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THE

GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE,

AND

HISTORICAL CHRONICLE.

FROM JULY TO DECEMBER, 1829.

VOLUME XCIX.

(BEING THE TWENTY-SECOND OF A NEW SERIES.)

PART THE SECOND.

PRODESSE & DELECTARE.  E PLURIBUS UNUM.

BY SYLVANUS URBAN, GENT.

GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE LIBRARY

London:

PRINTED BY J. B. NICHOLS AND SON, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET;
WHERE LETTERS ARE PARTICULARLY REQUESTED TO BE SENT, POST-PAID;

AND SOLD BY JOHN HARRIS,
AT THE CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, LUDGATE STREET;
AND BY PERTHES AND BESSER, HAMBURGH.

1829.

Arch. Soc. Fol. B. 42

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POST OFFICE, LONDON.

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THE NEW POST OFFICE.

(With a Plate.)

THE magnificent building recently opened as the new metropolitan Post Office, is situated near the junction of Cheapside and Newgate-street, on the spot formerly occupied by the college and sanctuary of St. Martin-le-Grand.*

It is one of the largest public edifices now existing in the City of London. The architect, Mr. Smirke, has employed in its construction his favourite order, the Grecian Ionic, which he has also introduced in his new buildings at the British Museum. In all his designs he appears to depend for effect more on the intrinsic beauty of the order itself, than on the embellishment of the subordinate features. The principal front, which is 400 feet in length (and of which the centre and one wing are represented in the accompanying view) has a grand and impressive effect, alike from the continuity and simplicity of its elevation, and from the solidity and magnificence of its proportions. The portico, which projects with two intercolumns at the sides, and is also recessed, has an air of space, and a depth of shadow, that contribute materially to enhance its effect. Its breadth is seventy, and its depth twenty feet. Over the door is placed a clock, with a face both to the exterior and interior; and on each side are two pedestals, with strong reflecting lamps. In this front are forty-four windows.

The east front, in Foster-lane, has upwards of 180 windows, and may be said to have the same appearance in relation to the other, as is usual with the backs of ordinary houses. The whole, however, is characterized with a simple and impressive character of due proportion.

The vestibule or great hall, which occupies the centre of the edifice, is a thoroughfare for the public from one street to the other. It is about eighty feet long (which is the depth of the building throughout), sixty feet broad (ten less than the portico), and fifty-three feet high in the centre. It is supported by two lines of six columns, similar to those of the portico; and formed of Portland stone, upon granite pedestals. Next the wall are corresponding pilasters, or antæ. The entablature, which is enriched with ornaments from the best examples, is of mastic; and is surmounted by an attic, on each side of which light is admitted. The dado and architraves of the doors are of granite; and above the entrance from Foster-lane, which is divided into three circular-headed doorways, is a gallery affording a communication to the first-floor apartments of the respective wings, and lighted by three circular-headed windows, corresponding to the doorways below.

On the north side of the vestibule are the several receiving rooms for newspapers, inland and ship letters; and behind these, further north, are the inland-letter-sorters and letter-carriers' rooms. These rooms, which extend the whole length of the front from the portico to the north wing, are tastefully finished. The latter is 35 feet high. Their fittings up appear to be perfect in their kind; there are almost innumerable boxes, pigeon-holes, drawers, &c. At each end of the letter-carriers' office are projecting circular rooms, or bars, for the principals. The mails are received at the doorway (in the eastern or Foster-lane front) north of the vestibule, leading to the inland offices—and are taken into a room called the tick room, where the bags are opened. In this part of the building is also a spacious office, appropriated to the correspondence of the West Indies; and also the comptroller's and mail-coach offices.

On the south side of the vestibule are the foreign, receiver-general's, and accountant's offices. The foreign office is most chastely and conveniently fitted up; the beauty of the ceiling at once attracts attention. At the east-

* The remains of the ancient College disclosed on clearing the site in 1818 were illustrated (with two engravings) in our vol. LXXXVIII. ii. 272, 393; LXXXIX. i. pp. 388, 414, 608; and an interesting volume, by Alfred John Kempe, esq. F.S.A. was subsequently published, entitled "Historical Notices of the Collegiate Church or Royal Free Chapel and Sanctuary of St. Martin-le-Grand; with Observations on the different kinds of Sanctuary formerly recognized by the Civil Law." (See vol. XCV. ii. p. 245.)

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ern end of the foreign office is a corridor, and the private foreign office, and that of the principal clerk.

At the eastern end of the vestibule is the twopenny post department, comprising the receiving, sorters', and carriers' rooms. The sorters' office is about 46 feet by 24 feet, on the plan and fitted up in the same judicious manner observed in the inland office. There is a very novel and admirable mode adopted for conveying letters across the vestibule to and from the inland, foreign, and twopenny post offices, in small waggons, traversing in a tunnel beneath the pavement by means of machinery: it is said to be the invention of Mr. Barrow.

The corridor immediately at the right hand of the principal entrance leads to the grand staircase, the dimensions of which are 32 feet by 23 feet; the steps are of solid masonry, and the balusters have a peculiarly massive appearance—they are of brass bronzed, and are cylindrical. On the landing there is a niche for a gas lamp.

On the first floor, are the board room, secretary's room, and his clerk's office, communicating by long passages with the solicitor's offices. The board room, which is 37 feet long and 24 feet broad, has an ornamented segment ceiling (of the form technically called waggon-head)—the cornice is supported by wainscot pilasters, the dado and doors are also of wainscot, and the walls have been painted to imitate the wood. All the floors throughout the building are of American oak.

At the eastern end of the hall, on the north side, is a staircase leading to the letter-bill, dead, mis-sent, and returned-letter offices; and across the gallery of the hall are the offices connected with the solicitor's and secretary's apartments, which latter are also approached from the grand staircase.

On the second floor story and upper story are sleeping rooms for the foreign clerks, who are liable to be summoned to duty at uncertain hours. The number of these rooms, and the extent of the accommodations, may be conceived, when it is stated that the rooms on each side of the gallery, two hundred and thirty-seven feet long, are appropriated to this purpose.

At the south-western extremity of the building is the private house of the Assistant Secretary. It is well suited for the residence of a gentleman's family; the principal rooms are in excellent proportion, and the whole so arranged as to admit of a free ventilation, and rendered as cheerful as the situation will admit.

In the basement, the whole of which is rendered fire-proof by brick vaulting, are rooms for the mail-guards, conveniently furnished with lockers, presses, and other accommodations; an armoury; and servants' offices. There is some ingenious machinery for conveying coals from the cellars to each story of the building; and a very simple yet perfect means is provided for obtaining a copious supply of water in case of fire, and conveying it through the building by means of those pipes. Immediately under the portico are placed two large gasometers (of Crossley's patent), capable of registering 4000 cubic feet of gas per hour. The gas is supplied by the City of London Company; and is consumed by nearly a thousand burners in the several offices and passages.

The new Post Office was first opened for business on Wednesday, September 23, a short time before five o'clock in the morning. The improved system enabled the inland officers to sort and arrange the letters by about eight o'clock, and at half-past eight they were ready for delivery. In the course of the morning four vehicles were stationed at the back of the Post-Office, built after the manner of the Omnibus (a new oblong vis-a-vis stage-coach, built on a plan lately imported from Paris). In these (which the Post Office name Accelerators,) the letter-carriers having to deliver letters at the west and north-western parts of the Metropolis, took their seats about half-past eight o'clock, two of the carriages proceeding up the Strand, and the other two up Holborn. There were about fourteen letter carriers in each. At Lloyd's Coffee House, and other public places in the city, the letters arrived full twenty minutes earlier than usual. The mails receive the bags, &c. in Foster-lane.

At the old Post Office, the portion called the Comptroller's office, has been converted into a receiving house for foreign and inland letters and newspapers, for the accommodation of the merchants and others near the Exchange.

Two other branch offices have been established at Charing-cross, next door

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to Northumberland House, and in Vere-street, Oxford-street, where letters are received until half-past seven in the evening.

The Post-office system of England, perfected as it has been of late years by the suggestions of Mr. Palmer, the late mail-coach contractor, is considered superior to that of any other country.

The mention of the office of Chief Postmaster of England occurs in 1581. In 1635 King Charles the First directed his "Postmaster of England for foreign parts" to open a communication, by running posts, between London and Edinburgh, Chester, Holyhead, Exeter, Plymouth, and Ireland, &c. In 1653-4 the post-office revenues were farmed by the Council of State and Protector at 10,000*l. per annum*. In 1656 the Parliament made some enactments for the erection of a new general Post-office, which was established at the Restoration in 1660, and from that period has only changed by a perpetual growth of activity and usefulness. The mail was first conveyed by stage-coaches on the 2d of August, 1785; and in 1789 no less than 30,000*l.* was added to the revenue by the establishment of mail-coaches.

The progressive increase of the Post Office receipts has been as follows:

1664.	£21,000	1723.	£201,804
1674..	43,000	1744..	235,492
1685..	65,000	1764..	281,535
1688..	76,318	1775..	345,321
1697..	90,505	1785..	463,753
1710..	111,461	1793..	607,268
1715..	145,227	1816..	2,067,940

The Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, which has been recently printed, is entirely devoted to the subject of the Post-office of the United Kingdom. The Report and its Appendix, which together occupy no less than 697 folio pages, relate to one only of three heads into which the subject matter is distributed by the Commissioners, namely, "The Circulation of Correspondence within the United Kingdom." The remaining two heads are, "The Communications with the Colonies and Dependencies of Great Britain, direct and intermediate, including the Internal Circulation of the Colonies;" and, "The Communications with Foreign Parts, direct and from the Colonies." The Commissioners exhibit a comparative statement of the general revenue and expenditure of the Post-office at two distinct periods, namely, the three years preceding the commencement of their inquiry, and the three years ending the 5th of January, 1827. From this statement it appears that in the last period there has been a progressive increase in the gross receipts in each of the three kingdoms; whereas in the former period there was a progressive decline. The average rate of charge upon the gross receipt, during the first period, was 28*l.* 19*s.* 4¼*d.*; during the latter, it was only 26*l.* 17*s.* 9¼*d.* The sum disbursed under the direction and responsibility of His Majesty's Postmasters-General in Great Britain and Ireland, during the latter period, was, on an average, 670,000*l. per ann.* The net revenue of 1828 was 1,400,000*l.*

The following abstract from the evidence of Sir Francis Freeling, will afford a comprehensive and instructive view of the conducting of this gigantic engine of general intercourse, and important branch of the revenue of the country. It will, together with what has been already related, demonstrate to those who wonder at the size of the new building, that such extensive business, even when conducted in the most simplified manner, could never be accomplished within confined limits.

Principal Offices.

The Inland-office, the Foreign-office, and the Twopenny-post (which is now very considerable,) are the three great divisions of the Post Office.

The Inland-office divides itself into the London-office, the Country-offices, and the Twopenny-post.

The general departments through which the business of the Inland-office is conducted, are the Inland, the Foreign, the Twopenny-post departments, the Ship-letter, the By-letter, the Dead-letter, the Returned-letter, the Letter-bill, the Accountant-general's, and the Receiver-general's offices; the latter office is a check upon the Postmasters-general, and the appointment of the Receiver-general is not with the Postmaster-general, but with the Treasury.

Letters sent from London.

Will you have the goodness to trace a letter from its being put into a receiving-house in London to its being delivered in the country?—If it is put in at any distant receiving-house, it is there stamped and put up into a bag, that bag not being accessible to any individual until it comes to the Post-office. Those bags are called for by the letter-carriers, who deposit some of them in

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sacks, which are put into carts employed for the purpose of saving time, in order to bring them to the office so much the earlier; others are brought in great sacks by the letter-carriers on foot. The bags are opened by persons appointed for the purpose, and the letters are then thrown out into great baskets, in which they are brought to the places where they are to be stamped. The stamping is done by messengers, or by letter-carriers; and, as they are stamped, one letter is put into a sort of box, which is to go for 100; and so it is that we arrive at something like the number of letters that are put into the Post-office of an evening.

There are four or five stamping-tables; and sometimes three or four, sometimes more persons, are employed at each table. As soon as the letters are stamped, they are taken away to be assorted into 18 or 20 divisions, upon tables which correspond with what we call the roads, from which those letters are to be sent; the individual at No. 1, or 5, or 10, as the case may be, comes exactly to his table, and takes from the corresponding number the letters which have been assorted in the manner I have described. This is done by a higher gradation of sorters. There are a certain number of individuals assigned to a road; they take the letters to the road, and there they are assorted for the different places along the line of that road. When the individual has got the letters to his proper road, he begins with marking them with the rates of postage; after that they are put up into the box which bears the name of the post town to which they are to be conveyed. When all the letters are assorted, it is his duty to tell up the whole in each box, in order to ascertain what sum the postmaster in the country is to be debited with: after that comes the process of tying them up in bundles, and putting them into bags and sealing them. The bags are then put, according to a certain order, into large sacks belonging to the roads; for instance, the Carlisle bag would be put at the bottom of what we should call the Carlisle sack, next to that Penrith, then Appleby, and then Brough, and so on. The sacks are then delivered to the guard, and he becomes from that moment responsible for their security. As he comes to each place, the bag belonging to the place is taken out; he delivers it to the postmaster, with all the bye-bags he may have to deliver, and takes up the bags which it is necessary he should have from that town for the different towns through which the mail-coach passes.

Accounts of Postage.

The clerks making up the bags enter in slips, against each post town, the amount of the whole of the letters sent away from the office. Those slips then are handed to the proper officers, in order that they may find their way to the Accountant-general, so that they may form the charge upon the Postmaster in the country. A sort of way-bill is sent down, specifying the amount of letters charged upon the Postmaster, which should correspond in all cases with the slip which goes to the Accountant-general. If we find that the Postmaster is in the habit of returning 1*d.*, or 2*d.*, or 3*d.*, even such small sums as that, short of the office charge, we have recourse to this process:—unknown to him, the letters are told over by two or three persons for a certain period, so that we might, if possible, swear to the accuracy of our account, and the inaccuracy of his. The Postmasters' accounts are made up in books monthly; sent, under the signature of the officer of the Letter-bill office, to the Accountant-general, and then they form a part of that account which is sent down to the Postmaster in the country once a quarter. The letter-money is remitted by way of instalments, which are regulated every quarter. Where the amount is large we get a remittance once in fourteen days; where it is under 70*l.* a fortnight, the remittance is made monthly. There are some very few instances in which an individual does not remit more than once in a quarter, which was formerly usual with all. The emoluments of the Postmasters in the country are in some instances influenced by the amount of the remittances; but the duties of the Post-offices are so varied in almost all cases, that the salary is never settled but on a due consideration of all the circumstances. An office where the amount of the revenue may be perhaps 200*l.* or 300*l.* a year, may from its local situation be a great forward-office; for instance, the town of Huntingdon: the mails arrive there in the dead of the night, and all the letters from the north come up to Huntingdon to be assorted for Cambridgeshire, for Suffolk, and for Norfolk, and they amount to, I may say, thousands; on the return they come from Cambridge and Norfolk to Huntingdon, and amount to as many: the result is, that the duties of that office are done at very unseasonable hours; of course the regulation of the salary is not dependent upon the money that the individual receives, because those are all letters *in transitu*, but according to the severity of the duties he has to perform, and the time at which they are performed.

Letters from the Country.

Will you have the goodnes to trace a letter, put in in the country, to its delivery in London?—It is dropped into the receiving-box at the Post-office of the town from which it is intended to be sent; it is stamped and taxed there by the Postmaster or the persons employed by him, all of whom take the oath of office; it is entered in his bill exactly in the same manner as is done in London; it is enclosed in a bag, which is

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sealed, delivered to the guard, put into his sack, and conveyed by the mail-coach to London. Having got to London, the bags are opened, the letters are told over, and more particularly the paid letters, because the Postmaster in the country receiving so much money for paid letters, it is very necessary that we should see that he has put down the right amount. After the letters have been examined and stamped, they are distributed into fourteen divisions, twelve for the inland letter-carriers, one for the window or alphabet, and one for the two-penny post. Each of these twelve divisions is then subdivided into walks (118 or 119 in number). They are then placed before six clerks, called tellers, who charge the amounts against the respective letter-carriers. The amount against each walk is entered in a book, and stated on a docket, which is delivered to another clerk, called the check clerk, who also enters it in his book. The letter-carriers then tell the letters, and report the amount they make to the check clerk. If it agrees with the amount of the docket he has received from the telling clerk, the docket is handed to the letter-carrier for signature, and returned again to the check-clerk, and the amount is thus established against the letter-carrier. If it disagree, after a second telling by the letter-carrier, the President selects a clerk from another part of the office to re-tell the letters, and decide which is right. The President frequently retells the letters himself. The telling-clerks, to prevent collusion with the letter-carriers, are changed almost every day.

Foreign Letters.

Will you have the goodness now to trace the Foreign Letters?—They are deposited in the receiving-houses, and come up in sealed bags, just the same as the others. When a foreign letter is put into the Post-office in the country, it is tendered at the window of the Post-office in the country, and paid for. It then comes up in what is called the paid bill to London, and is transferred to the Foreign-office; it becomes virtually a frank, as it forms no part of the charge on the Foreign-office. The bags are made up in the Foreign-office by nearly the same process as in the Inland-office, only of course on a smaller scale. We have a Hamburgh mail, a French mail, a mail to Ostend, a mail to Helvoet, a mail to Guttenburgh, a mail to Gibraltar and Malta, a mail to the Brazils, and a mail to Lisbon,—recently one to Buenos-Ayres.

Letters to the Colonies.

Letters are sent to the Colonies, with similar accounts to the Postmasters, who are our deputies, precisely in the same manner with the Postmaster of Bristol or Birmingham, and account for postage in the same way. The remittances are made by every packet, and these balances are at present, certainly, in a very creditable state. All letters from the Colonies are not received in the first instance by the Post-office in London; all that can be circulated sooner by going by the cross-post, are forwarded from Falmouth by the nearest post-road.

Cross Post.

Having gone through the direct communication, will you describe how letters are conveyed and checked in going through the line of cross-communication?—I will take the instance of Nottingham and Derby. The Postmaster of Nottingham, who sends the letters away, not only inserts the amount in the bill which accompanies those letters, but he keeps a voucher, which is transmitted monthly to the By and Cross-road office, in which the amount charged on Derby is inserted, with the day, in the column. The Postmaster at Derby, when he receives those letters, puts down the amount in what is called the received side of his voucher. The voucher from Nottingham, and that also from Derby, are transmitted to the By and Cross-road Letter-office; they are there examined to see whether they agree; if they do agree, the account is received, and the deputy is debited accordingly. There must be a collusion between the two parties of course, if there is any fraud.

Surveyors.

Have you not Surveyors?—It is a part of their instruction to look to those things accurately and constantly, in travelling through the country: if there is any thing which can in the most remote degree excite their suspicion, they are to represent it immediately. In a flagrant case, the surveyor would at once see it was his duty to take charge of the office, and he would immediately state that he had done so. Where a man is deficient in his remittances, and where it would be imprudent to leave the revenue to greater hazard, a Surveyor is sent to take charge of the office. The great security for the cross-posts is the attention of the Surveyors? The Surveyors are officers fixed in districts; there are seven of them. There is scarcely a day in the year in which I do not receive communications from some of them.

Speculations on Literary Pleasures.—No. XVII.

(*Continued from p. 224.*)

DEMAILLET, another of the family of theorists who have written concerning the origin and structure of our globe, and who taught that the earth, for many thousand years, was covered with water, and that man

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