

a curious or amusing side, which will perhaps develop in the reader a new and unexpected interest in "the hundred-handed giant who keeps up the intercourse between the different parts of the country, and wafts a sigh from Indus to the Pole."

How the people managed to get from place to place before the post-office had a history, or indeed for some time after the birth of that institution, is almost inconceivable to the present generation, who, in performing even a short journey, have at their disposal the elegance and convenience of the railway train. It is difficult to realize that throughout the United Kingdom—which to younger countries seems a type of almost immemorial civilization—the public highways were for a long time little more than tracks worn out of the surface of the virgin land, following principally the natural features of the country, and giving evidence that they had never been systematically made, but were the outcome of a mere habit of travel. They would not admit of the use of a stage coach with any degree of comfort or safety. Great men only, who could afford the necessary expense of a footman to run on either side of the coach and support it in rough places, adopted this method of travel.

The necessity for a better class of road cannot but have forced itself upon the Government of the country from time to time, if not for the benefit of travellers and to encourage trade, at least in order to facilitate the movement of troops in time of disturbance. Yet we find the state of the streets in the metropolis, as late as 1750, thus described in Blackie's "Comprehensive History of England": "When the only public approaches to Parliament were King and Union Streets, these were so wretchedly paved that when the King went in state to the House the ruts had to be filled up with bundles of fagots to allow the royal coach a safe transit." The same authority, some twenty years later, reports that notwithstanding numerous Acts of Parliament, of which no less than four hundred and fifty-two were passed between the years 1760 and 1764, for the improvement of the principal highways, little change for the better was perceptible. The roads in Scotland were equally bad, yet the tide of improvement which eventually set in was strongly opposed both in England and Scotland, involving in many places riot and bloodshed.

So strong was the aversion of the country people to the improved roads, that they would not travel over them. This bias may perhaps have partaken largely of that unreasonable conservatism which is always prone to assume that which is best, and opposes change on principle—an example of which is afforded by the conduct of the driver of the Marlborough coach, who, when the new Bath road was opened, obstinately refused to travel by it, and stuck to the old waggon track. "He was an old man," he said; "his grandfather and father had driven the aforesaid way before him, and he would continue in the old track till death." There are Marlborough coachmen yet in existence!

No one felt more keenly the deplorable condition of the roads than the post-boys, who were obliged continually to travel over them, and whose occupation must have been anything but light or agreeable. Cowper brings them vividly before us in the "Task":