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OCEAN PENNY POSTAGE.

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SPEECH

BY

MR. J. HENNIKER HEATON,

M.P. FOR CANTERBURY,

In the House of Commons, March 30, 1886.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

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*March 30th, 1886.*

Mr. J. HENNIKER HEATON said: Mr. Speaker, Sir,—I rise to move “That in the opinion of this House, the time has arrived for the Government of this country to open negotiations with other Governments, with a view to the establishment of a universal international penny postage system. (Cheers.) I presume that it is unnecessary for me, Sir, in addressing the House on this subject, to say one word as to the immense advantages which Sir Rowland Hill’s bold idea has conferred upon this country. The subject is worthy of eloquence to which I do not pretend. But it is obvious to every mind that by the supply of a cheap, rapid, and trustworthy method of communication not only have our people, high and low, enjoyed a means of continuous intercourse and fellowship with absent friends, not only have works of charity been facilitated, sympathies enlarged, and unity of feeling promoted, but in addition, an incalculable stimulus

has been given to trade and industry of every kind and degree. (Hear, hear.) Time is money, says the philosopher, and nobody assents more heartily to the proposition than the man of business. All this, I know, will be granted me. (Cheers.) All this resulted from the introduction of the penny post into England, Scotland, and Ireland.

#### EXTEND THE PENNY POST.

Now, Sir, in respect of the postal communication of this country with our colonies and with foreign nations, there are new and distinct advantages to be secured, provided always that the service is cheap, rapid, and trustworthy. I assert that it is, however, wanting in the first of these qualifications. (Hear, hear.) And I further assert that the distinct advantages to which I have referred as attainable are to a large extent sacrificed. These are, first, the promotion of cousinly feeling with the millions of Englishmen dwelling in our colonies—I will say brotherly feeling—and, secondly, the creation and fostering of a feeling of solidarity and common interest among all the nations of the earth.

#### REASONS FOR DOING THIS.

I may pretend to speak with some degree of knowledge respecting one of the greatest, most prosperous, and, I may be permitted to add, most

loyal of the British colonies—Australia (Cheers.) To that country a large proportion of the more intelligent and deserving emigrants annually go from “the old country,” while a much larger proportion goes to a second Continent, also peopled by men of English lineage, and speaking our mother tongue. Now it is notorious that the mass of these exiles are persons in the humblest circumstances, who work for a daily wage, and calculate every farthing of expenditure as carefully as do their equally indigent relatives left behind in England or Ireland. What is the consequence? All communication between the divided members of the family is looked upon as an expensive indulgence, and economy too often begins with a practical casting off of all the ties that bind, or ought to bind, the emigrant to the land of his fathers. (Hear.) Sir, in these days of industrial crisis and colonial extension, when envious glances mark the extent of our wealthy empire, and keen men of business commissioned as consuls rove up every creek with offers of a protectorate and of protectionist duties, it is surely no sound policy to set a tax of a deterrent character upon indulgence in that natural affection which is so considerable a factor in patriotism. Surely it were wiser to encourage the wanderer to retain a lively interest in all that relates to his native land, his village and his cottage home. (Hear, hear.)

## ADVANCE CHRISTIANITY.

On the difficult question, whether the cheapening of postal communication with foreign countries would tend to the averting of those terrible conflicts which so frequently disgrace humanity in this 19th century of Christianity, I am not qualified to speak with authority. Yet surely, Sir, we may fairly assume that two peoples, in constant communication with one another, exchanging daily tens of thousands of letters, on business, and on social and political events, must be less ready to quarrel than two which remain as Nature placed them, in savage isolation. (Hear, hear.)

## WILL IT PAY ?

I now approach a subject which I suspect is uppermost in the minds of the opponents of this motion—that of the cost of transmission. (Hear, hear.) I will here lay down what may seem to financiers in this House a somewhat startling proposition. I hold that the State has no right to make a profit out of the post-office. (Cheers.) A large part of the business of life is now absolutely dependent on the postal service. Probably half the letters sent are business letters ; and another very large share is sent by persons of small means, who have many stern inducements to take care of their pence. In other words, one half of your postal revenue is derived from a tax on the machinery of trade, and another large share from the poorest class of citizens. (Cheers.)



## A TAX ON COMMERCE.

This is practically a tax on commerce. Whether the merchant pays the money at the custom-house, or at the post office, is all the same to him. A paternal Government allows the foreigner to introduce his goods duty free, to compete with home products; but lays a tax, through the post office, on the British exporter. I can understand the State charging a tax of 6*d.* a ton say on coals actually sold, but I cannot understand a tax of 6*d.* in the shape of postage on the communication or letters leading to that business transaction. (Hear, hear.)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES.

The true principle, I maintain, is for the State to encourage, by a moderate contribution, those operations of commerce, in the initial stage, which ultimately furnish work to English workers, and thus benefit the entire community. The State should, secondly, abstain from discouraging friendly intercourse between our home-keeping citizens, and their kinsmen and friends beyond the seas; or even between Englishmen and Frenchmen, Germans or Russians. There can be no objection to the principle of this "moderate contribution," for you have practically admitted it by paying subsidies to several of the trans-oceanic mail-lines, and the other day you voted £380,000 for a West African cable subsidy. Let us abandon half-measures. (Hear, hear.) Your

subsidies pass unnoticed, for few persons perceive the ultimate beneficial operation of them. (Hear.)

#### AN APPEAL.

But confer a substantial reduction in the cost of postage as a palpable, immediate benefit on the community, and you will reap a harvest of universal gratitude ; not only among Englishmen, but wherever the English tongue is spoken. (Cheers.) But, it may be urged, in view of the operations of the Postal Union (of which I would speak with the utmost gratitude), other nations must have something to say to this scheme. Granted ; it is for that very reason that I have cast my resolution in its present shape. I have no doubt that the inhabitants of other lands will be as willing as Englishmen to enjoy a cheap postal service.

#### A CONFERENCE PROPOSED.

Let Her Majesty's Government propose a Conference, or an extraordinary meeting of the Postal Union, or adopt any other procedure which in their judgment may be best. It will doubtless be necessary to make elaborate calculations as to the amounts of the initial loss of revenue to be respectively borne by the several States. But these calculations are not more difficult than those already completed by the members of the Union.

#### SOME STATISTICS.

I shall now ask the indulgence of the House while I quote some statistics, and read a few brief

extracts from letters received from representative men. The profit now derived from the Post Office is almost £3,000,000 sterling per annum, but the Postmaster-General alleges that this profit is all made at home, and that there is a loss on foreign business. Surely this is an argument in favour of foreign penny postage. Profit made in one direction should be applied to balance losses in another. (Hear, hear.) The revenue from the General Post Office in 1875 was £7,418,324, and the net profit, £2,534,306. The revenue last year had risen to £10,053,457, and the net profit, £2,932,267, an increase of more than two and a half millions in revenue, and nearly four hundred thousand pounds profit. I shall now, with your permission, point out some of the anomalies in the present system.

In the first place, the price charged for the conveyance of letters to Australia is 6*d.* per letter of half an ounce in weight, or no less than £1,792 per ton. There are no post cards to Australia.

In the second place, the cost of the postage of a newspaper weighing 4oz. to the ends of the earth is only 1*d.* A letter of the same weight would cost 4*s.* We might send eight letters for 1*d.* But we offer the Government 8*d.* for the eight letters, for it is only suggested that one letter should be sent for one penny.

(3.) The cost of carriage by a first-class steamship is only 40*s.* per ton, or 4 $\frac{2}{3}$  lbs. for one penny to Australia. The postal authorities might pay the

steamship owners 1s. per lb. At a penny per letter 32 letters would cost the public 2s. 8*d.* The postal authorities would then have 1s. 8*d.* for the cost of delivery, &c.

(4.) The French Government carries a post-card from, say Calais, to New Caledonia—1,000 miles beyond Australia—for 1*d.*

(5.) The Post Office charges 2½*d.* for carrying a letter from, say, Folkestone to Boulogne—a distance of about 32 miles by sea; and only 1*d.* for carrying it to the Orkneys—nearly all the way by rail—a distance of 750 or 800 miles.

On this subject one of my correspondents says:—“If it be worth the while of the French Government to take so much trouble, and go to a little expense for the sake of the few pokey colonies which it has been left for them to acquire, what shall we say of the obligations of the English Government, with whole continents for colonies, and a population of 300 millions of possible correspondents through the post?” (Cheers.)

#### WILL THE REVENUE SUFFER?

But is it certain that there will be a loss to the Postal service in consequence of the reduction which I advocate? As bearing upon this question let us take the case of the great reduction of postage in 1839. In the year 1839 there were carried or delivered in the United Kingdom in all 82 million and a half letters. In the year 1840 there were

delivered in the United Kingdom 169 millions; and there were delivered last year no less than 1,360 millions, or sixteen times as many as in 1839. Assuming, as I am fairly entitled to do, that the number of letters now carried at a prohibitive price by the Post Office for transmission abroad would be only six times greater than at present, the revenue would be the same as it is now. (Cheers.) But I set no such bounds on the communicativeness of the race. I would appeal to the Right Hon. gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury, with confidence, in view of his most recent experience, whether, given a penny postal rate, even with a sea to be crossed, and long railway journeys to make, the epistolary tendencies of mankind can be "cribb'd, cabined, and confined." (Cheers.)

#### VALUABLE TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT.

Among letters received, the Consul-General of Denmark writes:—"Between European countries near to each other, as for instance England and France or Germany, the present charge of  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$  is somewhat high and might with great advantage be reduced. As regards Denmark, she would naturally follow the lead of the great European countries in such a matter, and would, I feel sure, take part in an International Conference, and cordially co-operate in any practical scheme which would further develop the great reform of Sir Rowland Hill." (Cheers.)

An American gentleman writes from New York:—"A penny post between England and America

would pay well. It is not more expensive to send a letter from London to New York than from London to Scotland." (Cheers.)

A well-known emigration agent writes:—"One advantage of your scheme will be that the friends of the emigrant, instead of writing quarterly, will write weekly; and a great body of persons who never think at present of buying a costly foreign postage stamp, will develop a surprising interest in men and things abroad." (Cheers.)

A gentleman connected with an Agent-General's office writes:—"It will be said that the colonial postage service will not pay, and that large losses are already borne. The present results are from bad management. Last year Australia sent and received from England 12,000,000 letters, 10,000,000 newspapers, and 1,500,000 packets, at a cost of £270,000. With this enormous subsidy, if the colonies and the mother-country would unite, we could have a first-class mail service to and from Australia. From one to three first-class mail steamers now leave Australia every week for England."

The manager of the Australian Joint Stock Bank, one of our largest institutions, writes:—"I am entirely in accord with you as to the desirability of a universal penny post." (Cheers.)

#### A WORD PICTURE.

A well-known Australian writes:—"I wish the Postmaster-General could, in spirit, transport himself

into some rough, log-built shanty on the fringe of a virgin forest, where a knot of shaggy, brown-faced men are gathered in a circle to hear a letter from home read aloud. If he could mark the keen interest on every face, the rapt attention, the lively interest displayed in the history, health, and doings of their comrade's family circle at home in England, perhaps even the passing shade of envy at his happiness, and remember that such happiness would be returned a thousand fold, when the wanderer's reply reached his friends at home, I am not sure that his official sternness would not for a passing moment relax, and he might think more favourably of your motion." (Loud cheers.)

#### FURTHER EVIDENCE.

A leading merchant of the city of London writes to me as follows :—" There is no doubt the sympathy of the whole commercial world will be with you in your patriotic endeavour of obtaining a uniform and cheaper international postage, which would greatly facilitate commercial intercourse and considerably reduce office expenses, which, especially in these hard times, form a heavy item."

It should here be pointed out that a letter can be conveyed to Australia to-day as cheaply as it could have been conveyed to many parts of Great Britain and Ireland during Sir Rowland Hill's agitation.

Mr. S. W. Silver, the emigrant's friend, writes :—

“I believe that nothing is more likely to foster that regard which exists between the various members that compose the British Empire than a uniform penny postage. With such rapid communication as now exists, all that is required is to neutralise the expense to the greatest possible degree to render the union more facile.”

The Portugese Consul-General also writes in favour of the proposal.

The head of a large Commercial firm in the City writes:—“The State should look upon the Post-Office as a merchant does on an advertisement. The day has passed when the State could tax advertisements. I calculate that the increase of letter writers strictly corresponds to the increased number of children now being educated. Quite an army of letter writers is now being drilled and taught all over the country. The increase in our correspondence with foreign countries, and with our colonies, must therefore show a great increase during the next few years, fully compensating us for the largest possible expenditure foreseen by the Postmaster-General.”

The Consul-General of Austria-Hungary writes:—“I beg to assure you that I sincerely sympathise with the object you have in view, and I do not hesitate to think that the two difficulties you mention might be easily surmounted by an international Conference.”

The well known firm of W. and A. Gilbey, whose



commercial transactions extend to every country in the world, writes:—"We unhesitatingly and emphatically state that not only would such a result be beneficial to our trade, but it must undoubtedly tend to the advantage of British commerce generally. At the same time it would greatly cement that international good-will, so desirable at all times to cultivate, from every point of view. It would also, without doubt, cause an increased revenue to the Postal Department in a very short period of time."

#### A SIGNIFICANT FACT.

The fact should be borne in mind that at the present time Australia only sends on average four letters per head of the population per year to England, while among themselves the people of England exchange forty letters per head. The Australian Governments say the British Government will not consent to reduce the cost of letters on the ground that the British Government would be opposed to the proposal, but the Australian people are really anxious for the reduction. (Hear, hear.) I, therefore, simply ask for negotiations to be opened up.

#### A SPIRITED REJOINDER.

Now I approach a portion of my subject on which imaginative powers of the highest order would not be wasted. To such powers, as I have before stated, I make no pretension. But I am somewhat consoled for the consciousness of my intellectual

poverty in this respect from having observed that, as a rule, flights of imagination are not followed in this House with any great exhibition of interest or appreciation. (Hear, hear.) I may be told by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or by some less exalted authority in connection with our finances, that there are already very heavy drains upon the public purse, and that a policy of rigid retrenchment will be required to set it right. Sir, in view of the intention attributed to the Government to propose a loan of one or two hundred millions sterling, in order to round off and complete the grand Irish policy of the First Lord of the Treasury, I shall, in case the Chancellor of the Exchequer uses the economical argument, observe with some curiosity the facial control of the Right Honourable gentleman. (Laughter, and hear, hear.) Far be it from me to sneer at the sufferings of the loyal and unhappy class, the Irish landlords, for whose relief this vast expenditure is intended. I trust that they will duly receive this bounty, this 'conscience money,' of the First Lord of the Treasury, and that the loan will be punctually repaid. (Hear.)

#### A WORD FOR THE EXILES.

But, Sir, these are not the only deserving class of her Majesty's subjects. Surely those who are carrying on the vast business of this country, who labour to maintain and to increase the wealth on which we are all, high and low, dependent, the

merchants, artisans, and labourers engaged in commercial undertakings deserve some consideration. Surely we can spare a moment's thought, and even, if need be, a little money, to soften the rigour of exile to those millions of our countrymen beyond the sea, who have not this happiness which we enjoy, of dwelling in the land of their fathers, the land that still contains those dearest to them by the ties of nature and affection. (Cheers.) Sir, I am afraid that the House has perhaps been too long detained by what I have said from the consideration of a certain sentimental grievance affecting a limited but resolute class of her Majesty's subjects.\* My excuse must be, that coming into this assembly from the great southern Island-Continent, which is the largest and among the most lustrous of the jewels in the Imperial Crown, I naturally utter grievances of which Englishmen in that distant latitude are painfully conscious, but of which only a faint, occasional echo may have previously reached your ears. (Cheers.)

Doubtless, objections will be raised to the proposal on the score of its boldness, its innovating nature, its ingratitude, and so on. I make this appeal, however, not merely to the cold, calculating economists on the Treasury Bench (laughter), but to the representatives of the hundreds of millions who own our gracious Sovereign's sway. I ask them to make intercourse between their sundered coasts

\* A Scotch question was next on the paper.

as easy as speech, as free as air. (Applause.) I entreat them to tolerate no longer this unworthy profit on the expression of their fraternal sympathies, and on the natural development of their trade. (Cheers.) And I foretell that this reform, when it is ours—as it soon must be—will confer a wide spread benefit on commerce, it will bring new happiness into myriads of English homes here, in this country, and scattered by the brimming margent or the long wash of the Australasian seas, over pathless prairies in America (cheers), over trackless plains in Australia (cheers), and along glancing equatorial streams; and it will form the last and not the least tenacious of the ties that bind our colonies to their beloved mother country. (Loud Cheers.) Sir, I beg to move the resolution standing in my name. (Cheers.)

A division was taken on the original motion, which was defeated. 142 members voted for the motion.