

# AN OCEAN PENNY POSTAGE.

## WILL IT PAY?

BY ELIHU BURRITT.

By the term "*Ocean Penny Postage*," we mean simply this:—That the single service of transporting a letter, weighing under half-an-ounce, from any port of the United Kingdom to any port beyond the sea, at which the British mail-packets may touch, shall be performed by the British Government for *one penny*; or one penny for its mere conveyance from Folkestone to Boulogne, Liverpool to Boston, &c., and *vice versa*. Thus the entire charge upon a letter transmitted from any town in the United Kingdom to any port beyond the sea, would be twopence;—one penny for the inland rate, and the other for the ocean rate. In this brief statement of the proposition, we shall bring forward only those facts and statistics which may serve to demonstrate its feasibility; or, in other words, to show that such a measure would *pay*. And we will confine our argument to the two directions in which most of the letters to and from Great Britain are conveyed; or between it and the Continent of Europe on one side, and North America on the other. There are two great channels of correspondence between Great Britain and the Continent. The first is that between Dover and Ostend. Into this flows nearly all the correspondence of the German States, as well as that of Belgium. Now, then, can the British Government merely convey these letters between Dover and Ostend for a penny a-piece, without detriment to its revenue? How many more must it carry in its bags at that rate, than it does at the existing charge, in order to realise the present amount of revenue? And, at the outset of this argument, we must take it for granted, that the Government will be satisfied, if the *present* amount of revenue can be guaranteed under the proposed reduction. According to a recent convention with the Belgian Government, the whole charge of a letter, under a quarter of an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in Belgium, is fixed at 6d. Of this the British Post-office receives 4d., and the Belgian 2d. The British Inland charge is 1d.; thus leaving 3d. for the simple conveyance of a letter across the Channel. We ask the British Post-office to perform this single service for 1d.; which, with the 1d. for the inland rate, would give the Department 2d. for the transmission of a letter from London to Ostend, instead of 4d., which it now receives for both these services. Then the number of letters must be *doubled*, in order to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* in this direction. Upon what sources may we depend for this increase? We shall have the effect of *two* reductions upon the correspondence of 40,000,000 Germans and Belgians with Great Britain and North America. In the first place, an arrangement has just been concluded for establishing a uniform 3d. postage through all the German States. Thus, letters from the western frontiers of Russia and Turkey will be conveyed to the eastern frontier of Belgium for 3d., which is a

great reduction on the different rates which have hitherto existed in those States. For instance, the postage on a letter from Berlin to Frankfort has been 1s., and from Hamburg to the same town 9d. This reduction in itself, on the German inland charge, must greatly increase the number of letters which cross the Channel between Ostend and Dover. Now, then, superadd to this the reduction of the Channel rate to 1d., which would take effect upon all the myriad tributaries of this Continental correspondence. Its influence would also reach Sweden and Russia, from which a great number of letters is now forwarded to England *via* Ostend, on account of the accelerated expedition by this route. Nearly all the railways in Germany, either in operation or in process of construction, debouch, as it were, into this channel, and letters from Pesth and Dantzic determinate in this direction. Now we would appeal to any candid mind to justify the conclusion, that these two sources of increase would *double* the present number of letters conveyed between Ostend and Dover; which is all we need to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* in that direction.

Nearly the same facts and arguments will apply to the other great channel of correspondence, or that between Folkestone and Boulogne. There is no postal charge in Christendom so anomalous and exorbitant as that imposed upon the correspondence between Great Britain and France. Paris is nearer to London than Edinburgh is; and as near by the Express as Manchester is by the "Parliamentary train." But the charge on a letter, weighing only quarter of an ounce, between London and Paris, is 10d.; and on one weighing half an ounce, 1s. 3d.! The different services to which this amount is apportioned, are these: the French Post Office demands 5 sous, or 2½d., for the inland postage of a letter from Paris to Boulogne; the British Office, a penny from Folkestone to London; making 3½d. for all the land services between the two capitals, including the most expensive charges of receiving, despatching, and delivering. Here there is 6½d. for the mere transportation of a letter from Boulogne to Folkestone, a distance of thirty miles, and overcome by steam in two hours! But if the letter weighs half an ounce, then it is charged 1s. 3d. The French probably demand two rates for this weight, whilst the British Office allows it to one. Suppose the French receive 5d. for their inland charge on this letter; then 10d. is demanded for getting it from Boulogne to London, or *vice versa* for its mere transportation across the Channel! Is there any postal charge in the civilized world to compare with this for aggravated exorbitancy! Let us contrast it with a few of the rates adopted in different countries. From the Channel Islands to the remotest of the Shetland group, changing from steamer to railway, and from railway to steamer, for nearly 1000 miles, 1d. From the western frontiers of Russia and Turkey to the eastern boundary of Belgium, or from Trieste to Hamburg, or from Dantzic to Aix-la-Chapelle, 3d. From the Rio Grande, or the eastern boundary of Mexico, to the north-eastern boundary of the American Union, a distance of 3,000 miles, 1½d. From Folkestone to Boulogne, a distance of thirty miles, on the twelve hours' route between the two greatest capitals of the world, 9d. What reason is there to wonder at the fertile and furtive expedients adopted by

thousands, to evade this most disproportionate charge! What wonder that so many passengers are importuned in a half whisper, not only by personal acquaintances, but by utter strangers, "just to drop this letter in any office on the other side!" The conveyance of a dozen letters, weighing in all six ounces, costs as much as the fare of a man, weighing 200lbs., in the first cabin, including the steward's fee, between Folkestone and Boulogne. One could hardly conceive of a greater temptation than is pressed upon thousands, to evade this most exorbitant and unreasonable charge, by seeking some private mode of conveyance for their letters. A reduction of the Channel rate to 1d. would break up this contraband system, and bring into the bags of the Post Office the letters now conveyed in the pockets of passengers, and in other ways. Then, the reduction would impart a powerful and immediate stimulus to all the correspondence between the two countries, and constitute another great source of increase. The whole expense of a letter, weighing under a quarter of an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in France, is 10d. The French inland postage is 2½d., leaving 7½d. for the Channel and British inland services. Under a Channel Penny Postage, the whole charge on a letter from London to Boulogne, would be 2d. Then it would be necessary to *triple* the present number of letters, in order to effect this reduction without loss to the revenue. Now, is there not every reason to believe, that this amount of increase would be realised from the sources we have mentioned, and from other auxiliaries?

Let us now consider the feasibility of an Ocean Penny Postage between Great Britain and North America. The great distance to be overcome in this direction, may be opposed by many to the practicability of this proposition. But let such remember, that the British Office charges no more for conveying a letter, weighing half an ounce, from Liverpool to Boston, a distance of 3,000 miles, than from Folkestone to Boulogne, a distance of 30 miles. Every person who watches the signs of the times, must be struck with the new facilities, motives, and means of intercourse between Great Britain and North America. Six years ago, there were only four steam packets plying between the Old World and the New. Now there are sixteen, and eight more will be probably put on the same route in the course of a year. With so many competing lines, ready to underbid each other in the price of conveying the mails, there is reason to believe, that the British Government might save, in the cost of their transportation, half of the £145,000, which it now pays the Cunard line for that service. This saving would enable it at once to reduce the present rate 50 per cent. But, let us see if an Ocean Penny Postage in this direction would not *pay*, even without this saving. The postage on a letter, weighing half an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in the United States, is 1s. Of this amount, the British Post Office receives 9½d.; consequently, we have to show, that an Ocean Penny Postage would bring into the British mails *four times* the number of letters now conveyed in them across the Atlantic, in order to make it *pay*.

The number of letters conveyed between Great Britain and America, in 1846, was 1,395,824; of which 744,108 were sent to, or received from,

the United States, and 651,716 to or from the British Provinces. Let us then put the whole number thus transmitted in 1850, at 2,000,000. Now, we want 8,000,000 to produce, under an Ocean Penny Postage, the amount derived from these 2,000,000, at the shilling rate. In the first place then, nearly all will agree, that the present number of correspondents between Europe and America, would actually write two letters under the reduced rate, where they write one at the existing charge. Here we should have 4,000,000 to begin with. Then about 400,000 persons emigrate every year from Europe to America. These are new correspondents. They all leave relatives and friends behind, deeply interested in their welfare in the New World, and anxious to hear from them frequently. Let us suppose that, under an Ocean Penny Postage, they would write annually, three letters a head to these friends in Europe, and that these letters would all be answered. Then from this source alone we should have 2,400,000 the first year of the new postal system; and perhaps 4,000,000 the second, and 6,000,000 the third. An Ocean Penny Postage would doubtless bring into the mails nearly all the letters conveyed outside of them. There are at least 400,000 emigrants, passengers, officers and sailors who cross the Atlantic during the year. Let us suppose that every one of these, on an average, carries two letters in his pocket, directed to different persons in America, in order to save postage, and we have from this source 800,000. But there is a more fertile expedient than this for evading the present high rate. Thin paper, called *foreign post*, is manufactured purposely to enable persons to enclose under one envelope several communications addressed to different parties. Ten of these may be thus forwarded under a single rate. We would appeal to every person who has correspondents in America, to say, if it is too high an estimate to assume, that every envelope conveyed between Liverpool and Boston, contains two such communications. If this be admitted, then we have 2,000,000 from this source alone, which would probably be brought into the mails, as separate letters, under an Ocean Penny Postage. The last source of increase we will mention, is the saving to the Department of 120,000 *dead letters* annually, which are mostly refused on account of the present charge. These letters all cross the ocean twice, and occasion as much expense as 500,000 sent and received in the ordinary way. From these sources of increase, then, we have the 8,000,000 letters which are requisite, to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* between Great Britain and America, as much as the existing shilling rate pays at the present time. Everything conspires to increase the urgency of this great postal reform. It would, we are persuaded, do more than any other measure, to counteract the attractions and tendencies to which the recent policy of the British Government has released the colonial populations of the empire, and to attach them to the Mother country. It would abolish the alienating distinction of distance, and bring them all home again, just as if they were the inhabitants of the different counties of Great Britain.

London, 1851.

35, Broad Street Buildings.