

“ U.K.” VERSUS “ G.B.”

SIR,—Mr. Fred E. Dixon (April 30th), feeling so strongly against the obvious misuse of “ G.B.” when speaking of stamps of this country, has my admiration for his self-imposed, thankless task of re-educating all and sundry. But he is wrong in assuming that the G.P.O. does not use the term “ *Great Britain* ”. This appeared on our postcards first, I think, in 1879, and is still used throughout the international service, for instance on parcel despatch notes and on customs forms.

“ *United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)* ”, unfortunately, is not the correct country designation either, since it does not embrace the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands though, admittedly, only a purist would feel compelled to add “ *and Crown Dependencies* ” to make it correct and complete.

Ever since meter mark franking was introduced here, in

1922, the value dies show the inscription "GREAT BRITAIN," as also do the town dies in prepaid mail going overseas. Since this designation is definitely not correct as far as Northern Ireland and the "Crown Dependencies" are concerned, I recently took the matter up with the Head Postmaster of St. Helier, Jersey, who obtained an authoritative ruling from the G.P.O. Headquarters. The position is that Article 186 of the U.P.U. Convention of 1957, in reiteration of earlier agreements, stipulates that the country of origin should be indicated in impressions deriving from franking machines, whether they are postally or privately owned, and that the country designation of the latter must fall in line with the former.

The U.P.U. agreement was signed by "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" as the contracting authorities, and on behalf of other places such as the Channel Islands. The everyday term used by members of the U.P.U. is, however, "Grande-Bretagne", and the English version "Great Britain" is therefore a convenient, well-known designation to meet the requirements of Article 186.

In E. Stanley Gibbons' "Price List and Catalogue" of 1865 the stamps of our country are listed, for the first time as now, under "Great Britain", though the cover bears a reference "... to any address in the *Kingdom*", and page 1 mentions that "All remittances may be made in Unused *English Postage Stamps*". I think we will have to stick to the shorthand title "Great Britain" since it seems most unlikely that anyone will be agreeable to use the one and only really correct and all-embracing designation, namely just plain "*Britain*".

Our friends on the Continent, by the way, have only the haziest notion of what is involved. I have seen addresses quoted in export directories under "Glasgow, England". But, then, "England" in any foreign language translates as "Britain", which simplifies matters no end.