

THE ROMANCE OF THE POST OFFICE.

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QUEEN Jezebel is credited with having sent out the first circular letter. A more fortunate letter was carried by Naaman from the King of Syria to the King of Israel. In the reign of Hezekiah "the posts went with the letters from the King and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah."

Ahasuerus sent letters into every province of his vast empire declaring "that every man should bear rule in his own house," by no means a very good precept, if understood and practised as he himself was doing.

All civilized nations, ancient and modern, have known something of postal necessities and conveniences; but they have been as crude on the one hand as they have kingily on the other, for kingly messages and messengers have been almost the only ones concerned, until very recent times.

Our term, "post," is of Latin origin, from *positus*, placed. Horses and men were put at certain distances by the Emperor Augustus, to transport letters and travellers throughout the principal portions of the Roman Empire on Imperial business. Probably from this Roman origin we have inherited our permanent word "post."

Perhaps the Persians had the most perfected postal system of antiquity. Cyrus had established between Susa and the Egean Sea post stations, and the speed of the cour-

iers, Herodotus tells us, was such as "nothing mortal surpassed."

Posts almost as systematic were found in the ancient empires of Mexico and Peru, and in the fourteenth century when Marco Polo visited China he found a fairly good system of posts in existence. They may have been there for many centuries prior to that time, like a great many other notable elements of ancient Chinese civilization.

Some of the postal devices of antiquity were very curious. Herodotus tells us of one plan, which was to shave the head of a trusty messenger; and impress the message on his scalp. When the hair had grown sufficiently long for concealment, the messenger proceeded to his destination, and his head was again shaved, and the object of his secret mission revealed." Ovid speaks of messages being inscribed on a person's back, and Josephus states that during some wars, messages were conveyed by men disguised as animals, or that they were enclosed in coffins in company with an embalmed body.

Appian mentions letters inscribed on leaden bullets and thrown by a sling into a besieged city or camp.

The British postal service—with which the present article has chiefly to do*—dates back its feeble beginnings to as early a period as most other European States. The first Postmaster-General of England was Sir Bryan Luke, appointed in 1533, just ten years before the Emperor Charles V. appointed Count Leonard of Thurn and Taxis Postmaster-General for his empire.

* The Romance of the British Post Office. Its Inception and Wondrous Development." By Archibald Granger Bowie. London: S. W. Partridge. Toronto: Wm. Briggs.