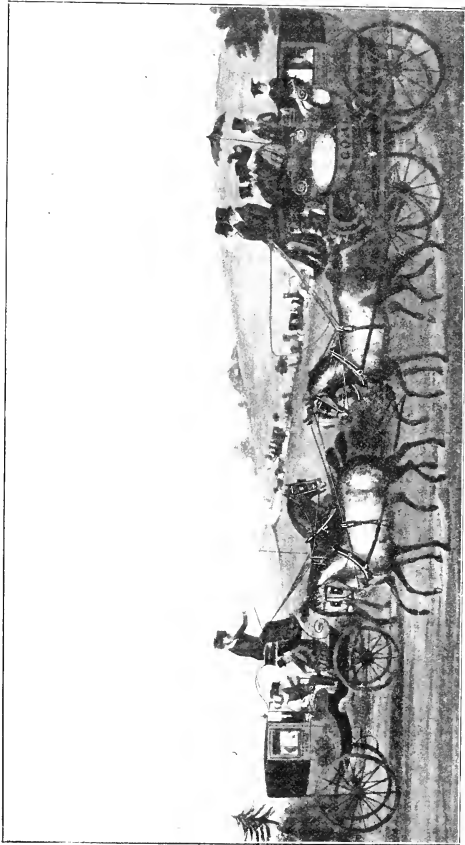
Road, incomparably the most travelled of all, that in the spring of 1819 it was thought necessary by a prominent firm of coach-proprietors to introduce a "safety" coach. This was the "Sovereign," an entirely new departure in coach-building. It was at once larger and lighter than an ordinary coach. "It weighs," said the *Brighton Herald*, "only $1500\frac{1}{4}$ lb.; which is 400 lb. lighter than the average of coaches built to carry luggage, and $80\frac{3}{4}$ lb. less than some gentlemen's landaus. The different coachmen who have driven it say that on level ground it runs much lighter than others, and every mechanic knows that small wheels have the advantage at a hill." Evidently then, the "Sovereign" was built with smaller wheels than were usual. It was, in addition, five inches broader in the gauge of the axletrees, while, according to the official description, the weight of the body was "placed five feet lower, so that when the wheels on one side are thrown off, the axle drags on the ground, and will allow the remaining wheels to be lifted twelve inches or more before the coach loses its balance. If a wheel had been thrown off any other coach while going at the rate of nine miles an hour with two outside passengers, it must have gone over; but should it take place with the safe coach, it will not incline on one side so as to make passengers uncomfortable."

The appearance of this affair was extraordinary. It carried no outsides on the roof; they were placed in a fore-carriage like the body of a landau, constructed between the box and the body of the

coach. Under the box was "a spacious lock-up receptacle for the stowage of luggage"; so it was a "safety" coach in more than one particular, and the local newspaper was of opinion that "the confidence which manufacturers and dealers have of their valuable property being secured from wet and pilfering is enough to secure for it the most decided preference, independently of its personal safety." So great was the interest taken at Brighton in this pioneer of safety coaches that an enormous crowd of nearly two thousand persons assembled to witness the departure on its first journey, Sunday, March 21st, 1819. It made the passage to London in six hours; a speed quite up to the level of the usual performances.

The popularity of the "Sovereign" was so great and immediate that other coach-proprietors lost no time in having "safeties" built. The next to take the road was the "Umpire," in July of the same year, followed by the "Dart" and "Hero." These were all swift, as well as safe. A similar Patent Safety was Matthews's coach. The proprietor of the "Comet" adopted it for a time, as shown in the old print engraved here.

The inevitable debasement of the specific term "safety," and its general application at the whim of proprietors, quite irrespective of safety construction, is found beginning in 1821, with the advertisement of Whitechurch, Best & Wilkins, of Brighton, in which, while the public were reminded that the firm were the first to run a coach to London in six hours, returning the same



MATTHEWS' PATENT SAFETY COACHES ON THE BRIGHTON ROAD.

day, stress was laid upon the fact that this quick service had been continued daily for six years without an accident. Experienced coachmen, steady horses, and a stern discouragement of racing had procured this desirable immunity, and so (the advertisement continued) it was hoped the public would not deem the proprietors presumptuous in claiming the privilege of calling the coach, although not a patent, a safety. Alas for these pioneers of quick transit and sticklers for decent conduct on the road! The firm very soon decayed, and Whitchurch, the senior partner, was brought to poverty.

To follow the history of the "safety" coaches and the pseudo-"safeties" would be a long business, but it may be said that these specially constructed vehicles did not long continue, and that the average stage-coach passenger took the claims of all very much on trust. To show that he did so we need only quote the anecdote related by "Viator Junior" in the *Sporting Magazine* of 1828, at the expense of the "Patriot" coach, then newly provided with Cooke's protection reins:—

"Just as Pickett was starting with his 'Union' coach out of Holborn, up comes a pury old citizen, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"'Pray, coachman, is this here the Patriotic Life-Preserver Patent Safety Coach?'

"'Yes, sir,' says Pickett, not hearing above half his passenger's question; 'room behind,

sir: jump up, if you please—very late this morning.’

“‘Why, where’s the machinery?’ cries the old one.

“‘There, sir,’ replies a passenger (a young Cantab, I suspect), pointing to a heavy trunk of mine that was swung underneath, ‘in that box, sir, that’s where the machinery works.’

“‘Ah!’ quoth the old man, climbing up, quite satisfied: ‘wonderful inventions nowadays, sir. We shall all get safe to Brighton: no chance of an accident by *this* coach.’”

The Brighton Road, as already hinted, was in many ways exceptional. It had exceptionally many Royal associations, reflected vividly enough in the names of its coaches. Among these was, of course, the “Prince Regent,” started in 1813, but preceded by the “Princess Charlotte,” established a year earlier, and followed by the “Regent,” “Royal George,” “Royal Adelaide,” “Royal Clarence,” “Royal Sussex,” “Royal Victoria,” and “Royal York.”

Later sporting names for coaches than the “Tally-ho’s” and the “Hightflyers” were such as the “Bang Up,” the “Heeover”—surely no prudent person travelled by a coach with a name so suggestive of broken necks—and the “High-mettled Racer,” while the gay young bloods who drove the crack Windsor coach called it, after the first *dansense* of that time, the “Taglioni.” The “Taglioni” was a fast coach, driven by fast men, and had a picture of

Taglioni herself, pirouetting round on the tips of her toes, painted prominently on the body. But of all the sporting names, that of the "Tantivy" breathes most the classic spirit of that sporting age, and called forth one of the coaching classics, written in regretful anticipation of coaches being supplanted by railways. The "Tantivy Trot" was written by Egerton Warburton, of Arley, Cheshire. It was sung to the air of "Here's to the Maiden of Bashful Fifteen," and was an especial favourite with the brazen-throated young sportsmen of the Bullingdon Club:—

THE TANTIVY TROT

Here's to the heroes of four-in hand fame,
 Harrison, Peyton, and Warde, sir;
 Here's to the dragsmen that after them came,
 Ford, and the Lancashire lord, sir.

Here's to the team, sir, all harnessed to start,
 Brilliant in Brummagem leather;
 Here's to the waggoner skill'd in the art
 Of coupling the cattle together.

Here's to the arm that holds them when gone,
 Still to a gallop inclined, sir;
 Heads to the front with no bearing reins on,
 Tails with no cruppers behind, sir.

Here's to the shape that is shown the near side,
 Here's to the blood on the off, sir;
 Limbs without check to the freedom of stride,
 Wind without whistle or cough, sir.

Here's to the dear little damsels within,
 Here's to the swells on the top, sir;
 Here's to the music in three feet of tin,
 Here's to the tapering crop, sir.

Here's to the dragsmen I've dragged into song —
 Salisbury, Mountain and Co., sir;
 Here's to the Cracknell that cracks 'em along,
 Five twenty times at a go, sir.

Here's to MacAdam, the Mac of all Maes,
 Here's to the road we ne'er tire on,
 Let me but roll o'er the granite he cracks,
 Ride ye who like it on iron.

Let the steam-pot
 Hiss till it's hot;
 Give me the speed
 Of the Tantivy trot.

It is a long set of verses, but it should not be difficult, if any one had the mind to it, to continue them indefinitely. In truth, they limp not a little, and do not go the swinging pace of the "Tantivy" itself. But this was the best the old-time enthusiasm for the road could produce, and that it should have been so popular at coaching festivities shows that although coachmen, amateur and professional, were severe critics of other coaching matters, they were sufficiently indulgent to literary efforts on this especial theme.

Rowland Eyles Egerton Warburton, who wrote the "Tantivy Trot" in 1834, at the request of Charles Ford for something to celebrate the Birmingham "Tantivy" coach, was regarded by

the sporting world as its laureate. He was the squire of Arley Hall, Cheshire, and the owner of many fat acres in that county. He outlived the coaching age by many a long day, and died in 1891 in his 88th year. The last sixteen years of his life were saddened by the affliction of total blindness.

CHAPTER XIV

GOING BY COACH : BOOKING OFFICES

JOURNEYS by coach were entered upon by our grandfathers with much deliberation. It was not then a matter of suddenly making up one's mind to go somewhere, and going accordingly, with only a few minutes' preparation. The first step was to book one's seat, a formality then absolutely necessary, and in most cases some days before the journey was proposed to be taken. Only by doing so could one be sure of finding a place. The nearest modern parallel to this custom is the booking of passages on ocean steamers; and a relic of it may be observed every day at every railway station where the name of "Booking Office" instead of Ticket Office is a survival—like that of the official railway designation of carriages and passenger returns as "coaches" and "coaching traffic"—of customs gone, never to return.

The passengers by coach were actually, as the term implies, "booked." The booking clerk did not merely give one a ticket in exchange for the fare. He entered the passenger's name and all necessary particulars in a huge ledger, and in this identical manner the first railway passengers

secured their places, until the mere work of entering these details became too great.

The booking-clerks in coach-offices had their responsibilities, and were kept up to the highest mark of efficiency by the knowledge that if they fell into such an error as overbooking a coach on any particular journey, not only would the proprietors be bound in law to by some means convey those passengers for whom there was no room, but that the extra cost of so doing would infallibly be deducted from their wages. The loss in such cases would inevitably be heavy, but dependent upon the length of the journey. Mistakes of this kind generally meant that the extra passengers were conveyed by post-chaise, at anything from ninepence to a shilling a mile; and it was the difference between these rates and the coach-fares of from twopence to fivepence a mile that the clerks had to make good, unless the overbooked passengers were sufficiently good-natured to wait for another coach.

The usual practice on securing a place was to pay a proportion—generally one-half of the fare—down, and the other half on taking one's seat, as noted in the contemporary doggerel, which declared:—

When to York per mail you start,
 Four-caped, like other men,
 To the book-keeper so smart
 You pay three pounds, in part :
 Two pounds ten before you start :
 Sum total, five-pound-ten."

If you did not put in an appearance, the deposit was, of course, forfeited.

Dickens, who as a reporter in his early years was very intimately acquainted with coach travelling and all the manners and customs connected with it, has left a very picturesque description of a coach booking-office and its occupants. The first impression received by the prospective traveller was of his own unimportance. One entered a mouldy-looking room, ornamented with large posting-bills, the greater part of the place enclosed behind a huge lumbering rough counter, and fitted up with recesses like the dens of the smaller animals in a travelling menagerie, without the bars. At these booking-offices, in fact, one booked parcels as well as passengers, and into these recesses the parcels were flung, with an air of recklessness at which the passenger who might have chanced to buy a new carpet-bag that morning would feel considerably annoyed.

The booking-office to which Dickens here refers was at the "Golden Cross," Charing Cross; but booking-offices were all very much alike, and were exceedingly dreary and uncomfortable places, resembling modern offices for the reception of parcels:—

"Porters, like so many Atlases, keep rushing in and out, with large packages on their shoulders; and while you are waiting to make the necessary inquiries, you wonder what on earth the booking-office clerks can have been before they were booking-office clerks; one of them, with his pen

behind his ear, and his hands behind him, is standing in front of the fire like a full-length portrait of Napoleon; the other, with his hat half off his head, enters the passengers' names in the books with a coolness which is inexpressibly provoking; and the villain whistles—actually whistles—while a man asks him what the fare is outside—all the way to Holyhead!—in frosty weather too! They are clearly an isolated race, evidently possessing no sympathies or feelings in common with the rest of mankind. Your turn comes at last, and, having paid the fare, you tremblingly inquire—‘What time will it be necessary for me to be here in the morning?’ ‘Six o’clock,’ replies the whistler, carelessly pitching the sovereign you have just parted with into a wooden bowl on the desk. ‘Rather before than arter,’ adds the man with the semi-roasted unmentionables, with just as much ease and complacency as if the whole world got out of bed at five. You turn into the street, ruminating, as you bend your steps homewards, on the extent to which men become hardened in cruelty by custom.”

The long-distance coaches—divided into the “day” and “night” varieties—started very early in the morning, or late in the afternoon. The midday aspect of such yards as Sherman’s “Bull and Mouth,” Chaplin’s “Swan with Two Necks,” the “Belle Sauvage, the “Cross Keys,” the “Golden Cross,” and others was one of repose, but from unearthly hours in the forenoon until

nine or ten, or from three o'clock in the afternoon until nine at night, they were the scenes of bustling activity. Any reference to old coaching time-bills will show that the majority of the day stage-coaches to places distant a hundred miles or more from London started about 6 a.m. Thus in 1824, among the coaches from London to Birmingham, eight are found timed from London between five and a quarter to eight in the morning; leaving the rest of the day blank until 3 p.m., when the earliest of the night coaches set out. The "Sovereign" went in 1824 from the "Bull," Whitechapel, at 5 a.m. Half an hour later went the "Crown Prince" from the "Belle Sauvage," and the "Aurora," from the "Bull and Mouth"; followed by the "Courier," from the "Swan with Two Necks," and the "Light Coach" from the "Cross Keys" and "Golden Cross" at 6. At 6.30 went the "Oxonian Express" from the "Bull and Mouth"; the "Independent Tally-Ho," from the "Golden Cross," while "Mountain's Tally-Ho," from the "Saracen's Head," Snow Hill, left at 7.45. In the same year the three early coaches for Bath left London at 5, 5.45, and 6.15 a.m. These hours, which we should nowadays regard as extravagantly early, were necessary if those coaches were to properly serve the roads they travelled, for even a fast coach, doing its 9 or 9½ miles an hour, including stoppages, would not reach Bath or Birmingham before the day had nearly closed.

These unseasonable hours meant, of course,

very early rising indeed for would-be passengers, and not even that hardy generation endured the infliction without a very great deal of grumbling. But there was no remedy. It was only a choice of ills, whether you had to be called at a little after three o'clock on perhaps a winter's morning for a day's journey, or whether you elected to wait until the afternoon, and so, travelling through the night, were deposited at your journey's end on the pavements of Bath or Birmingham, or some other strange place, at the inhospitable hours between midnight and six a.m.; in which latter case you would be in that extremely unpleasant position of wanting to go to bed when the rest of the world was considering the expediency of getting out of it.

Some, difficult to arouse in the early morn, adopted the heroic expedient of sitting up all night. Others, like Leigh Hunt and James Payn, taught by long experience, engaged a bedroom overnight at the inn whence the coach started, so that they might be on the spot and lie two hours longer. Even then, as Payn confessed, he often slept too long, and so, without breakfast, often carrying his boots in his hand, and in other ways not completely dressed, would dash into the coach at the very moment of its moving away.

"We have often wondered," wrote Dickens, "how many months' incessant travelling in a post-chaise it would take to kill a man; and, wondering by analogy, we should very much like to know how many months of constant travelling in a

succession of early coaches an unfortunate mortal could endure. Breaking a man alive upon the wheel would be nothing to breaking his rest, his peace, his heart—everything but his fast—upon four; and the punishment of Ixion (the only practical person, by-the-by, who has discovered the secret of the perpetual motion) would sink into utter insignificance before the one we have suggested. If we had been a powerful churchman in those good times when blood was shed as freely as water, and men were mowed down like grass in the sacred cause of religion, we would have lain by very quietly till we got hold of some especially obstinate miscreant, who positively refused to be converted to our faith, and then we would have booked him for an inside place in a small coach, which travelled day and night; and, securing the remainder of the places for stout men with a slight tendency to coughing and spitting, we would have started him forth on his last travels—leaving him mercilessly to all the tortures which the waiters, landlords, coachmen, guards, boots, chambermaids, and other familiars on his line of road might think proper to inflict.

“If,” he continued, “there be one thing in existence more miserable than another, it most unquestionably is the being compelled to rise by candle-light. If you ever doubted the fact, you are painfully convinced of your error on the morning of your departure. You left strict orders overnight to be called at half-past four, and you have done nothing all night but doze for five

minutes at a time, and start up suddenly from a terrific dream of a large church clock with the small hand running round, with astonishing rapidity, to every figure on the dial-plate. At last, completely exhausted, you fall gradually into a refreshing sleep—your thoughts grow confused—the stage-coaches, which have been ‘going off’ before your eyes all night, become less and less distinct, until they go off altogether; one moment you are driving with all the skill and smartness of an experienced whip—the next you are exhibiting *à la* Ducrow on the off leader; anon you are closely muffled up, inside, and have just recognised in the person of the guard an old school-fellow whose funeral, even in your dream, you remember to have attended eighteen years ago. At last you fall into a state of complete oblivion, from which you are aroused, as if into a new state of existence, by a singular illusion. You are apprenticed to a trunk-maker; how, or why, or when, or wherefore, you don’t take the trouble to inquire; but there you are, pasting the lining in the lid of a portmanteau. Confound that other apprentice in the back-shop, how he is hammering!—rap, rap, rap—what an industrious fellow he must be! you have heard him at work for half an hour past, and he has been hammering incessantly the whole time. Rap, rap, rap, again—he’s talking now—what’s that he said? Five o’clock! You make a violent exertion, and start up in bed. The vision is at once dispelled; the trunk-maker’s shop is your own bedroom, and the other

apprentice your shivering servant, who has been vainly endeavouring to wake you for the last quarter of an hour, at the imminent risk of breaking either his own knuckles or the panels of the door.

“ You proceed to dress yourself with all possible despatch. The flaring flat candle with the long snuff gives light enough to show that the things you want are not where they ought to be, and you undergo a trifling delay in consequence of having carefully packed up one of your boots in your over-anxiety of the preceding night. You soon complete your toilet, however, for you are not particular on such an occasion, and you shaved yesterday evening ; so, mounting your Petersham greatcoat and green travelling shawl, and grasping your carpet bag in your right hand, you walk lightly downstairs, lest you should awaken any of the family, and after pausing in the common sitting-room for one moment, just to have a cup of coffee (the said common sitting-room looking remarkably comfortable, with everything out of its place, and strewn with the crumbs of last night’s supper), you undo the chain and bolts of the street-door, and find yourself fairly in the street.

“ A thaw, by all that is miserable ! The frost is completely broken up. You look down the long perspective of Oxford Street, the gas-lights mournfully reflected on the wet pavement, and can discern no speck in the road to encourage the belief that there is a cab or a coach to be had—the very coachmen have gone home in despair.

The cold sleet is drizzling down with that gentle regularity which betokens a duration of four-and-twenty hours at least; the damp hangs upon the housetops and lamp-posts, and clings to you like an invisible cloak. The water is 'coming in' in every area, the pipes have burst, the water-butts are running over; the kennels seem to be doing matches against time, pump-handles descend of their own accord, horses in market-carts fall down, and there's no one to help them up again; policemen look as if they had been carefully sprinkled with powdered glass; here and there a milk-woman trudges slowly along, with a bit of list round each foot to keep her from slipping; boys who 'don't sleep in the house,' and are not allowed much sleep out of it, can't wake their masters by thundering at the shop-door, and cry with the cold—the compound of ice, snow, and water on the pavement is a couple of inches thick—nobody ventures to walk fast to keep himself warm, and nobody could succeed in keeping himself warm if he did.

“It strikes a quarter past five as you trudge down Waterloo Place on your way to the “Golden Cross,” and you discover, for the first time, that you were called about an hour too early. You have not time to go back, there is no place open to go into, and you have, therefore, no resource but to go forward, which you do, feeling remarkably satisfied with yourself and everything about you. You arrive at the office, and look wistfully up the yard for the Birmingham Highflier, which,

for aught you can see, may have flown away altogether, for no preparations appear to be on foot for the departure of any vehicle in the shape of a coach. You wander into the booking-office, which, with the gas-lights and blazing fire, looks quite comfortable by contrast—that is to say, if any place *can* look comfortable at half-past five on a winter's morning. There stands the identical book-keeper in the same position as if he had not moved since you saw him yesterday. As he informs you that the coach is up the yard, and will be brought round in about a quarter of an hour, you leave your bag and repair to 'the Tap'—not with any absurd idea of warming yourself, because you feel such a result to be utterly hopeless, but for the purpose of procuring some hot brandy-and-water, which you do—when the kettle boils! an event which occurs exactly two minutes and a half before the time fixed for the starting of the coach.

“The first stroke of six peals from St. Martin's Church steeple just as you take the first sip of the boiling liquid. You find yourself at the booking-office in two seconds, and the tap-waiter finds himself much comforted by your brandy-and-water in about the same period. The coach is out; the horses are in, and the guard and two or three porters are stowing the luggage away, and running up the steps of the booking-office and down the steps of the booking-office, with breathless rapidity. The place, which a few minutes ago was so still and quiet, is now all bustle; the early vendors of

the morning papers have arrived, and you are assailed on all sides with shouts of ‘*Times*, gen’l’m’n, *Times*,’ ‘Here’s *Chron—Chron—Chron*,’ ‘*Herald*, ma’am,’ ‘Highly interesting murder, gen’l’m’n,’ ‘Curious case o’ breach o’ promise, ladies.’ The inside passengers are already in their dens, and the outsides, with the exception of yourself, are pacing up and down the pavement to keep themselves warm; they consist of two young men with very long hair, to which the sleet has communicated the appearance of crystallised rats’ tails; one thin young woman, cold and peevish, one old gentleman ditto ditto, and something in a cloak and cap, intended to represent a military officer; every member of the party with a large stiff shawl over his chin, looking exactly as if he were playing a set of Pan’s pipes.

“‘Take off the cloths, Bob,’ says the coachman, who now appears for the first time, in a rough blue greatcoat, of which the buttons behind are so far apart that you can’t see them both at the same time. ‘Now, gen’l’m’n!’ cries the guard, with the waybill in his hand. ‘Five minutes behind time already!’ Up jump the passengers—the two young men smoking like limekilns, and the old gentleman grumbling audibly. The thin young woman is got upon the roof by dint of a great deal of pulling and pushing, and helping and trouble; and she repays it by expressing her solemn conviction that she will never be able to get down again.

“‘All right!’ sings out the guard at last,

jumping up as the coach starts, and blowing his horn directly afterwards, in proof of the soundness of his wind. 'Let 'em go, Harry; give 'em their heads!' cries the coachman—and off we start as briskly as if the morning were 'all right,' as well as the coach."

CHAPTER XV

HOW THE COACH PASSENGERS FARED : MANNERS AND CUSTOMS DOWN THE ROAD

THERE is no consensus of opinion to be found among travellers by coach on the subject of the joys or sorrows of old-time travel. Everything depended on the weather, the coach, the other passengers, and upon the nature of the traveller himself. Sometimes a coach journey was a misery; at others it was a joy to look back upon. Humourists of the early and mid-eighteenth century found the subject of coach-travelling very attractive, and returned again and again to the stock characters of the braggart and domineering military man among the passengers, who was really a coward, and the modest, unassuming young man who always killed or dispersed the highwaymen while the captain, who by his own account had fought at Ramilies with Marlborough, prostrated himself on the floor and tried to crawl under the petticoats of the lady passengers or cover himself with the straw that strewed the floor. Those humourists could always get a laugh from such accounts, and sighs of appreciation from the ladies, who all wished they numbered

among their acquaintance such proper young men as Roderick Random, who in Smollett's romance performs such prodigies of valour in the "Exeter Fly" somewhere about the neighbourhood of Turnham Green.

"When I had taken my seat," says Roderick, after an adventure of the kind already hinted at, "Miss Snapper, who from the coach had seen everything that had happened, made me a compliment on my behaviour; and said she was glad to see me returned without having received any injury; her mother, too, owned herself obliged to my resolution; and the lawyer told me I was entitled by Act of Parliament to a reward of forty pounds for having apprehended a highwayman. The soldier"—who had behaved in the conventional style of poltroonery—"observed, with a countenance in which impudence and shame, struggling, produced some disorder, that if I had not been in such a d—d hurry to get out of the coach, he would have secured the rogue effectually without all this bustle and loss of time, by a scheme which my heat and precipitation ruined. 'For my part,' continued he, 'I am always extremely cool on these occasions.'

"'So it appeared by your trembling,' said the young lady.

"'Death and the deuce!' cried he. 'Your sex protects you, madam; if any man on earth durst tell me so much, I'd send him to hell in an instant.'

“So saying, he fixed his eyes upon me, and asked if I had seen him tremble. I answered, without hesitation, ‘Yes.’

“‘Damme, sir,’ said he, ‘d’ye doubt my courage?’

“I replied, ‘Very much.’

“This declaration quite disconcerted him; he looked blank, and pronounced in a faltering voice, ‘Oh! ’tis very well! I shall find a time.’

“I signified my contempt for him by thrusting my tongue into my cheek, which humbled him so much that he scarce swore another oath aloud during the whole journey.”

These soldiers, or pretended soldiers—for it would not be fair to those who warred under Marlborough to assume that such cowardly ruffians were genuine military men—were found hectoring in every coach in those picturesque times, threatening to run everyone through the vitals, and rarely, it is to be feared, meeting with those modest and self-possessed young demigods who wore all the lackadaisical airs of an Apollo superimposed upon the brawn and biceps of a Hercules, and with those biceps always at the service of the ladies at precisely the psychological moment.

Ladies, strange to say, seem at a very early date to have travelled unaccompanied by friends or relatives. The way was long, the discomforts great, and so the politeness and attentions shown them were proportionately increased. Thoresby, who in 1714 travelled to London by the York

stage with some ladies of sorts, speaks of the well-established custom of paying for their refreshments on the road, and mentions, between Grantham and Stamford, that they were "more chargeable with wine and brandy than the former part of the journey, wherein we had neither; but the next day we gave them leave to treat themselves." So the line was drawn somewhere.

Shergold, who in the coaching era was proprietor of the "Castle Hotel," Brighton, and had every reason to know what life on the road was like, declared, in a very readable pamphlet he wrote, that "a woman was a creature to be looked at, admired, courted, and beloved in a stage-coach"; but let the rash modern traveller presume to look admiringly at the lady occupant of a railway carriage, and it is not at all unlikely that she will be horribly frightened, and take the next opportunity of changing into another compartment.

An amusing tale, declared to be true, has been told of the possibilities of a coach in the love-making sort. It was about 1780 that a young gentleman, anxious to win the good graces of a lady, and lacking other opportunities, engaged all the remaining inside seats of the coach between Glasgow and Edinburgh by which he knew she would travel. He succeeded so well in his enterprise that the lady consented on the journey to be his bride; but candour compels the admission that the marriage thus

romantically agreed upon turned out a particularly unhappy one.

The final test of a gentleman in those days was his behaviour at a stage-coach dinner. It was, if you consider it, a very severe and unfair test, for it is allowed that politeness generally leaves starving people at an early stage; and the appetites that coach passengers brought with them into the dining-room of an inn were usually very keen. An acquaintance of Constable, the painter, could find no more striking climax to a list of his virtues than to declare that he was "a gentleman at a stage-coach dinner." "Then," said his companion, "he must have been a gentleman indeed!"

What, then, did it mean, this gentlemanly conduct? It meant, in short, that one who could fairly lay claim to it must take some lady of the party into his care, escort her from the coach into the inn, see to it that she was provided with dinner, and pay her reckoning. He must not first attempt to satisfy his own hunger, although perhaps he was up at five o'clock in the morning, and had only taken a hurried coach-breakfast at the first stage out.

The gentleman who fulfilled the canons of this time could rarely hope to get any dinner for himself. On the later coaches, time was so strictly kept that the coachmen were off to the minute; and the landlords, who, of course, knew that, were generally suspected of delaying the appearance of the food so long that not one of

the party could have time to do justice to it. Our gentleman, therefore, often had the mortification of paying both for the lady's dinner and for his own, of which he had not tasted a mouthful. He returned to the coach as hungry as he had left it, and kept his gentility as warm as it was possible to do on an empty stomach. A very little of this was sufficient to wear the nap off the politeness of a Chesterfield, and it must not infrequently have happened that the person who had been all courtliness at dinner became selfishness incarnate at tea.

Those who did not come up to the high standard that Constable attained—and they were in the majority—hurried out of the coach without the slightest consideration for any one else, and flinging themselves into the inn, roared out for “dinner, d——d quick”; or—older travellers and more wary—filled their spirit flasks at the bar, and made sure of having a meal of sorts by demanding cold ham or beef, or any of those dishes which the hostelries of that time possessed in abundance.

Many writers have attempted to describe those coach-dinners, and one endeavoured to vividly picture them by declaring that they reminded him more of hounds feeding at a trough than human beings; but none have equalled the anonymous account quoted here.

“First of all, you had, in winter, to be called before daylight; then you had to proceed in a rattling hackney-coach (your teeth rattling to

match with the cold) to the office from which the 'Wonder,' 'Telegraph,' 'Regulator,' 'Highflyer,' or 'Independent' started; then you were hurried over your meals, as the following account will show:—

“‘Twenty minutes allowed here, gentlemen, for dinner,’ exclaims the coachman, as we drive up to the ‘Bull’ at Smallborough.

“What a scene of confusion ensued! Bells rang, ostlers halloed, waiters ran, or rather broke into that shambling shuffle whose secret seems to be known only to those who ‘stand and wait’—at least, no other creature practises it.

“‘Please to alight, ladies and gentlemen,’ exclaims the landlord, addressing the four insides; while the ostler, bringing a somewhat crazy ladder, makes a similar request to the eleven outsides.

“The day has been a miserable specimen: incessant rain, with a biting easterly wind, giving an inappropriately jocose gentleman the opportunity of offering facetious remarks upon ‘heavy wet,’ and ‘cold without.’ You enter the best parlour of the inn, anticipating a warm welcome and a share in those creature comforts looked forward to in such circumstances by all. But here the legal axiom, that ‘possession is nine points of the law,’ is realised to your horror and dismay in a sight of the first-comers on an earlier coach occupying every seat near the fire; while a tablecloth covered with fragments, and a disarray of empty glasses tell a tale of another dinner having recently been ‘polished off.’

“ ‘Waiter, waiter !’ shriek half a dozen voices in as many keys, and in accents ranging from the imperious to the imploring. Enters then a slipshod, soiled being, with watery eyes and apologetic mien. ‘Here, you, where’s the dinner?’ chorus the starving, half-drenched passengers.

“ ‘Dinner?’—scratching his head; ‘er—well—er: beg pardon, gents, but the “Independent” was rather late like to-day, and the “Hightflyer,” she were down early, and—er——’ Well, the gist of all these apologetics was that the company had to wait while the next joint was being dished up.

“ Meanwhile the ‘Independents’ absorbing all the fire are bustled off by a portly man in a low-crowned hat and a huge caped box-coat, or ‘upper Benjamin,’ as it used to be called. ‘Gentlemen,’ he roars, ‘time’s up!’ With great to-do of cloaking, shawling, greateating, and paying, they are outside, and we, in the twinkling of an eye, in their fireside seats, listening to the curses levelled at the ostler by the outsides for letting the seats get wet. With a precautionary ‘Sit tight,’ they lurch violently off, and we are left anxiously awaiting the arrival of that dinner.

“ At last it comes: a procession of three—the landlady, parlourmaid, and waiter—bearing dishes with tin covers. These battered relics removed, a coarse fat leg of mutton, roasted to a cinder, is unveiled, together with a huge joint of boiled beef, very much underdone; potatoes, hot without and hard within, and some gritty cabbage.

“ ‘Slice of mutton for a lady,’ says the waiter,

approaching a stout gentleman in the act of helping himself to that part of the joint so highly prized by epicures, called the 'Pope's eye.' The direction of the knife is instantly changed, and the lady's plate filled with a somewhat less desirable ration. 'Please, sir, a little fat,' continues the assiduous waiter, 'and a little gravy,' he adds, anxious to earn a tip from the old stager of the male sex, who thus invariably forwarded his demands, as coming from a lady. Numerous other applications are made to the carver, who, disgusted with his place, helps himself to his coveted delicacy, and requests the waiter, with emphasis, to attend to the other passengers himself.

"Time flies fast, and especially time devoted to pleasure, and none of the party are aware how fast the glass has run, until the entrance of the coachman, informing all concerned that the coach is ready.

"Up starts the stout gentleman. 'Coachman, the time can't be up; I've not eaten a morsel.'

"'Full twenty minutes, sir,' replies that Jehu.

"'Abominable,' continues the first speaker.

"'Who riseth from a feast with that keen appetite that he sits down?' quotes a stage-struck attorney's clerk.

"'I have,' mutters the Daniel Lambert of the party; 'and if Shakespeare wrote that—well, coach-dinners were not known in his time.'

"Now we do as we saw the 'Independents' do before us, and fee the coachman, scramble for

greatcoats, cloaks, shawls and umbrellas, in addition to ringing for the waiters to bring that brandy-and-water ordered ten minutes before, but not yet forthcoming.

“Half-crowns and shillings are tendered in payment to the waiter, who of course has no change: what waiter ever had, when you were in a hurry? It is a mere additional annoyance that the stage-struck youth finds this an opportunity of quoting from *Pizarro*, ‘We want no change, and, least of all, such change as you would give us,’ concluding with the lines of one of Haynes Bayley’s popular ballads:—

And were I in a foreign land,
You’d find no change in me.

“Now, at the ultimate moment, the waiter appears with a tray containing ‘one cold, without,’ ‘four hots, with,’ ‘two hots, sugar and no fruit,’ and ‘three with the chill off’—the ‘with’ and ‘without’ referring to sugar, the ‘no fruit’ applying to lemon. Fortunate now are the owners of cold beverages, for none but a fire-eater could swallow the scalding potatoes that are now left as perquisites to the waiter. Amid the babel of departure may be distinguished, ‘Please remember the waiter, sir!’ ‘Didn’t take for your dinner, sir.’ ‘Glass of brandy, ma’am.’ ‘A basin of soup and a pint of ale gone away without paying!’ ‘Chambermaid, ma’am.’ ‘Ostler, sir! I got you some nice dry straw.’

“Away, away. ‘Now, gentlemen, sit fast.

Let 'em go, Jem—I've got 'em!' and off goes the 'Highflyer.' "

Here is another such scene, observed with another pair of eyes, or imagined by another brain :—

“ ‘Put the joints opposite the women,’ says the landlord to the waiter taking in the dinner; ‘they’re slow carvers.’ ”

“ Meanwhile, passengers are busy, taking off coats, one, two and three in succession (those were the days of *bond-fide* ‘great-coats,’ nowadays become lessened, and merely overcoats). Chins appear out of their many wrappings of silk, and fur caps are bundled into pockets. Inside passengers eye outsiders with suspicion, while a deaf gentleman who has left his trumpet in the coach meets an acquaintance whom he has not seen for seven years, and in consequence of not having that instrument with him can only shake hands and grimace in return to the speaker’s greetings :

“ ‘You find it very warm inside, I should think, sir, don’t you?’ says the acquaintance.

“ ‘Thank ye, my good friend; I am rather deaf, but I suppose you are inquiring after my wife and daughters: they are quite well, thank you.’ ”

“ ‘Where will you sit at dinner?’ rejoins the acquaintance.

“ ‘It is two years since I was there,’ replies he.

“ ‘No: where will you sit, sir? I said.’ ”

“ ‘Oh! John: he is still in Jamaica with his regiment.’ . . . ”

“ ‘Come, waiter, d—n it all, why was not the dinner on the table when we arrived?’ demands a superfine inside passenger. ‘This is always the way with your confounded coach-dinners. And what have you got under there,—goose, eh?’

“ ‘No; pork, sir.’

“ ‘What is under that cover?’

“ ‘Pork too, sir.’

“ ‘Great heavens! pork again! the country is deluged with pork: who the devil do you think can dine off pork?’

“ ‘A couple of ducks coming, sir,’ says the waiter.

“ ‘Confound your ducks! What with your pork and ducks, you’ll make the whole inside of the coach reek with onions and vulgarity.’

“ ‘There’s a cold collation on the side-table, sir, if you prefer cold meat.’

“ ‘Hang your cold collation! have you got any real Devonshire cider in the house?’

“ ‘Yes, sir; some very excellent.’

“ ‘Then bring me a bottle, and a toothpick.’

“ ‘Now, look here, waiter,’ says one of the diners, ‘there are the horses out already, and we have not half done yet: blow me if I go before the half-hour’s up.’

“ ‘Take any cheese, sir?’ asks the waiter.

“ ‘No, to be sure, not yet; have you no tarts?’

“ ‘Why, none, I am afraid, that we can recommend, sir; but there’s some very nice cold plum-pudding you can have.’

“Enter coachman: ‘I leaves you here, if you please, sir.’

“‘Just as you please; I have no objection,’ says a satirical passenger.

“‘Please to remember the coachman—driven you forty-five miles.’

“‘Yes, but you will recollect you were very impertinent about my wife’s bandbox;—there’s a shilling, between us, for you.’

“‘Oh! sir, I’m sure I didn’t mean no unperliteness—I hopes you von’t think nothink about it; it were wery aggravising that the box was forgot, but I hopes you’ll give me a trifle more—forty-five miles.’

“‘No, no more—so be off.’ . . .

“‘Please to remember the coachman, ma’am—forty-five miles. Leave you here, sir, if you please—go no further, sir—forty-five miles, ma’am.’ . . .

“‘Now, ladies and gentlemen, the coach is quite ready: time’s up,’ says the guard, entering the room. . . .

“‘What’s dinner, waiter?’

“‘Two-and-three, and eightpence—one-and-eightpence—is three-and-eleven, sir,’ says the cunning waiter, whose artful arithmetic is decidedly not ‘according to Cocker.’ ‘Yours is three-and-sixpence, ma’am—two glasses brandy and water. Yours is four shillings, sir—a bottle of real Devonshire eider, sir.’ . . .

“‘Now, sir, coach is ready—time up; can’t wait,’ roars out the guard. ‘Here, Joe, set the

ladder for the lady'; and the passengers are hurried into their places."

Not so hurried was that gentleman who on one of these quick-change and pantomime-rally occasions remained calmly drinking his tea while his fellow-passengers were jostling each other in their anxiety to regain their seats.

"You'll miss the coach, sir!" shouted the landlord in his ear, under the impression that he was deaf and had not heard the stampeding feet.

"I want a spoon to stir my tea," said this last-remaining guest: "why didn't we have any?"

The landlord glanced hurriedly round—not one spoon of all those that had been on the table remained. He rushed out to the coach to find who among the passengers had stolen them; and by the time he had delayed the coach and insulted everyone, the last passenger, having finished his breakfast at leisure, came out with the information that they had been found in the teapot, where, as will by now have been suspected, he had himself placed them.

There is no generalising on the subject of coach-breakfasts or dinners. Some inns were famous for good fare, others were notorious for bad provisioning and worse service; and all were liable to change from good to ill, or the reverse, according to how they changed hands from time to time. Sidney Smith, who was under no illusions, and lived well into the railway age, did not lament the days when he travelled post from Combe Florey to London—"living for three days

on veal-cutlets and waiters"; but, on the other hand, travellers equally familiar with the roads were heard lamenting the good and varied fare they had been used to find, and sought in vain in later days. Lord William Lennox wrote regretfully of the "plain and perfect" English dinners down the road, generally consisting, he said, of mutton-broth, rich in meat and herbs, fresh-water fish in every form, eels—stewed, fried, boiled, baked, spitchocked, and water-souché; salmon, the purest butter, green gooseberries, the earliest cucumbers, saddle of Southdown mutton, kept to a moment and done to a turn, mutton chops, hot and hot, Irish stews, rump-steaks tender and juicy, chicken and ham, plum-pudding, fruit-tarts, and trifle and gooseberry-fool.

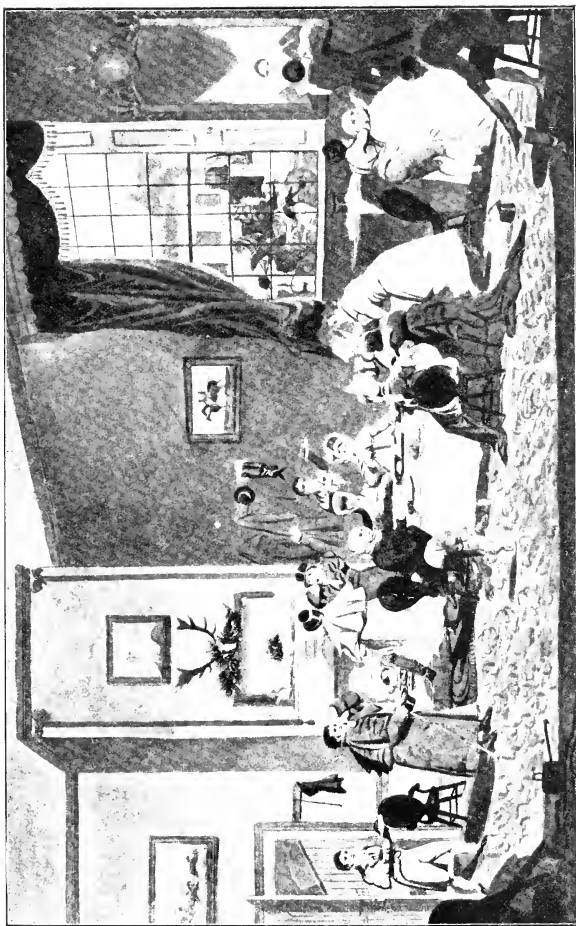
Then the produce of the grape! No thin, washy claret, at 18s. a dozen, no fiery port, one day in bottle, no sherry at 25s. the cask; but fine, sound vintages, fit for any private cellar.

Other travellers tell less roseate tales. Often they had the sole choice between ham and eggs, ill cooked, and nothing at all; or, if the choice was there, the mutton was half-done and stringy, the chops greasy and cold, and the rump-steaks tough and dry, with everything else in accordance. If we like to take Thomas Hughes, in *Tom Brown*, as an authority, however, the breakfasts were really noble meals; for Tom, going to Rugby, is represented at a table spread with the whitest of cloths, and rich in cold pigeon-pie, a Yorkshire ham, a round of cold boiled beef, and

a loaf of household bread. On these the guests made a beginning, but the waiter entered "in an instant" (paragon of waiters!) with kidneys, steak, rashers of bacon, poached eggs, and buttered toast and muffins. Tom fell-to with a will, and put away kidneys and pigeon-pie and coffee until his little skin was as tight as a drum—little pig!

It is a coach-breakfast that is so well pictured by James Pollard in the accompanying illustration. The company, with an indescribable air of having been up all night, are just finishing their meal, and the polite gentleman in the ample overcoat is trying to induce the two ladies under his charge to take a little more. It is quite evident that this has been a more leisured affair than usual, for the yawning travellers by the fireplace have finished their meal long ago, and a stout person is being shaved by a barber in knee-breeches, with legs of a distinctly Lowther-Areadian type, suggestive of bran and sawdust instead of bone and muscle. The coachman, appearing hat in hand and touching his forehead, has come to the end of his stage: he "goes no further, gents," and is here to claim his dues. Meanwhile, the guard outside is lustily blowing his horn, and the empty coach is seen waiting.

The scene, in fact, here pictured is the last halt on a long journey; an opportunity seized by the passengers, not only for a meal, but for a shave and a general brush-up preparatory to alighting at their destination. Such scenes were the commonplace incidents to be observed at Highgate,



After J. Pollack.

A COACH-BREAKFAST.

Barnet, Hounslow, and other stages near London in the coaching age.

Here at least—for there are twelve passengers present—the insides and the outsides have foregathered, and for once the gulf socially dividing them has been bridged. This generally impassable gulf was more marked in the case of the mails than in that of the stage-coaches. The very superior and exclusive travellers who went in their own chariots or by post-chaise resorted to well-known hotels and posting-houses on the roads, whose chaste halls were never profaned by coaches. Even the superior persons who travelled inside the mails could not hope to win to those expensive and select abiding-places; but they formed a caste by themselves, who never willingly sat at meat with the outsides. De Quincey, who often travelled outside, experienced something of this contempt, and the recollection seems to have lent eloquence to his remarks on the subject. It was, he tells us, “The fixed assumption of the four inside people that they, the illustrious quaternion, constituted a porcelain variety of the human race, whose dignity would have been compromised by exchanging one word of civility with the three miserable delf-ware outsides. Even to have kicked an outsider might have been held to attain the foot concerned in that operation, so that perhaps it would have required an Act of Parliament to restore its purity of blood. What words, then, could express the horror and the sense of treason in that case, which *had* happened, where

all three outsides (the trinity of Pariahs) made a vain attempt to sit down at the same breakfast-table or dinner-table with the consecrated four? I myself witnessed such an attempt; and on that occasion a benevolent old gentleman endeavoured to soothe his three holy associates by suggesting that if the outsides were indicted for this criminal attempt at the next assizes, the court would regard it as a case of lunacy or delirium tremens rather than that of treason. England owes much of her grandeur to the depth of the aristocratic element in her social composition when pulling against her own strong democracy. I am not the man to laugh at it. But sometimes, undoubtedly, it expressed itself in comic shapes. The course taken with the infatuated outsiders, in the particular attempt which I have noticed, was that the waiter, beckoning them away from the privileged *salle-à-manger*, sang out, 'This way, my good men,' and then enticed these good men away to the kitchen. But that plan had not always answered. Sometimes, though rarely, cases occurred where the intruders, being stronger than usual, or more vicious than usual, resolutely refused to budge, and so far carried their point as to have a separate table arranged for themselves in a corner of the general room. Yet, if an Indian screen could be found ample enough to plant them out from the very eyes of the high table or dais, it then became possible to assume as a fiction of law that the three delf fellows after all were not present. They could be ignored by the porcelain men, under the

maxim that objects not appearing and not existing are governed by the same logical construction."

Humour had a splendid field in coaching, and the literature of the road is gemmed with twice a hundred good stories and mirth-provoking scenes. Few things seem to have been more productive of funny stories than the undue tendency to fatness on the part of a passenger. There is, for example, the tale of the stupid servant who, having to book two seats inside a coach for his master, a man of prodigious bulk, to whom one seat would be useless, returned from the booking-office with the news that he had secured the only two places to be had—one inside and one out.

This bears comparison with that other story of the stout man's revenge. He, too, was accustomed to book two seats. On one occasion this amiable eccentricity of his was observed overnight by two waggish fellows who thought they would play a trick on the fat man. They accordingly booked seats also, and took care to be seated in them before the man of much avoirdupois came. They sat facing one another, one back and the other in front, so that he had indeed two seats, but not, as they necessarily should have been, together. He asked them very politely to change their positions, but they refused, although he explained that he had booked two seats, and his reason for doing so. There the seats were, they said.

But the outraged man of flesh determined to be revenged, and, looking round at the next stage

where the coach stopped, spied a chimney-sweep. He beckoned.

“Chimley, yer honour ?” queried Chummy.

“No : come here. Have you any objection to a ride this morning ? I’ll pay you for a day’s work, and your fare back again.”

“All right, yer honour ; I’ll just run home and clean myself.”

“No, no ! come as you are, and when in the coach give yourself a good shake every now and then, to make the soot fly.”

They got in, Chummy acting his part very well, and greatly to the annoyance and discomfort of the wags, who, however, said nothing. But when the coach stopped at the next change, and for breakfast, they asked the man who had been their butt, and was now their tormentor, how far he was going to take the sweep, as he was not a very desirable companion.

He replied : “I took two seats so that, although corpulent, I should annoy no one. You prevented me occupying them, therefore I filled the remaining seat with Chummy, and he goes as far as the end of my journey. But I will dismiss him if you will agree to what I propose. When I engaged him, I agreed to pay him for his time, and to pay his fare home, with all other expenses incurred. He is now at breakfast. If you agree to pay him, he goes no farther ; if not, he proceeds.”

Having listened to this ultimatum, and being completely discomfited, they accepted these terms, and the sweep was dismissed.

Among the most laughable of old-time skits on coaching miseries is the following breathless account, in the style of the immortal Jingle. Its humour is somewhat broad, and indeed all coaching humour was of the smoking-room rather than of the drawing-room order:—

“STAGE-COACH ADVENTURES.

“INSIDE.—Crammed full of passengers—three fat fusty old men—a young mother and sick child—a cross old maid—a poll parrot—a bag of red herrings—double-barrelled gun (which you are afraid is loaded)—and a snarling lapdog, in addition to yourself. Awake out of a sound nap with the cramp in one leg and the other in a lady’s handbox—pay the damage (four or five shillings) for gallantry’s sake—getting out in the dark at the half-way house, in the hurry stepping into the return coach and finding yourself next morning at the very spot you had started from the evening before—not a breath of air—asthmatic old woman and child with the measles—window closed in consequence—unpleasant smell—shoes filled with warm water—look up and find it’s the child—obliged to bear it—no appeal—shut your eyes and scold the dog—pretend sleep and pinch the child—mistake—pinch the dog and get bit—execrate the child in return—black looks—no gentleman—pay the coachman and drop a piece of gold in the straw—not to be found—fell through a crevice—coachman says ‘He’ll find it’—can’t—get out yourself—gone—picked up by the

ostler—no time for blowing up—coach off for next stage—lose your money—get in—lose your seat—stuck in the middle—get laughed at—lose your temper—turn sulky—and turned over in a horse pond.

“OUTSIDE.—Your eye cut out by the lash of a clumsy coachman’s whip—hat blown off into a pond by a sudden gust of wind—seated between two apprehended murderers and a noted sheep-stealer in irons, who are being conveyed to gaol—a drunken fellow half-asleep falls off the coach—and in attempting to save himself drags you along with him into the mud—musical guard, and driver horn mad—turned over—one leg under a bale of cotton, the other under the coach—hands in breeches pockets—head in hamper of wine—lots of broken bottles *versus* broken heads—cut and run—send for surgeon—wounds dressed, lotion and lint, four dollars—take post-chaise—get home—lie down—and laid up.”

A “humorous” story is told of a coach coming into Dover at night, and the coachman, “feather-edging” a corner, running into a lamp-post. It was the period just after Waterloo. A little French count, who occupied the box-seat, was thrown off, and, falling on his side, had three ribs fractured. The coachman pulled up and asked a passing sailor to pick up the unhappy passenger. The half-drunken tar, seeing a heap of limp clothes on the pavement, said, “There’s no gemman here—on’y a lot of coats.” At that moment the Count groaned, “Oh! by gar! I

brake tree rib." "Damn your eyes!" roared the sailor, "you're a Frenchman, are you? Lie there and be damned," and so went on his way.

I think the brutality of this tale is even more noticeable than its humour, but it is distinctly redolent of the age when people only laughed on seeing others placed in a painful or uncomfortable position. When no one was hurt there was no humour, according to the notions of that time—a time when to crush a man's hat over his eyes was exquisitely funny, and for half a dozen lusty Toms and Jerrys to overturn a decrepit old watchman was a screaming farce. It is, by the way, significant that that was the era when screaming farces held the theatrical stage, and the rough-and-tumble of the harlequinade was at its zenith. The practical joker was then prominent, and the more "practical" (*i.e.* the more wantonly cruel and injurious) the joke the more it was applauded. If the victim ever thought of resenting a witticism of this kind, he was, in the cant of that period, "no sportsman," and behind that formula the blackguard jokers screened themselves. If they had not very carefully, for their own protection, erected that obligation to "take a thing in good part" which stayed the heavy hand of revenge, it is quite likely that some of these humourists would have been very severely mauled. The amazing thing is that the victims agreed to that convention, and allowed themselves to be harassed with impunity.

Practical joking affected every class. One of the old borough members of Parliament—Francis Fane, who began his long Parliamentary career in 1790—was a practical joker of the most desolating kind. Travelling by coach to London along the Exeter Road on one occasion, he saw, from his seat inside, the coat-tails of one of the outside passengers—a barber, of Dorchester—hanging down. This gave him the pleasing notion of cutting open the pocket and extracting its contents, which happened to be a bulky parcel of banknotes the unfortunate shaver had had given in his charge. The extraordinary cruelty of the practical jokers who made existence a burden to their victims a hundred years ago prompted Fane to gloat over the barber's terror when he found the notes gone, and only to restore them when his enjoyment could be carried no farther. As some amends, he entertained his victim at the White Horse Cellar on the eve of the barber's return to Dorchester; but his practical joking was not yet complete, for, taking excellent care that his victim should be fully charged with liquor, he hustled him into the night coach for quite another Dorchester—Dorchester, Oxfordshire—where he was duly set down the following morning.

APPENDIX

SOME detailed notice of the Palmer family will have interest here. Mischance long ago destroyed many genealogical documents relating to John Palmer's ancestors, but family tradition still points to the "John Palmere" who, in 1384, represented Bath in Parliament, as a distinguished forbear. Of ancient and honourable origin, the matrimonial alliances of the Palmers are found among the old county families of Somerset and Wilts. The postal reformer's mother was one of the Longs, to this day seated in the latter county. She and her husband, John Palmer the elder, lie at Weston, two miles from Bath, and in the village church their memorial tablets may yet be seen.

A tradition tells how the reformer himself might have become a Long, had he desired. His kinsman, Walter Long, who died unmarried at the age of ninety-five, proposed to make him heir to extensive estates in Wilts, on condition that he assumed the name; but, with the pardonable arrogance of one who owned an ancient and honourable ancestry, Palmer declined, and satisfied his pride even though he relinquished a rent-roll.

He received his education at Colerne, Wilts, and at Marlborough Grammar School. Of his three sons, John proceeded to Cambridge and took holy orders; Charles and Edmund, educated at Eton, went respectively into the Army and Navy. It is curious to note how strong has been the military tradition in the family. Charles

became Colonel of the 10th (Prince of Wales's) Hussars, following upon the scandal which discredited the former Colonel of that regiment, many of whose officers, charged with cowardice before the enemy in the Peninsula, were transferred to other regiments, and became known as the "Elegant Extracts." Their places were filled by officers from other sources, and the 10th Hussars thereupon acquired the title of "Prince's Mixture." Colonel Palmer subsequently rose to the rank of general officer.

Edmund was that distinguished captain in the Navy who, when in command of H.M.S. *Hebrus* in 1814, captured the French frigate, *L'Etoile*, the last of the enemy's ships to be taken at the end of the long war. His son, Colonel Edmund Palmer, R.A., has himself carried on the tradition, and given sons of his own to the service of his country. His son Edmund fell to the bullet of an Afghan hillman, after he had captured a tower in one of the passes of that distant country whose sun-baked rocks have been stained with the blood of many a gallant Englishman. John Jervis Palmer, his brother, captain in the Egyptian Army, died of pneumonia at the frontier post of Wady Halfa, looking out across the parching sands of the Soudan.

Veterinary Library
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