

THE  
LUCIFER MATCH,  
AND  
POST OFFICE MONOPOLY;

*Being the substance of a Paper read at the*

Huddersfield Literary & Scientific Society,

BY  
WILLIAM HASTINGS.



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*[The right of translation is reserved.]*

TO

JOHN FREEMAN, Esq.,

President,

AND

THE MEMBERS OF THE HUDDERSFIELD LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY,

THIS PAPER IS

Respectfully Dedicated.

# The Lucifer Match,

AND

## POST OFFICE MONOPOLY.

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES, and GENTLEMEN,

As old as the Post Office itself perhaps is the institution of the brimstone match, useful in its way, but only ignitable by fire or by some agent by which fire could be obtained.

Charles Knight has given a graphic account of the difficulties of procuring light in careful families who allowed no fire to be kept up during the night, and who had no other resource but the old match, which had to be ignited in the following manner, by the now obsolete process of flint and steel:—

Over tinder, or scorched linen, sparks were struck from the steel, until one more lucky than the rest fell on the black combustible but not inflammable mass, producing a glow of sufficient strength to inflame the brimstone match.

Fancy the discomfort of having to rise on a dark winter morning to find the tinder-box misplaced, and the flint and steel carried away by the juvenile members of the household, for with boys

they would be favourite playthings; and picture to yourselves all the family derangement of the inmates if one or more sleeping apartments had to be aroused before the missing implements were discovered. Without doubt, the Lucifer Match was an invaluable invention.

It was due to accident. About forty years ago, a chemist in one of our northern towns, whose name and place of residence I forget, happening to have nothing better at hand than a brimstone match to stir some solution, was astonished to see the match ignite. This happy discovery he improved; the result, the Lucifer Match. Conscious of its merit, he immediately began the manufacture, charging half-a-crown a box, which was readily paid. As the secret could not be long kept, he had soon competitors who forced the price down to one shilling; at this point he threw up the business as no longer worth following.

Here the subject gives rise to the following reflections:—

First, had the discovery been made thirty years earlier, when all light, from a farthing candle to a garret window, was considered a taxable article, the manufacture of spontaneously-lighting matches might have been secured as a Government monopoly; and if all other countries had followed suit and adopted this ready means of taxation, we should probably be still paying one shilling a box for our lucifers, or praising the boldness of some

reformer who, after repeated efforts, had got reluctant Chancellors to lower the price to three-pence, and there would have been hosts of defenders of the exchequer, all ready to prove that the normal rate was one shilling, that the manufacture and sale of lucifers ought only to be carried on by the State, that it was a legitimate source of revenue, and lowering the price was only to sacrifice its income.

Let no one underrate the reformer's difficulties. People patiently endure accustomed burdens, and they would vote him a dreamer who, knowing nothing of the manufacture, which would, of course, be entirely in the hands of the Government, should insist that more profit would be realized by the myriads that might be sold at one farthing than on the comparatively few at one shilling.

Fortunately for the dissemination of Lucifer Matches, they were neither taken up as a Government monopoly nor fostered by protection. The industry, first commenced in England, rapidly spread. The inventor threw up the manufacture as no longer worth following, his appliances only enabling him to work with profit at one shilling a box. The continued application of unrestricted skill has reduced the price to less than a farthing a box, and these, not made at our doors, but the produce of various countries. We have not only our safety lights and patent vestas, but a host of foreign varieties, Stand-

sticknors, Zundholz, Allumettes Chimiques, often in boxes gems of artistic skill, and from such distances as to prove how little the cost of transport is appreciable on small objects.

I am not prepared to insist that excessive cheapness is without its drawbacks. Lucifer Matches are the too-ready instrument of the incendiary, and by their careless use much valuable property, and lives yet more valuable, have been sacrificed; nor am I prepared to prove that cheap postage is an unalloyed blessing. Trivial and inopportune letters consume time and ruffle temper, but the benefits in either case far outweigh the disadvantages.

The logic of facts has given us cheap Lucifer Matches. Postage, I have proved in a paper previously read in this room, and since published under the title of "UNIVERSAL PENNY POSTAGE," is still much too dear.

In spite of every remonstrance the Post Office adheres to its old rates, or yields only inch by inch, and so it will ever do unless some competition is permitted, or its monopoly threatened.

Founded originally as a monopoly in favour of James, Duke of York, afterwards the second king of that name, the taint of its origin clings to it to this day.

It never concedes that its primary duty is the conveyance of letters or the convenience of the public, but holds to the privilege,—that dear to

all monopolists who have exclusive rights,—the highest rate of remuneration that the law or custom will allow it to enforce. See how it has acted in the recent purchase of the Telegraphs. It was most desirable that the electric telegraph should be extended to places which would not pay any Company to have a special staff and offices for the sole purpose, but the Post Office with its existing staff might have extended wires to those places, and then offered to work together on mutually advantageous terms with one or other of the Companies. There would have then been healthy competition and rivalry, and instead of having to \* purchase all the Companies at three or fourfold their value, an annual subsidy would have sufficed, and there would not have been the disgraceful deadlock which has followed the transfer of all the three existing Companies at once to the Post Office: but no, the institution could brook no competitor, and with the transfer of the Telegraph Companies the only unfettered opponent of the Post Office is extinguished.

Competition, or the absence of monopoly, cheapened Matches; a like result would follow if the conveyance of Letters were left to free competition.

\* The way the public money was squandered in these transactions is but a type of the penny wise and pound foolish practice of the Post Office. Who but monopolists, who fear no competition, would ever contract by the ounce or the pound for freight?—See the Fifteenth Report of the Postmaster-General, page 10.

It is fair, therefore, to ask, why should the Post Office have so exclusive a monopoly?

I maintain :

(1) That, were there open competition, we might have a universal penny rate between any two offices, however distant, and that the operation would leave a profit for the service.

(2) That the postage on town delivery might be reduced to one-tenth of the present rate ; and

(3) That hourly deliveries in most towns would be attended with advantage to the public, and profit to the Post Office.

In charging half-a-crown a box for his matches, the inventor committed the mistake of estimating the merchandise at its extreme value to the consumer, instead of basing it upon the cost of the material and labour applied in its production. The Post Office commits the same mistake. Without doubt the work it does it does well, and it is almost impossible to over-estimate the value of a letter to the correspondents, and this may be said of many letters that daily pass through its hands ; but, humiliating though it be to the self-love of the Post Office, with this value it has nothing to do. The letter, except such as are registered, is only a missive of such a weight. There is no discrimination between the good and worthless— all must be charged alike.

This indisputable fact admitted, we must, in order to find out what the Post Office ought to



charge, estimate as near as possible the cost of the service in manipulation and transport.

To do this upon a single letter is impossible, but we may form some idea of the labour, the cost of transport, and of the materials consumed, upon a certain weight of letters, and see how that compares with the remuneration obtainable in other industries for like services.

The cost of letter-carrying consists of :

1. Sorting, stamping, packing.
2. Transport.
3. Stamping, sorting for delivery, and delivery.

The first and third of these are common to all letters which have to be mailed, whether the bag be sent ten or ten thousand miles; the cost is, therefore, the same in every case, high on the individual letter when the number is small, but becoming infinitesimal, in inverse proportion, if the supply be large; and, as foreign and colonial letters need no more manipulation than those intended for the nearest post town, we have, apart from inland, only their transport to consider.

Before I enter on the cost of transport, let us compare the cost of inland and foreign postage.

The lowest letter rate is one penny per half-ounce, or 2s. 8d. per lb. On foreign postage, the rates advance from 3d. to 2s. 4d. per half-ounce. The following table (from "Universal Postage") shows what these various figures sum up to:—

1d.	the half-oz. is	2s. 8d.	per lb., and	£208	per ton.	Present Inland rate.
3d.	„	8s.	„	£894	„	Private ship rate to the West Indies.
4d.	„	10s. 8d.	„	£1,192	„	Rate to France, but as the single letter must be under $\frac{1}{4}$ oz., letters to France are, in fact, charged 8d. per half-ounce.
6d.	„	16s.	„	£1,788	„	India and China, <i>via</i> Southampton.
8d.	„	21s. 4d.	„	£2,388	„	France, Frenchpacket, and to Switzerland.
1s.	„	32s.	„	£3,584	„	United States of America.
1s. 4d.	„	42s. 8d.	„	£4,776	„	Hong Kong and Singapore.
s.	„	64s.	„	£7,168	„	Sweden, Russia, Turkey
2s. 4d.	„	74s. 8d.	„	£8,360	„	California, Oregon, &c.

Goods are conveyed by the mail steamers at the following rates:—

To New York, £3 per ton of 40 cubic feet; to the West Indies, Brazil, and the River Plate, £7 to £10 per ton; by the Red Sea to Australia, £34; to China, £40; to Yokohama, £42. 6s. 8d. per ton, all of 40 cubic feet measurement.

I must again remind you that my remarks only refer to the transit between existing Post Offices. Wherever such exist, be the letters few or many, the annual outlay is the same: every additional letter is therefore pure profit, and if the numbers increase beyond the power of the existing staff, this must of necessity prove that the addition of further help would again be but another source of increased profit.

What, then, is the cost of transit on half an ounce, or a single letter? It may be presumed that the Peninsular and Oriental Company charge

the Post Office for the service rendered at something like the rates they charge on parcels and passengers' luggage.

The letters being packed in boxes need no more care and attention than the merchandise by the same conveyance, the rate to Japan being £42. 13s. 4d. per cubic ton, which I give as being the longest transit entirely within our own management; and as the cubic ton, or 40 cubic feet, would, allowing an extreme calculation for the weight of packages, contain 875 \* pounds nett of letters, this at one penny per half-ounce would be £116. 13s., leaving three-fifths of cost for profit to the Post Office at one penny per half-ounce, even on this most distant service; but, by the same contract, letters are delivered at the Oceanic ports of Spain, Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, India, and the Australian Colonies; on these, of course, the proportionate gain would be greater.

These contracts do not limit the quantity that the Post Office can send; it is clearly, therefore, its interest to avail itself of the privilege, and offer every inducement, by low rates, to get as much *weight* for its subsidy as possible.

Monopolists prefer light work and heavy pay.

\* This weight is the presumed nett weight of the contents of the iron boxes that are used for the overland mail, made purposely small for convenience in crossing from Alexandria to Suez.

The wood boxes used by the same mail would hold nearly double, and, of course, the proportion of mail matters would be even greater when packed in bags.

The Post Office charges one shilling per half-ounce for this service, which, on 875 pounds, would be £1,400 on letters, against £43 on luggage by the same conveyance.

Let us now compare this scale of charges with those of various kinds of merchandise or produce.

I shall now quote from my former paper, "Universal Penny Postage."

The Overland Mail occasionally brings thousands of chests of tea on freight.

This tea would not bring more than 2s. per pound in bond in London, cultivation, manipulation, merchants' profits, insurance, freight, and all other expenses included. The letters by the same overland steamer are charged 42s. 8d. per pound, and the Post Office does not meddle with their production. Even at this extravagant rate of charge, it neither finds the paper nor writes the letters. Other industries have to go farther a-field, and are content to ask, or rather see their true interest in asking, a very small fraction of the Post Office rates.

Cotton forms often the largest part of the freight by the American packets, and the transit to the port of shipment would be by rail, the speed of travelling the same as the mails. There is therefore little difference in speed of transit between cotton and the mail bags, and there ought to be as little difference in the cost of carrying. Railways and steamers were made for goods and passengers ;

the letter traffic is incidental, and the Post Office avails itself only of what already exists for other purposes.

The carriage, therefore, of cotton and of mail bags being the same, we have only the other elements of cost to consider.

How much more of thought and labour has to be devoted to the production and supply of a pound of cotton, raised in the East Indies, or on the banks of the Mississippi, and delivered to the spinner in England, than has to be conferred by the Post Office on a pound of letters. Cotton has to be planted, hoed, weeded, tended, and picked by a much more laborious process than stamping letters, sold and re-sold; bargains made for shipment; again sold; and all this is done, or will be done, and the pound of cotton be grown, packed, sent to port, shipped to another hemisphere, bought and sold, and finally delivered to the spinner at prices varying from 8d. to 1s. per pound, whereas the price I am proposing for the adoption of the Post Office, as a great concession, is 2s. 8d. per pound.

\* The penny newspaper is a standing reproach to the Post Office. Everything that is done for letters, sorting, transit, and delivery, is done for the newspaper, and the subject-matter itself given in for a penny.

\* Since this paper was written, I am informed that the little halfpenny newspaper, the *Echo*, is really prepared, in the way of writing, paper, printing, and delivery, for one farthing.

The return of post between Berlin and London is now as short as it was between London and Edinburgh forty years ago. Between London and Paris it is less than the return then was between London and Manchester, and the conveyances which have thus shortened the time have also diminished, in greater proportion, the cost per weight in transit; and yet the two Post Offices are haggling about a few grammes in weight for the single letter charged at the rate of 10s. 6d. per lb.

Here 400 miles from Paris, I have, at 4 p.m. to-day, received and read the *National* and *Figaro* Journals of this morning, containing the editor's comments on events of yesterday; these journals, production, printing, materials, newsvendors' profits, and transit, cost only 2½d. each, weighing two or more ounces.

It is waste of time to urge the matter further: if these facts do not establish my position, nothing that I could say more would do so.

My second point, viz., that postage on town letters might be reduced to one-tenth of a penny, follows as a natural sequence of my first.

If a penny suffices, even on the longest transit, one-tenth of a penny must be ample where there is no transit, once sorting only, and delivery. A company was started in London some time ago to deliver circulars for tradespeople at some such rate, but the Post Office put a stop to the practice

—proof sufficient, however, that it might be done with profit.

On the third point I shall not dwell either. It is little more than 40 years since "*L' Entreprise Générale des Omnibus*" started in Paris. Its success depended on cheap rates, *fixed, regular, and frequent* times of departure. Almost every second and third-rate town has now its lines of omnibuses. In our own of barely 40,000 inhabitants, five lines run regularly from the market-place every hour or half-hour, and the success hitherto warrants the expectation that the numbers will increase, and the departures probably be yet more frequent.

The postal deliveries are 7 a.m., 1.45, 4.15, and 6 p.m. The letter boxes are cleared 9, 10.45 a.m.; 1.45, 3, 6, 8, and 9 p.m. It is clear to any one who compares these figures that no one would think of posting a town letter who hoped for reply within reasonable time, or as he would be induced to do, if, without being at the trouble of consulting a table, he were certain that within the hour it would be on its way, and that, before another had passed, a reply might be despatched.

You will say that my ideas are Utopian; so they are; they would not be worth your notice if they were not. We live in Utopia, not in the dreamland of Sir Thomas More, but in a Utopia of realized impossibilities. Many men like in-

trepid Waghorn have seen this land from afar, who were not allowed to enter therein !

Many learned pundits have declared that things would never be realized, except in Utopia, which are now as familiar and commonplace as our daily bread ! Steam-shipping, crossing the Atlantic ! impossible, said Lardner. Join the Red Sea and the Mediterranean by a ship-canal ! madness, said our great engineers.

What would have been thought of any one who prophesied forty years ago that a cable should unite Europe and America, and that one ship would be able to stow away and pay out the long line, and, more wonderful still, that by this connexion men's thoughts and words could be instantaneously flashed across from side to side ?

I repeat, we live in Utopia,—in it, but not of it, the Post Office lags fifty years behind, and so it will ever do while its monopoly lasts.

But why, you may ask, is this subject brought before us as a Society ? Because we are constantly breaking the law, and rendering ourselves liable to heavy penalties.

We only send through the post the circulars for members who are at too great a distance for special delivery, the rest are delivered by a hired messenger, total cost some £6 per annum. Were we to pay postage on all, the cost would be over £30, or more than one-fourth of our annual income.



For every letter sent by hand, we are liable to a penalty of £5.

We have a right to complain of being put in the position of being law-breakers; for our existence, as a Society, depends upon our continuing the practice; were we to obey the law, we should have to knock off our periodicals, or our lectures, or economise in some other way which would be fatal to the Society.

The question is more social and educational than economical. It is, in fact, on those letters which give no direct or immediate return in money value that the pressure of postage falls, and these are the letters that everybody has occasion to write. Business men are, numerically, a small portion of the community, and it is a very poor business that will not pay postage.

In some cases, cheapening postage would actually entail loss, as the same letter may, legitimately, be charged to several correspondents, all of whose interests are subserved by it. Ten times one shilling leaves a different result from ten times one penny.

My pamphlet was sent in 1866 to all the Chambers of Commerce in the kingdom, many of whom at once petitioned in favour of the adoption of an immediate reduction to a universal rate of one penny, but since then they have acted very languidly in the matter.

The Liverpool Chamber excused themselves on

the plea that—"the public, neither at home nor abroad, were prepared for the measure."

Let it be our endeavour to pave the way. I propose, therefore, that we should follow the precedent set to us in 1839, when inland penny postage was the question. Miss Martineau says, petitions poured in from men of all parties, from commercial, social, religious, and literary associations. All was needed; for within a few weeks of the passing of the Act, Members high in the Administration, who admitted that some concession ought to be made, said that, as to the adoption of Mr. Hill's plans, it was the most absurd idea that anybody could conceive—too absurd to be worth a reply. The force of public opinion was too great for redtapism! Government gave way, and, most unwillingly, the Post Office had also to yield.

No concession worth the name will even now be made, but under pressure. The public must speak out; petitions should go from associations, commercial, religious, and literary, as in 1839. I hope, Sir, to enlist ours in the good fight, but let us not waste energy in attacking out-posts, such as a reduction of a halfpenny on newspapers, or threepence or sixpence on foreign postages, but make a direct assault on the fortress, and petition for a Parliamentary or Royal Commission of Inquiry into the whole question of rates, subsidies, and management. And, above all, make

the institution show cause why, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when monopolies have been condemned by men of all parties, it should be allowed to retain the monopoly accorded to it in the seventeenth.

WILLIAM HASTINGS.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

UNIVERSAL PENNY POSTAGE,

*Price 6d.,*

CONTAINS A SUCCINCT HISTORY OF EVENTS LEADING  
TO SIR ROWLAND HILL'S REFORMS.

*Extract of a Letter from the Hon. REVERDY JOHNSON  
to the "Huddersfield Observer."*

LEGATION OF THE U. S.,  
LONDON, *4th January, 1869.*

SIR,

I have your letter of 1st inst., with your pamphlet,  
"Universal Penny Postage."

As my opinion concurs with yours upon the subject which  
the pamphlet treats, I will, as the most likely way of furthering  
the object, forward the pamphlet to my Government by next  
mail \* \* \*

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,  
Office of Foreign Mails,  
WASHINGTON, *January 26th, 1869.*

DEAR SIR,

A late despatch from Hon. REVERDY JOHNSON, U. S.  
Minister at London, to the Secretary of State, having been  
referred to this department for perusal, I have read with  
interest your carefully-prepared pamphlet on "Universal  
Penny Postage," which accompanied the despatch, and would  
be pleased if you can conveniently send me a copy of it for the  
files of this department.

I am, very respectfully,  
Your obedient Servant,

JOSEPH H. BLACKFAN,  
*Superintendent,*

To WILLIAM HASTINGS, Esq., *Huddersfield, England. With*

— *Mr Hastings*  
*Compliments*  
HUDDERSFIELD: B. BROWN. MANCHESTER: DIRKS & Co.