

March. 1883.

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A

FEW WORDS ON POSTAL MATTERS.

ADDRESSED TO

**Her Majesty's Postmaster-General.**

BY

**WILLIAM A. S. WESTOBY, M.A.,**

**BARRISTER-AT-LAW.**



TO THE

RIGHT HONBLE. HENRY FAWCETT, M.P.,

*Her Majesty's Postmaster-General,*

ETC. ETC.

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SIR,—In the month of December, 1881, I took the liberty of calling your attention to a few postal matters, in which it appeared to me that alterations might be made with advantage. One of these, the issue of reply cards, has been since carried out; but others of greater importance still remain, some of which may probably require the intervention of Parliament. I have arranged them under separate heads, and in this form now venture to submit them to your consideration, in the hope that some at least of them may be favourably entertained by the authorities.

Public opinion is unanimous in recognising the ability you have shown in the management of the great institution of which you are the head, and the vigour which marks your administration. Though you have had many intricate questions to solve, you have not omitted to carry out several useful and important reforms. The Telegraph Service has been improved, and the convenience of the public been consulted by making postage stamps again available for telegrams. By arrangements with the Treasury, the distinction between unappropriated Inland Revenue stamps for

small amounts and postage stamps has been abolished. Reply cards and cheap envelopes have been issued. Indicators have been introduced into the pillar-boxes, though they might have been better arranged had your predecessors adopted a different style of pillar architecture. The postal order scheme proposed to Lord John Manners by the late Mr. Chetwynd has been carried into effect. Some valuable facilities have been given for late posting; and, above all, an arrangement has been concluded with the railway interest, which will ere long culminate in the establishment of an inland and international parcel post.

I trust that, with renovated health and strength, you will ere long be able to bring about other reforms which seem to be requisite, if the Post Office is to fulfil what the country expects of it, and to keep pace with similar institutions in other countries.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient, humble Servant,

WILLIAM A. S. WESTOBY.

11, EARL'S AVENUE, FOLKESTONE,

*March, 1883.*

## A FEW WORDS ON POSTAL MATTERS.

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*Sample Post.*—By a Treasury Warrant of 11th September, 1863, a sample post was established, permitting the public to send by post samples of *no intrinsic value*; but as this condition naturally gave rise to considerable divergency of views between the senders and the officials, the restriction was removed by a Treasury Warrant of 20th March, 1865, and packets not exceeding 24 oz. in weight were allowed to be sent by post at rates based on 2d. for every 4 oz., or double the book post rate then in force, the letter rate at that period being 1d. for every  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. When under the provisions of the Act 33 and 34 Vict., c. 79, the impressed stamp on newspapers was abolished, and a registered newspaper was made chargeable after the 30th September, 1870, with a postage of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d., the book post rate was altered to  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for every 2 oz. In March, 1871, the sample post was abolished, and by way of compensation the letter rate was changed to 1d. for 1 oz., 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 2 oz., after which it advanced by the same increment as the book post up to 12 oz., and at that point reverted to 1d. per oz.

Regarded by the light of subsequent events, and especially the establishment of the Postal Union, the alterations made in 1871 by Lord Emly appear to have been somewhat ill-advised and irrational. Under the regulations of the Postal Union a sample weighing less than 4 oz. sent from England to any of the countries in class A. is charged 1d.; whereas the same, if sent from one place to another in Great Britain, is now charged under the letter rate with 2d. Again, it is a known fact that English manufacturers of certain goods, who send out samples in large quantities, avail themselves of the greater facilities afforded by the Postal Union, and despatch their samples to England from Ostend or Antwerp at a lower rate than if they were posted in England. Messrs.

Peek, Frean, and Co. some time since stated publicly that they saved a large amount in postage by sending samples of their biscuits in this manner, the rate from Belgium to England, with the privilege of free redirection, amounting to ten-thirteenths of a penny on samples of less than 100 grammes.

*The Book Post.*—Although a book post was established in 1848, yet it was not definitively organised until 1855, when the rates were fixed at 1d. under 4 oz., 2d. under 8 oz., and so on up to 32 oz. The late Mr. Graves more than once in the House of Commons called the attention of the Government to the hardships inflicted on trade by a rate, the minimum of which was 1d.; but it was not till the newspaper rate had in 1870 been reduced to  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. that the book post rate was lowered to  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for every 2 oz. Prior to this alteration thousands of circulars, prospectuses, &c., were sent to Belgium, to be there posted for England, as under the postal treaty with that country they were, if under 50 grammes ( $1\frac{3}{4}$  oz.) in weight, liable only to a charge of five-thirteenths of a penny. Nor has the alteration entirely put a stop to this traffic, inasmuch as the fraction of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. more than covers the expenses, and the posting abroad carries with it the privilege of free redirection in England. Under the regulations of the Postal Union the foreign postage is the same as the inland; for the cost of sending printed matter by post to one's next door neighbour is the same as if sent from England to San Francisco. Other countries make a distinction. Thus in Belgium, where the single letter rate for  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. is 10 centimes, the internal book post rate is 2 centimes for every 50 grammes. In France, where the single letter rate for  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. is 20 centimes, the internal book post rate is 5 centimes for 50 grammes; but the scale commences at 5 grammes, the rate for which is 1 centime, for 10 grammes 2 centimes, for 15 grammes 3 centimes, and for 20 grammes 4 centimes. Thus a circular weighing under 15 grammes or  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. is carried over all France, even to Algeria, for 3 centimes, or one farthing; and one of 5 grammes, equal to the weight of a halfpenny stout card, or nearly three thin ones, will travel the same distance for one-thirteenth of a penny.

The service that would be rendered, not only to trade, but to the community in general, by altering the present internal book post rate to a farthing for the first ounce would be incalculable, and it is difficult to conceive on what

grounds this should not be conceded. It cannot be from the fear of additional labour to the Post Office, which has been the alarm cry of every Postmaster General since the days of Lord Lichfield whenever the lowering of any of the rates has been proposed—an anticipation never justified by experience; for the Post Office, to its pride be it said, has invariably proved itself equal to its work. Neither can it be on financial grounds. The cost of the postage on a letter or packet, as demonstrated by Sir Rowland Hill, consists of its reception, conveyance, and delivery, the second of these elements being infinitesimal as compared with the other two, while the last is by far the most costly; so that on circulars posted in Belgium, France, Switzerland, &c., to England at a cost of five-thirteenths of a penny the English Post Office cannot certainly receive more than one-sixth of a penny as its proportion for doing the most expensive part of the work.

As the establishment of a parcels post must necessarily lead to some changes in the present book post rates, it is to be hoped that in adjusting the new tariff some consideration will be given to the propriety of altering the unit, and to the re-establishment of the sample post.

*Post Cards.*—It would be difficult to find any European State—and there are but few out of Europe—where post cards are charged above their facial value. Still, if that portion of the British public with whom post cards find favour is content to pay a penny or twopence a dozen for the cards, it would be a pity to enlighten it too much lest it should take to grumbling, and involve the Post Office in a loss of some £50,000 a year. It is a curious fact that in France and Belgium, where the cards are sold at their facial value, the number used is diminishing, while in England it is increasing. In Belgium the letters per inhabitant show a rapid annual increase, and are now threefold what they are in England.

*Insurance.*—A system of insurance of letters containing money or securities for money has been in force for many years in various Continental and foreign countries. Two classes of registered letters are ordinarily recognised—one where the letter is simply registered, or *recommandée*, the loss of which gives rise to an indemnity of £2; and the other where, besides being registered, it is insured to the amount of its declared value, and is termed a *lettre chargée*, the

extra charge for insurance of home letters being commonly at the rate of about 1d. for each £40. The statistics of these letters in France have not of late appeared in the *Annuaire des Postes*; but from those last published, it appeared that a considerable profit accrued to the Post Office from this branch of the service. In Belgium during the year 1881 one *lettre recommandée* was lost, giving rise to an indemnity of £2; while upwards of 15 millions sterling were safely conveyed by means of *lettres chargées*. In this latter country the maximum of the declared value of a home letter is fixed at £4,000, on which the insurance premium is 10 francs; but whenever the value exceeds £1,000 in town and £200 in country deliveries, notice is given to the addressee, and he or his constituted attorney must apply for it at the Post Office.

It is not probable that such a system would meet with any great success in England, where it is not customary to send large sums by the post in bank-notes, and where securities to bearer are not so common as they are on the Continent; but the experiment might well be tried, especially if the system could be gradually extended to foreign countries. Most of the Continental States have arrangements for this purpose, and as a specimen of the rates those in force in Belgium may be quoted. For the *limitrophe* States of France, Germany, and Luxemburg it is 1s. per £100; for Austria, Denmark, Italy, Russia, and Switzerland it is 1s. 6d. per £100; for Sweden and Norway, Portugal, Roumania, the French and Danish Colonies, it is 2s. 6d. per £100, with a maximum of declared value of £400 in all cases. The highest rate is that to Egypt, where it is 3s. per £100, with a maximum of £200. In all cases the unit is £8, any fraction of £8 being calculated as an entire unit. To all these countries money orders to the amount of £20 may be sent; while in England the maximum is £10, and no means at present exist of transmitting larger sums through the post.

*Savings Slips.*—The institution of these slips was intended to be a material illustration of the proverb, that “a penny saved is a penny gained.” But the converse is not always true; for the penny gained, instead of being saved may possibly have been stolen. The authority given to Postmasters to purchase stamps from the public at a small discount is a wise one; for not only does it make postage stamps



a species of paper currency for small sums, but it is a considerable safeguard against the circulation of forged stamps. The permission to purchase is, however, accompanied by the following restrictive condition: "In order to prevent the temptation to steal stamps attached to letters, which might be afforded by facilities for selling them, single stamps cannot be purchased. They must in all cases be presented in strips of not less than two." This is supplemented by another provision to the following effect: "In consequence of representations made to the Post Office by various firms, that there is reason to believe that their postage stamps were purloined by persons in their employ, the Department has recommended that the initials of firms, &c., be perforated through the stamps by a machine devised for the purpose, so that the sale of such stamps being thereby rendered difficult (Postmasters having been instructed not to purchase any of them) there may be little or no temptation to steal them."

The taking a postage stamp does not require such a strong development of the organ of appropriation as the taking of its equivalent in hard cash. Many an *employé* who would regard the latter as downright stealing, would look at the former with very different eyes, though the Post Office designates it as "purloining" and "stealing," and puts a block in the way by "preventing the temptation." The Savings Bank slips not only remove the block, but offer a premium to the purloiner; for the possessor of twelve single stamps can now in effect turn them into cash without discount, by the simple process of affixing them to a slip, and opening a banking account with the Post Office, into which he can pay the amount, and that of all his further *savings*. The regulation authorizing this, which exists co-ordinately with those above set out, says, "Any person desirous of saving one shilling by means of penny contributions for deposit in the Post Office Savings Bank, may do so by purchasing with every penny so saved a penny postage stamp, and affixing it to a form to be obtained at any Post Office. When twelve such stamps have been so affixed, the form may be taken to any Post Office Savings Bank in the United Kingdom, where it will be received by the Postmaster, and one shilling be allowed for the stamps."

The purchase of the postage stamp with the saved penny has a fascinating sound, but in reality it is but an empty one. It is only, after all, a ceremonial observance dispensed with in practice; for it is perfectly well known that slips

filled up with penny postage stamps obtained anywhere and anyhow are received, and no questions asked as to whether they are the result of *thrift* or *theft*. From the first moment the system was introduced it seemed to be one specially adapted to facilitate the disposal of stolen stamps, and that it has proved to be so the records of our criminal courts amply show. Only at the recent assizes at Bristol a female domestic servant pleaded guilty to stealing twenty post letters, some of them containing cheques. She had not touched the cheques, her sole object being to take the stamps off the letters in order to pay them into her account at the Post Office Savings Bank. Lord Justice Baggallay, taking into consideration the fact that she had not appropriated the cheques, sentenced her only to six months' hard labour. Other instances will be familiar to those who have watched the proceedings in the police courts, and it may without hesitation be said that the system offers a premium on dishonesty rather than an inducement for thrift. The principle is good, but the mode of carrying it into effect is bad. If the penny is to be a *saved* one let it be applied, not in "purchasing a penny postage stamp," but in purchasing a penny *thrift* stamp, specially created for the purpose, and there will then be a chance of the system working honestly, though there may be a falling off in the number of new accounts opened with the Post Office Savings Bank.

*Telegraphs.*—There is scarcely an individual to be found who is not dissatisfied with the present tariff; but there are very few to be found who would agree on one that would be more satisfactory, and at the same time would not endanger the net revenue, which only suffices to pay a moderate rate of interest on the capital involved. The public has always been expecting a sixpenny rate, for which Mr. Potter tried hard when the bill was before the House of Commons in 1868. Mr. Ward Hunt, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that he believed in a sixpenny rate, and that no doubt the rate would be eventually reduced to sixpence; but it was thought prudent to try the effect of a shilling rate in the first instance. Mr. Scudamore was also in favour of a sixpenny rate for messages of ten words, but it is true that at that time he did not know that the price of the purchase would so much exceed his estimate. To establish a word tariff where, as in foreign telegrams, the addresses are counted would create great discontent; while to continue the system of send-

ing the addresses free, which is almost peculiar to this country, and make the reduction alone on the message, would in all probability involve a loss to the revenue. A fixed charge on each telegram to cover the addresses, with a tax on each five or six words, would possibly be the fairest way of making the experiment; for it must be borne in mind that a large proportion of the messages sent might be compressed into fewer words than twenty; but nine out of ten of those who send ordinary messages do not take the trouble of endeavouring to shorten them below twenty words—to use a vulgar expression, they prefer to take out their shilling's worth. The subject is a difficult and a thorny one, but one which sooner or later must engage the attention of the authorities.

*Stamps.*—When the question of the employment of postage stamps was first practically considered, three conditions were aimed at—security against forgery, protection against the use of the stamps a second time, and economy of production. The principal securities against forgery were sought in the paper and the design. The former was watermarked with a small design under each stamp, and another in the margins of the sheets, pointing to a double purpose—the one as between the government and the public, the other as between the government and the parties through whose hands the paper must pass. So far as the watermark on each stamp is concerned the protection afforded by it has never been doubted, though it must be admitted that it is a protection against the sale of forged stamps rather than against their use, as it is not visible when the stamp is affixed. As regards the design, it is now a matter of history that Sir F. Baring and Sir Rowland Hill, who were principally answerable for the choice of it, were chiefly influenced by the consideration that the officials, through whose hands the letters passed, would become so familiar with the features of a portrait that a forgery would strike the eye at once far more forcibly than if an elaborate design, such as lion and unicorn, was adopted. It was required, however, that the portrait on all the stamps should be identical, and for this purpose a model was chosen, from which was engraved the head of Her Majesty as it continues to this day on the envelopes, while the die of the one penny adhesive was engraved on steel by the first artist of the day from a drawing made from the same model, and the die for the twopenny adhesive was produced from that of the one penny by mechanical means. The uniformity was therefore

complete. As an additional precaution against the forger, who would naturally make use of a single die only, a system of lettering was introduced into the lower angles of the 240 representations of the die on the plate; so that no two of the stamps on the plate were absolutely identical, though the design was preserved in its integrity.

With the fourpenny stamp, issued in 1855, another portrait was introduced, and since that date the uniformity has been destroyed. The last portrait, that on the hybrid "postage and inland revenue" penny stamp, differs even from that on its immediate predecessor, as must ever be the case when a fresh die is engraved; for no engraver can by handiwork make an exact reproduction. The fact was scarcely credited by the authorities when, in one of those fitful scares from which they suffer at times, they employed a clever engraver to copy one of the penny stamps; but the failure to reproduce the features was so manifest that the fears of imitation were at once allayed.\* The principal safeguard against forgery has, however, now been removed, by the introduction of differing portraits, which present the greatest amount of danger according as the resemblance is closest without being identical. There ought to be one mother die of the principal design, and one only, from which the subsidiary dies should be constructed mechanically, in such a way that the principal feature in the design should require no subsequent retouching by the engraver.

The use of stamps a second time is a fraud more to be apprehended than their forgery, and this may be rendered possible, either by removing the obliterating marks, or by the omission to impose them efficaciously. The use of fugitive ink in the printing is the great safeguard against the removal of the effacing marks without destroying the impression, and the new penny postage and revenue stamp may be taken as a good example of the use of such ink. In the imposition of the effacing marks there has of late been a great improvement, though it would be difficult to say how many stamps that pass muster are formed from the tops and bottoms of imperfectly obliterated ones. Some, though probably not many, instances have most certainly occurred; but now that the double lettering in the angles has been abandoned in the stamps recently issued, the principal means of detecting this species of fraud have been removed.

\* *The Postage and Telegraph Stamps of Great Britain.* By F. A. Philbrick and W. A. S. Westoby. Page 294.

The last object aimed at was economy in production, so far as it was compatible with excellence of work, and the presence of the safeguards against forgery and the fraudulent use of the stamps. The cost of the production of our stamps is no secret, because it has been done almost entirely by contract; but it is not easy to compare it with that of other Continental States, as in the majority of these the manufacture is carried out by the government, or under its immediate superintendence, as it ought to be. When postage stamps were first introduced, it was absolutely necessary to contract for the supply, because they were manufactured by a mode which, though not protected by any patent, was the special work of Messrs. Bacon and Petch, and the dies were reproduced on the plates by peculiar machinery. The case is now entirely different, and, however well the work may be done out of doors, there can be little doubt but that it might be done much more satisfactorily by the government.

It is a matter of common report, that on the expiration of the contract with Messrs. Perkins, Bacon, & Co., for the supply of the stamps of the value of twopence and under, the new contract, which was to be for surface-printed stamps, was given to the lowest bidder. To tender at a low price it was necessary to alter the mode of production, and this necessitated the adoption of a coarser style of engraving, and thus it is that all the stamps of 2½d. and upwards are finely engraved, while in the inferior values everything has been sacrificed to cheapness.

The postage stamps at present in use are not creditable to a great country like England, the original inventor of them. There is no firm in the world that can and does produce more exquisite specimens of surface-printed stamps than the present contractors; but their wings are clipped by a pinching economy. The immunity from forgery, consequent upon the precautions hitherto taken and the few changes that were made during many years, seems to have rendered the authorities so venturesome, that it looks as if they had instructed the contractors not to do as much as they could, but as little as might suffice. The printers of the 2 cents stamp of Hong-kong must be ashamed of the halfpenny stamp of Great Britain, and yet it is only a question of price, as these stamps are both the work of the same firm.

A long familiarity with the stamps of all the stamp-issuing countries of the world, and a knowledge of most of the forgeries that have been produced, either to deceive the

Post Office or collectors, leads me to offer the following suggestions as *desiderata* in the new set of stamps about to be issued.

1. The preservation of the existing safeguards of water-marked paper and angle lettering, for the reasons given above.

The plate numbers are of but little or no importance. As originally introduced into the line-engraved stamps, they were engraved on the steel roller used for constructing the particular plate, and certainly tended to render forgery more difficult; but, as applied to surface-printed stamps, they seem almost on a par with the date-plugs till lately used in the one penny envelope dies, which were utterly useless, and most probably only got there because they were inserted in bill and other like stamps, where they were of use.

2. Absolute uniformity in the principal feature of the design, with circumstantial variations in the treatment of the subsidiary parts, so that one value or set of values may be readily distinguished from the others.

3. The introduction of a distinct figure of facial value, which is essential to the rapid and sure conduct of the business of the Post Office, and is especially desirable for letters going to foreign countries, where the *employés* are unable to read the minute inscriptions of the values in full.

4. As high a class of engraving as is compatible with the new system of manufacture, if this is to be continued, though England is nearly the only country in the world where excellence of work is allowed to bear any relationship with the facial value.

5. Clear printing in salient, fine colours, so chosen as to show plainly the obliterating marks. The colours should also, as far as possible, be primitive ones, which are far preferable to those neutral tints now so much in vogue, and which, being a combination of two or more colours, are continually varying in tone, and are trying to those who have to deal with stamps with great rapidity and by artificial light. Above all, the colours should be fugitive, yielding at once to any of those detergents which it is not advisable to mention.

And lastly, for the honour of the country, let the designs themselves be worthy of it.