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A

LETTER

ON THE LATE

POST OFFICE AGITATION.

BY

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By the Same Author,

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SECOND LETTER

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A LETTER,

&c.

MY DEAR SIR,

We have been lately invited to sign a parochial remonstrance against some projected changes in the business of the London Post Office. I, for one, declined the invitation. I never thought of obtruding upon others my *reasons* for this refusal. I am not the Minister of the Parish; nor have my opinions, therefore, on such a subject, any particular claim on the attention of my neighbours.

You know the circumstance which now compels me to explain myself. I regret the necessity. But neither I, nor those

who have agreed with me on this occasion, can listen in silence to the imputation of being indifferent to the national observance of the Sunday. If I can show you that we are not justly liable to this suspicion, it is well worth while to do so. If I fail to convince you, I shall at least have entered a serious protest, for myself and them, against such an imputation.

I have thoroughly examined the original minute (submitted by Mr. Rowland Hill to the Post Master General in February last) which formed the basis of the late alteration in the Sunday duties of the Post Office. I could wish that that minute had been more generally studied by those who have pronounced a judgment upon the question. It is open to your inspection: you may form, therefore, your own opinion upon the justice of the following observations.

The measure now impugned (the transmission, namely, of certain provincial and foreign letters through London on the Sunday) is not an isolated one. It is but one part of a more general scheme. And what is

the object of that scheme, as described in the minute referred to?¹ *The reduction of the Sunday duties of the Post Office. The securing of the utmost possible amount of Sunday rest to all connected with the Post Office.* What, again, was the first part of the same measure? What was that earlier step, taken by the same persons in the same direction, of which the present change is a consequence? *The total suspension of all money-order business on Sunday throughout England and Wales.* And what are some of those

¹ See Minute, 1, 2, 3. "I beg to submit my views as to further measures for reducing the Sunday duties of the Post Office. The importance of affording to all connected with the Post Office the utmost amount of rest on the Sunday that is consistent with a due regard to public convenience, having led to measures for the suspension of money-order business on that day throughout England and Wales, it is very satisfactory to remark, &c. &c. And I confidently anticipate like satisfactory results, should the Treasury concur in your Lordship's recent recommendation of a similar measure in Ireland and Scotland. . . . In considering the above improvement, the importance of similar relief as respects other duties was kept in mind; and, from the investigations which have been made, there can be no doubt that a further very important relief as relates to Sunday work may be effected in all the provincial offices."

ulterior measures, to which the attention of the originators of this is next to be directed? *The deferring of work now done on the Sunday till after midnight.*² *The reduction of Sunday work, even at the chief Office, considerably below its present amount.*³ *Important measures of relief to the rural messengers and rural receivers on the Sunday.*⁴ What, finally, is the declared object of the present alteration? *Further relief from Sunday labour in the provincial Post Offices; and thus, the diminution of Sunday work in the department as a whole.* So far from its being correct to state this as a merely accidental result of the measure, it is its very object and purpose, to which all else is subordinate and subsidiary.

Ought not these considerations to preclude at least a precipitate sentence of condemnation? May we not be permitted to learn the object of a measure from its author? Are we justified in imputing to any man, I do not say, motives which he disavows, but motives of which he professes the very opposite, and against

² Minute, 25.

³ Minute, 26.

⁴ Minute, 39.

which his own previous and subsequent acts obviously militate?

But the change, however well meant, may be practically injurious. It may cause more harm than it obviates. It may introduce more Sunday labour than it supercedes. This is, of course, conceivable. It is just possible, doubtless, that an able and experienced officer of this department of the Government may be found, on this one occasion, so unskilful or so short-sighted, as to have effected, not *less* than he proposed, but the very *opposite* of that which he designed. But is it so?

It is admitted that, at first sight, the alteration in question may seem to *increase* the Sunday duties of the Post Office. In London, to a certain extent, it does. It will require, at the outset, the additional attendance of twenty-five persons (hereafter, possibly, of a somewhat larger number) on Sunday in the London Post Office.⁵ That attendance, you will observe, is *voluntary*. Nor is it allowed, in any case, to infringe upon the hours of divine service. It

⁵ Minute, 18, 19.

is proposed that the whole interval from ten in the morning till five in the afternoon be left perfectly free.⁶ Nor yet would it be correct to represent the alteration as involving any change of *principle*. The attendance and employment of *certain* persons, the reception and assortment of *certain* letters, on the Sunday, even in the London Post Office, is no new thing.⁷ The conscience of the Christian community has left *these* practices unchallenged and unnoticed until now. Such considerations ought to have some weight in our estimate of the present innovation. Still, so far as it goes,

⁶ Minute, 17.

⁷ Minute, 12, 13. "Even to London [under the old system] nearly all letters from Ireland, Scotland, and the out-ports, as also all foreign and colonial letters whatever, are brought, as on other days; the same being partly assorted at the chief office on the Sunday, for delivery or for forwarding, as the case may be, the next morning. For the performance of these duties, and for the selection and delivery of the "States" (letters addressed chiefly to the higher offices of Government), twenty-six persons are ordinarily employed at the chief office on the Sunday, their time of occupation being, on the average, six hours. The arrival of a heavy mail from abroad requires a greater force."

and taken alone, the augmentation of the Sunday force in the London Post Office is admitted to be an evil. Is it counter-balanced by any greater good?

It is necessary to take a *national* view of such a question. The Post Office system throughout England is one, not many. The London Office, and the provincial Offices, are but several parts of one connected whole. The question, therefore, is, not whether this Office, or that Office, separately regarded, will be a gainer or a loser by the change; but whether, on the whole, the *aggregate* of gain or of loss will preponderate; whether, so to say, the Post Office of *England*, as distinguished from that of London separately, or that of York or of Manchester separately, will thus be relieved on the Sunday, or burdened. If twenty-five *additional* servants are required in the *London* Office on the Sunday, and *twice* twenty-five can be *relieved* on that day in the *provincial* Offices; the change, so far as it extends, is salutary. Now, if this obvious principle be granted, the question is decided at once. Beyond all contradiction,

the present measure is one of relief from Sunday labour to the department *as a whole*. But the opponents of the measure argue thus: Taking the London Office by itself, an *addition* is proposed to the labours of the Sunday: this is a sinful project: and if it be urged, on the other side, that a ten-fold *relief* will thus be afforded to the *provincial* Offices, they answer, that this is but *doing evil that good may come*. Yet is not this argument capable of an easy inversion? Are you not, in *resisting* the proposed relief of the country Offices, on the plea of regard for that of London, doing, in fact, a great evil—not that a small good may come, but that a small evil may not come?

What, then, are some of the advantages (speaking merely with reference to the observance of the Sunday) by which this admitted evil is counterbalanced? I will enumerate three only.

1. The cessation of several Sunday cross-posts, by which the detention of letters in London throughout that day has been hitherto evaded or obviated:⁸ and this,

⁸ *Minute*, 11. "The evil of detention has been found

without any addition to the existing number of mail-trains, or other means of transmission, to or from London, on the Sunday.⁹

2. A great diminution of the former amount of letters written and read in the country on that day.¹⁰

so serious, that in several cases the rule has been evaded, either by making use of other existing channels for the conveyance of the mails sent on ordinary days through London, or by the actual establishment of Sunday cross-posts; either of which arrangements obviously involves increased expence, trouble, liability to error, perplexity to the public, *and additional Sunday work.*"

⁹ Minute, 14, 33.

¹⁰ Minute, 21, 22, 23. "It is notorious that a blank post is everywhere preceded and followed by a greater amount of correspondence than usual. Thus, in London, the average number of letters is greater on Saturday by 6 per cent., and on Monday by 25 per cent., than on other days. But, as respects the correspondence sent through London, Saturday evening is at present in most towns a blank post time. It therefore follows that such correspondence is despatched from the provinces in unusual amount on Saturday morning, and on Sunday morning or evening, according as there may or may not be a Sunday day mail. Now each of these augmentations tends to produce additional Sunday work, both to the department and to the public. For the letters in the first category are for the most part distributed by the Post Office and read by the public on the Sunday,

3. The entire discontinuance of a second delivery of letters on Sunday throughout England and Wales :¹¹ a measure affecting considerably more than two hundred Towns, and affording direct and immediate relief to a very far larger number of persons.

Nor is it, perhaps, altogether presumptuous to express a hope that the unrestricted *transmission* of letters on the Sunday may eventually be followed by an equally general *suspension* of their *delivery* ; by which London and the country would be placed, in this respect, on a footing of per-

and those in the second are for the most part written by the public and despatched by the office on Sunday. It is obvious therefore that, as far as relates to the letters in question, the proposed change would entirely get rid of Sunday work, as respects the public ; while, as respects the department, it would exchange work now dispersed through nearly a thousand offices for concentrated employment in one ; the latter requiring a less proportionate force, and falling on such time as to be dealt with without infringement on the hours of divine service."

¹¹ Minute, 27, 28 ; where the *connection* of this measure with that now under consideration is more fully illustrated.

fect equality; the due observance of the Sunday being alike in both secured, with no injurious consequences, in either, to the business of the following day.

Meanwhile, it is ascertained that, by the alterations already effected, a very large body (amounting to some hundreds at least) of persons now occupied on the Sunday in the provincial Offices, even during the hours of public worship, will be enabled to obtain rest on that day, and to enjoy without interruption the benefit of its religious services.¹² The number of principal Post Offices thus benefited, in a greater or less degree,—some to the extent of *seven hours* of additional suspension of business on every Sunday,—amounts very nearly to *five hundred*. A very far larger number, at present imperfectly ascertained, of Sub-offices throughout the country, will partake of the same advantage. The total number of *persons* thus relieved will obviously far exceed that of the aggregate of *Offices*. And who will say that these great benefits, *the direct and prin-*

¹² Minute, 37.

cipal object (be it remembered) *of the whole measure*, are utterly vitiated by their unavoidable accompaniment — the employment, namely, of a small *additional* force in *one*, the Metropolitan Office, on the same day?

What, then, remains, to justify the agitation occasioned by this measure, but a vague and indefinite suspicion that a change in one direction may lead to a change in the other? that a measure which proposes neither to bring in nor take out a single London letter on the Sunday,¹³ may eventually cause, in London itself, both a Sunday collection and a Sunday delivery? that he who now seeks to lighten Sunday labour, to diminish Sunday deliveries, Sunday letter-writing and letter-reading, may hereafter lend his aid to their augmentation and diffusion? Let these evils be met, on their proper ground, and at the proper time. Let the good sense and the religious feeling of the country be appealed to when the danger really threatens. At present, it is as remote as ever. It will not be brought

¹³ Minute, 34.

one step nearer by *this* measure. But it *may* be increased by a premature and unreasonable outcry, to be succeeded, as usual, by a very natural recoil.

I remain, my dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

C. J. VAUGHAN.

HARROW,

November 16, 1849.

By the Same Author.

SERMONS, chiefly Parochial. 8vo. 1845.

SERMONS, preached in the Chapel of Harrow School.
8vo. 1847.

NINE SERMONS, preached for the most part in the
Chapel of Harrow School. 12mo. 1849.

AN EARNEST APPEAL to the Master and Seniors
of Trinity College, Cambridge, on the Revision of
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