as much as possible was foreseen and done. General Ismay was in July anxious about Sikh violence and recruited to the staff an officer with special knowledge of the Punjab and its peoples. Only in the first week of August, however, were any definite plots uncovered (the depleted CID was perhaps hardly to blame), and even then the bulk of advice was against arresting the Sikh leaders on the grounds that this would not interrupt a well-decentralised agitation, but simply cause further riots. These grounds are valid; only much earlier action through Congress and other political channels to strengthen responsible Sikh leadership could have modified the violence. Nor is there much of a case against Mountbatten for agreeing quickly to divide administration and army. On paper, no doubt, unified forces would have been strong. But the leaders on both sides pressed for early division and to have refused this would have been to risk a complete loss of confidence which the delicate negotiations could have at no stage endured. In any case, the continued reliability of united forces would have been most uncertain.

What of the failure of the Mission to settle before the transfer of power the position of the princes? The failure' refers in effect to only three cases — Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir — but they have done much to poison relations between the new Dominions. Here the answers are less convincing. It is clear that Mountbatten discussed both before and after the transfer of power to persuade the rulers of these states to see reason and facts. (It is significant in view of subsequent developments that in June 1947 he even secured from Congress an assurance to Kashmir that accession to Pakistan would not be regarded as an unfriendly act!) Mr Campbell-Johnson implies that their failure to adjust themselves was the result of their shortsightedness alone. It is, however, a fact that Congress leaders were in the months before August most anxious on this issue, and yet nothing was done to obtain from London a strengthening of Mountbatten's persuasive powers over the rulers; on the contrary, they continued to receive direct and indirect encouragement to be difficult.

The Mountbatten mission is usually associated with partition and transfer of power. This is only half the story and the arrangement of the present volume in two parts properly stresses this. The value of

Plain Words


This book was written at the invitation of the Treasury, with a view to help officials in their use of written English. First published in 1948, it has since run into more than a dozen reprints. Its great appeal to the readers is an indication of the fresh and entertaining way in which it describes the principles that should govern the use of English by officials. It does not mean that the principles are different for others who have to express themselves in written English. But there are some faults to which official writing is specially prone. Such faults have been enumerated in this little book with a wealth of illustrations and a style that is at once simple and convincing.

"The basic fault of present-day writing is a tendency to say what one has to say in as complicated a way as possible"; hence the need for Plain Words. A schoolboy once wrote that the cow "has a head so that the mouth can be somewhere". Why do we write instead that it is there "in order to ensure that the mouth may be appropriately positioned environmentally?" Sir Ernest Gowers analyses the temptations that lure us to this sort of writing; and he has given practical hints on how to achieve a direct and effective style. To the official, his first advice is to be friendly with the common man, who may need his guidance. This friendliness should be reflected in tire style of writing letters to him. His style should avoid, as far as possible, the chilly formalities of letters, where the opening words must be "I am directed by so and so". These phrases are flagrantly unreal when, as is often the case, letters are sent on the authority of junior officials, exercising a delegated responsibility. The book abounds in illustrations where words with vague meanings are used rather than the precise ones. The rules for good writing laid down by two distinguished predecessors, Fowler and Quiller-Couch, are distilled in the following three:

(1) Use no more words than are necessary to express your meaning;
(a) Use familiar words rather than the far-fetched; and
(3) Use words with a precise meaning rather than those that are vague and in particular, prefer concrete words to abstract.

These rules are examined in three separate chapters under the headings, "Avoiding Superfluous Words", "Choosing Familiar Words" and "Choosing Concrete Words". The first of these chapters gives some excellent examples of padding and of the excessive use of adjectives and adverbs like undue, unduly, definite, definitely, considerable, substantial and so on. The second chapter shows how words like alternative, bottle-neck, casualty, claim, involve, repercussions and sabotage are over worked and wrongly used in place of simpler words. In the chapter on "Choosing the Concrete Words", the author criticises the use of vague abstract words like condition, position, situation, and abstract adjectival phrases as in "the weather will be of showery character". He understands, of course, that the cloudiness of meaning is sometimes due to tire safety-first mentality of the officials. But he thinks and rightly too, that caution cannot be any excuse for obscurity in official writing.

In addition to the advice on choice of words there are useful chapters on the arrangement of words in sentences and on punctuation. Though the book is limited by its purpose to help the officials and is thus no general treatise on the use of English, it will certainly be interesting and useful for all, who write in English.

Mountbatten's advice and initiative in the post-partition problems of refugees, rioting, Hyderabad and Kashmir needs to be emphasised. It was an Indian press photographer who on seeing the mass acclamation accorded to the Mountbattens on August 15th, remarked "At last, after 200 years, Britain has conquered India." Nothing did more to consolidate that "conquest than Mountbatten's assistance during the first difficult eleven months of independence.