

BOOKS OF REFERENCE
AND EPITAPHS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "SIR ROWLAND HILL: THE
STORY OF A GREAT REFORM"

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From the author

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STORY OF A GREAT REFORM"

TRUTH IS THE HIGHEST THING THAT MAN MAY KEEP.
CHAUCER.

TRUTH IS TRUTH TO THE END OF THE RECKONING.
SHAKESPEARE.

[*By*
Eleanor C. Smyth.]

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THE compilers of books of reference are apparently not aware that of the articles admitted to their pages some are by no means free from error. Were it otherwise, detection of that fault would hardly be left to readers who are neither compilers nor contributors, and who are naturally aggrieved when confronted with the misstatements made on some subject with which they are well acquainted.

Ordinary authors are supposed to verify the quotations they use, though they obviously at times neglect to do so. But to mutilate a quotation is not so heinous an offence as to permit the intrusion of actual falsehood—especially of falsehood that has been repeatedly unmasked—to books of reference, works to which the seeker after information turns as to an infallible guide. When that seeker discovers that, instead of fact, fiction is provided, his faith in infallibility is rudely shattered. It cannot be wise policy to subject him to disillusion.

One case of reprehensible carelessness is seen in Dr. Brewer's "Historical Note-Book" (edition 1891), wherein appeared two items which were fit only for the waste-paper basket, and should have been there consigned. One informed the reader that "Post Office Orders for the transmission of money were introduced in 1840,"

etc. The "learned" compiler was evidently ignorant of postal history, and apparently made no attempt to become acquainted with it. Otherwise he would have known that the Money Order system—which is what he was probably thinking of—was in existence many years before the date he assigned to it. It was established as a private undertaking, its title being "Stow and Co.," by three Post Office clerks in 1792, proved a financial success, and in 1834 was taken over by the Post Office itself, and given its present name. *Postal* orders were introduced by Professor Fawcett, then Postmaster-General, in the early 'eighties of last century.

But Dr. Brewer strayed still further into the land of fable when, in the second item, and in all seriousness, he quoted the mendacious tablet erected at Dundee over the grave of James Chalmers, printer and bookseller, by his son. In this carven falsehood, my father Sir Rowland Hill's scheme of Penny Postage is described as being "saved from collapse" by the stamps claimed as the elder Chalmers' invention.

Before admitting to his work of reference these sorry specimens of cock-and-bull lore, why did not Dr. Brewer consult some authority on postal history? That he failed to do so laid him open to a charge of reprehensible carelessness or amazing credulity or both.

To write harshly of a deceased author is distasteful, but when, as in this case, the evil a man does lives after him—less perhaps Dr. Brewer's evil-doing than that of his probable instructor, the younger Chalmers—it becomes a duty to speak plainly in defence of that other dead man whose beneficent reform these detractors were not ashamed to try to belittle.

Biographical
Errors, etc.

In the "Dictionary of National Biography" the same misstatement as to the origin of postage stamps is seen. But here there is some faint shadow of excuse in that the letter C (for Chalmers) precedes in the alphabet the letter H (for Hill). Thus so long a start was secured for publication of the falsehood that to overtake it was impossible. Still, before inserting the earlier biography some effort should have been made to discriminate between truth and error: a task quite easy of accomplishment, and better far than altering the later biography in order to bring both into seeming agreement.

Of "Haydn's Dictionary of Dates" the latest edition known to me is the twenty-third. In that also credence was given to the Chalmers myth, making yet another instance of neglect to sift truth from falsehood, causing one person at least to refrain from buying a once-alluring volume, and suggesting the surmise that the compilers of books of reference must copy from one

another's works instead of striking out an independent course.

With the "Encyclopædia" of W. and R. Chambers, Ltd, the practice seems to be different. The claim is made for all books of reference that each succeeding edition is carefully revised before publication. It is a custom which would be more honoured in the observance than the breach. The deservedly famous old Edinburgh house apparently does follow this rule. In a former edition of their "Encyclopædia" the cessation of garrotting was attributed to the infliction upon the criminals of corporal punishment. Later examination of the subject showed that this was not true, and that view was confirmed by high legal authority. In the next edition the allegation was withdrawn, a proof that Messrs. Chambers do not consider their dignity imperilled by the admission that a mistake has been made. An example well worthy of imitation by the compilers of similar works.

It is therefore possible that in a still later edition of the Chambers' "Encyclopædia" we shall see another mistake expunged: that in the article on "Stamps," which says that both Chalmers and my father seem, independently of one another, to have hit on the idea of using them for postal purposes. That this was not the case will be shown in these pages.

In the literature which, like the rose of

quite another epitaph than that quoted by Dr. Brewer, lives but for a day, misstatements are frequent, historical events being especially subjected to distortion, ludicrously so sometimes, as when a highly imaginative scribe wrote that Joan of Arc achieved fame at the siege of New Orleans. The fact evidently counted for nothing that Columbus's discovery of America did not take place till more than sixty years after her death, that the Louisianian city was built later still, and that the "glorious maid" never crossed the Atlantic. But in serious literary works we have a right to look for something better.

Ency. Brit.
Errors Re-
peated

As regards the new issue of the "Enclopædia Britannica," while glad that the editor has omitted or modified some of the matter which made the article on the British Post Office in the ninth edition offensive as well as inaccurate, one regrets to see that in its present article on the subject in Vol. xxii. the discredited myth which attributes to James Chalmers invention of the adhesive postage stamp, and in the impossible year 1834, is still treated as an actual fact.

Also, apropos of my brother Pearson Hill's pamphlets on this question, protest must be made against the allegation that their author is considered not to have "*weakened* the evidence of the priority

of the *invention* by Chalmers," a quotation whose parentage is easily recognized. It was not a case of mere "*weakening*," but of entire demolition. And I may add that, however often revived, this over thirty-years-old claim has never yet been proven. It is sometimes asserted that proof *has* been established; but assertion and proof are hardly synonymous terms.

The presence of the many mistakes in this portion of the ninth edition is readily explained. The invitation my brother gave the compilers of that issue to introduce them to the Post Office authorities was not accepted. The source of information to which preference was accorded is plainly indicated both by the rubbish printed and by the appended footnotes. In nearly every instance they are the titles of the younger Chalmers' defamatory pamphlets. As their author habitually drew on his imagination for his "facts," any article based upon his writings could not fail to be misleading.

While the article on the Post Office was being written for the new "Encyclopædia Britannica" it would have been well to correct other mistakes of the earlier one. The Paris "post-paid envelope" of 1653, for example, was not "in common use," but was an aristocratic monopoly. Nor were the Sardinian

“stamped postal letter-paper” and envelopes “issued to the public” between the years 1818 and 1836. They were made for the sole use of Ministers of State, lasted from 1819 to 1821 only, and after long disuse were destroyed in order to demonetise them. Trivial mistakes these perhaps, but even with trivial mistakes works of reference should have nothing to do.

Vested Interests, etc.

The allusion in the new “Encyclopædia Britannica” to “high-handedness” as characteristic of Rowland Hill, and as accountable for “part of the strenuousness of the opposition”—presumably official—to his plan is in questionable taste. No great reform was ever yet won by doses of metaphorical rose-water, a weapon which would have been wholly ineffectual what time my father was battling for Penny Postage against the twin powers of ignorance and vested interests, that formidable combination which Mr. *Punch* in his fine poem on the reformer’s death not inaptly called “pig-headed Obstruction’s force.”* Sound logic and ready argument were the arms by which “the far-seeing won his way at last,”* arms that, when fighting for great principles, every true reformer alone finds efficacious.

“The change” from the old to the

**Punch*, September 20, 1879.

new postal system, declares the writer in the "Encyclopædia's" latest edition, "worked much harm to some humble but hardworking and meritorious functionaries," an allegation as amazing as it is ambiguous. The new system, by which "all the world was kindlier, closer knit," gave employment to many thousands of people, not only in the postal service itself, which grew with mighty strides, but to those in outside trades and in new ones born of the reform, such as the makers of hall-door and street letter-boxes, letter-weighing machines, the postage stamps, etc. It would be difficult to mention any calling which the new system did not benefit. And in how many cases did it not weld afresh the slackened, at times broken, ties between parted relatives and friends long severed by heavy postal charges and limited modes of communication? So far from injuring "meritorious functionaries," my father, throughout his official career, diligently studied the welfare both of the public and of the postal staff. To even the poorest of the latter class increased pay, an annual holiday, free medical attendance, and more sanitary buildings in which to work were among the advantages secured under his rule. Would not some allusion to these facts have been in better taste than the rather cryptic remark above-quoted?

The "Encyclopædia Britannica" is of course a practically inexhaustible storehouse of useful knowledge, and all must hope that editor and colleagues alike may live to produce an even more wonderful twelfth edition. But when it appears it would be gratifying to know that within those future pages the impossible Chalmers myth and quotations from the egregious Chalmers pamphlets would not be permitted to find place.

Encyclo-
pædic Errors

Mr. A. Carlyle's recent letter to the "Times" exposing the many errors in the article on his uncle, the great Carlyle, shows that the relatives of the postal reformer are not alone in resenting the carelessness—to use no harsher term—of which some of the writers in this work have been guilty.

To write of this old dispute, interesting chiefly to a past generation of philatelists, seems almost as reprehensible an act as to start a new discussion on the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask or on that of the author of the Letters of Junius. Nevertheless, if writers who know as little of the history of the Post Office as the present scribe knows of the "canals" of the planet Mars will persist in treating these repeatedly demolished fables as facts, the destructive process must be renewed till articles that sin against the light in books of reference and elsewhere

Post Circular
and Cole
Bequest

are consigned to the rubbish heap. The fault of this recurring strife lies not with those whose sole aim is to defend the truth, but with the aggressors.

Had James Chalmers really been the first to suggest the use of stamps as payers of postage, and before or after the publication of the Penny Postage scheme, why did he not claim the invention either in his correspondence with Rowland Hill—to be referred to later—or in the article describing his own work as a minor postal reformer which he contributed to the “*Post Circular*” of April 5, 1838? This paper was established by the famous London Mercantile Committee in furtherance of their self-imposed, untiring efforts to secure the adoption of my father’s plan. Its able editor was Mr. (afterwards Sir) Henry Cole; and an entire series formed part of the “*Cole bequest*” to the South Kensington Museum. There, if it has been held in safe custody, that number of the “*Postal Circular*” should still be found among its fellows.

Why also, supposing that the elder Chalmers accomplished all his son claimed for him, did he keep silence about his stamps during the years which followed the establishment of the reformed system? Penny Postage came into operation on January 10, 1840. James Chalmers died in 1853, nineteen years after the date se-

lected as that of his (supposed) invention of "experimental" postage stamps. Though with what experiments things so entirely useless could be connected it would be difficult to say.

The article contributed to the "Post Circular" is dated February 8, 1838, and in this James Chalmers distinctly stated that he *first* tried his hand at the making of stamps in November, 1837. In determining this date, then but three months old, he was undoubtedly a more reliable authority than could be any one who should write not of his own, but of another person's work more than forty years later.

The Penny Postage Bill became an Act in July, 1839, and in the succeeding August the Treasury issued a minute inviting the public to furnish designs for the proposed "stamped covers, stamped paper, and stamps to be used separately."

Of the many competitors James Chalmers was one. His stamps failed to meet with approval partly because, as they were printed on one end of a slip of paper whose other end was to be inserted beneath the envelope-flap, the unsecured end, during the missive's passage through the post, might easily disappear, and thus all proof of payment be destroyed. Another objection was that the stamps themselves, being type-set, could readily be forged. And I may add that, so far from being the inven-

tor of the adhesive stamp, he actually deprecated its use on account of the then supposed difficulty of gumming large sheets of paper.

Accompanying his letter and stamp-specimens was a "Certificate" signed by many more than a hundred of his fellow citizens, speaking highly of his labours in the cause of postal reform—which began some seventeen years earlier with the bringing about of a notable acceleration of the mail-coach service between London and Dundee—and urging the adoption by the Treasury of the stamps their friend was sending on approval. But of those declared by the younger Chalmers to have been produced in 1834, and exhibited to the appreciative Dundee public no mention occurs. Had they ever existed, is it likely that an invention so original and ingenious, albeit so useless, could have been completely forgotten by every one of the many signatories of the deservedly complimentary certificate?

But before proceeding further to demonstrate the falsity of the Chalmers claim it will be necessary to give some description of the old postal system, if only to show how impossible of use while it lasted stamps, as a means of paying postage, would have been.

As the charges on letters in pre-Penny Postage days were paid not by the writer

but by the recipient of each missive, a stamp, which is a mere token of prepayment, could not be used. Perhaps at some future date a still newer seeker after "mare's nests" will discover that, years before railway trains ran, railway tickets, which likewise are tokens of prepayment, were made "experimentally" by yet another person gifted with preternaturally prophetic vision. The latter myth would not be more absurd than the earlier one.

No Prepay-
ment

Letters were paid for on delivery instead of on posting because there was no uniformity of rate, and the variety of charges was great and complex. It may indeed be doubted whether any but practised officials could with certainty calculate their amount. The charges depended, primarily, on the distance travelled by each letter, though not necessarily on the distance severing the correspondents, because, for convenience sake, a missive would sometimes be made to take a long round; on weight in some cases; and on the number of separate pieces of paper of which a letter consisted. Extra postage was also charged for the "privilege" of passing through particular towns, whether to insure a letter's safety during its journey, its speedier delivery, or to give it prestige, who can say? Upon this peculiarity, Sir Walter Scott, who knew only the old postal system, made some humor-

Complications

Dear Letters

ous comments in the fortieth chapter of "Guy Mannering."

"Single" letters were written on one large, square sheet of paper which was deftly folded, a fair-sized, blank space being left outside for the address. If a letter seemed to be unduly thick it underwent the "candling" process, that is, was held up against a strong artificial light, when, if found to contain an enclosure, it became what was called a "double" letter, and double postage was charged on it. If during the scrutiny the enclosure was seen to be of value, as, for instance, a bank-note, the missive did not always reach its destination. In consequence of many incidents of this sort, the custom, not yet obsolete, arose of cutting a bank-note in two, and, when posting the one half, of keeping back the second till acknowledgment of the first was received.

A letter was once sent from London to Wolverhampton which held two enclosures. Single postage between the two towns was tenpence. The letter, being in three parts, cost its recipient half-a-crown.

Had an adhesive stamp therefore been affixed to a single-sheet letter, a charge of double postage would have been made; and had a single-sheet letter been placed in an envelope on which was fastened an adhesive stamp—thus causing the missive to be of three parts—it would, like the one

which went to Wolverhampton, have been rated as a triple packet.

Use of
Stamps
Impossible

Even had postage stamps and the old postal system been contemporaneous, which of course was not the case the former could not be legal tender when prepayment was not the rule, and when the postal charges were of necessity paid in coin.

The charge on a triple letter passing between towns so widely asunder as London and Edinburgh was about four shillings. With single postage at but a third of that amount, correspondence could hardly have been brisk when the nation was far less wealthy and its volume of trade far smaller than are both at the present day; and on one journey between those two important centres of population the mail-coach carried one letter only; an incident which, according to another authority, occurred a second time.

It should also be remembered that all this while privileged persons such as peers of the realm, etc., paid no postal charges, and, in addition to their private correspondence, could send and receive free of expense such weighty things as human beings—on one occasion two housemaids—domestic animals, pianos, bales of goods, a large feather-bed, etc.

Under a combination of circumstances so perplexing and vexatious, what sane

man would have squandered time and brain-power in making postage-stamps for letters?

With newspapers the case was different, and in 1834, during the long agitation for the abolition of the obnoxious "taxes on knowledge," Charles Knight, publisher and author, who, like the brothers Chambers of Edinburgh, was a pioneer in issuing good, cheap literature, proposed that a separate stamped wrapper should be substituted for the duty-stamp (generally rated at threepence), impressment of which on the large, blank sheets of paper was obligatory before any item of news could be printed upon them. It was an irksome impost whose departure to join the ranks of many another "tax unwise" now happily got rid of was inordinately delayed. Therefore, while it lingered the cheap newspaper of to-day could have no existence; and since journalism was further hampered by paper, advertisement, and other duties, it is little wonder that the ordinary "daily" should have been priced at fivepence.

The postage on newspapers was of necessity prepaid because the duty-stamp possessed one redeeming virtue; it franked each copy through the post. But the prepayment was not a generous gift from publishers to people; inasmuch

as the price above-mentioned is proof that the former recouped themselves out of the pocket of each purchaser. As, human nature being what it is, was but natural.

Letter
Postage paid
in Coin

On the other hand, as we have seen, prepayment of letter-postage was practically impossible by reason of the variety of charges. These were reckoned by the officials, the sum being entered on the addressed face of each letter; the postman collected the amount due in coin of the realm from the person unto whom each was destined or delivered, having often to wait some minutes before being paid, and when his slow round was completed he made over its proceeds to the local postmaster. Before reaching head-quarters the money passed through several hands, the accounts were sometimes carelessly kept, and speculation was rife.

For the reason already mentioned, envelopes were not in use, although a belief exists that this is not the case, possibly because the name in a rather different sense is recognized in connexion with postal documents as far back, it is said, as the days of Dean Swift. In those postally dark ages, a number of letters, probably franked, occasionally perhaps smuggled, and in most cases, if not in all, bound for some one centre or neighbourhood, were at times enclosed under a single cover "of sorts."

Had prepayment of letter-postage been practicable under the old system, would not a man so far-seeing and public-spirited as was Mr. Knight have suggested the extension of his proposed newspaper-wrapper stamp to other postal documents?

My father's reform had been many years established before Mr Knight's proposal was adopted, the delay being caused by the retention of the newspaper-stamp duty till the nineteenth century's 'fifties. But it was the recollection of his friend's invention which gave Rowland Hill the idea of applying stamps as a means of prepayment of postage to mail-matter of all kinds. Hence the suggestion as a feature of his plan, duly recorded at pp. 42 and 45 of his pamphlet "Post Office Reform," of the use of both impressed and adhesive stamps, the latter being entirely his own device, and described as a "bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash which, by the application of a little moisture, might be attached to the back of the letter."

When making this proposal my father did not fail to attribute to Mr Knight the merit of being the first to recommend the former kind. Had he owed any part of his great scheme to other persons he would have acknowledged the obligation.

Not only in his pamphlet, but in a paper entitled "On the Collection of Postage by Means of Stamps" prepared by my father for the Government in June, 1839, three weeks before the opening of the debate on the Penny Postage Bill in the House of Commons, did he advise the use of stamps. In this paper he also suggested that the adhesives should be printed on sheets of twenty rows of twelve stamps apiece, one sovereign's worth; and from the first they have been thus issued. But since that early date the sheet in one respect has been greatly improved, thanks to Mr. Archer the patentee, by the introduction of the perforation which permits easy detachment of each stamp from its fellows, thereby saving valuable time, to say nothing of temper, to the many thousands of people who have a large correspondence, and necessarily write in a hurry.

Use of
Stamps ad-
vised, etc.

It cost Rowland Hill much arduous thought to bring to concrete shape his views upon postal reform. But the task was congenial, and the subject was thoroughly mastered and logically argued. Had the scheme been of construction too faulty to be of practical use, is it likely that the British public would have worked for it during two-and-a-half years as untiringly and enthusiastically as they

did; or the newspaper press, metropolitan and provincial, have supported it throughout the same period; or that Parliament, then far less affected by the "congestion" which now afflicts it, would have seriously discussed, and, backed by an overwhelming majority, have placed it on the Statute-book?

In February, 1837, Rowland Hill was examined by the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, and his evidence, together with that of other witnesses, is recorded in the Commissioners' ninth Report. On this occasion he explained in detail his plan of reform as set forth in his pamphlet, and described the stamps therein proposed. His verbal description of the adhesive—invention of which has been claimed by or on behalf of not a few others besides Chalmers—resembles that above-quoted from "Post Office Reform," and appeared on p. 38 of the Commissioners' Report.

This able Commission was appointed on the initiative of Robert Wallace of Kelly, the famous first member for Greenock, who, later, was also instrumental in nominating that Select Committee on Postage which examined and reported upon Rowland Hill's scheme. Unto Mr Wallace, whose active interest in postal reform never slackened, we likewise owe that "happy thought" which safeguards valuable packages during their

transit by post: the registration of letters. The Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry sat frequently during the years 1835 to 1838, published ten reports, and by their advocacy of my father's plan—which they began by regarding with more than “a little aversion”—gave material aid to its adoption. Neither they nor the Select Committee seem to have considered the plan “chaotic.” In the Commissioners' fifth Report a scheme of postal reform was indeed propounded, but it was widely dissimilar from that of Rowland Hill which superseded it.

The Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry were appointed to examine the question of postal reform generally; the Select Committee on Postage was, on the contrary, occupied only with the plan advocated in my father's pamphlet. The Committee was granted by Parliament in November, 1837, less than ten months after the issue of “Post Office Reform,” and in the interval, so far had its author's views advanced in public favour that Parliament made the appointment without even going through the formality of a debate. The Committee sat for sixty-three days, and examined over eighty witnesses, one of whom was Rowland Hill himself. Can anyone believe that these able, hard-working Commissioners and Committee-men would

P.O. In-
quiry, etc.
R. H.'s
Evidence

A Mythical Episode, etc. have taken all this trouble over an impracticable plan?

According to the younger Chalmers, his father came forward, stamps in hand, to reassure a distracted people lost in bewilderment how to make workable a plan of postal reform so unskillfully put together as to be doomed to "collapse," yet which had just been carried into law by a Government that, by giving countenance to so impossible a measure, must have temporarily lost its wits. That the public was as distraught as the Government would seem to be the case, for of all the crowd no one was apparently sane enough to draw the belated Scotsman's attention to the pages of that pamphlet wherein the different stamps are mentioned; to the ninth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry; to the Select Committee's Reports; to the many articles, etc., on the reform contained in the contemporary newspaper-press; or to the Treasury's widely circulated invitation to the public to become stamp-designers.

Had this dramatic episode actually taken place, the relief to the country would have been so great that the glad tidings must have spread far and wide; it must have become common talk and every newspaper would have chronicled it. But no amount of search among con-

temporaneous files will reveal a trace of the story, and for the best of reasons: because it is one for which there is absolutely no foundation.

Well-known
Philatelists,
etc.

A significant fact is the following. For eleven months, and while the Chalmers claim was still young, the case lay before the London Philatelic Society for consideration. The examination was carefully and impartially conducted; and at the claimant's request the Society consented to the long delay in order to give him an opportunity in the interval to furnish them with further "proofs." But they waited in vain. Then in October, 1882, and in the absence from their deliberations of both disputants, the Society, on every point, unanimously declared against the claim; and notices of the transaction appeared in more than one number of the "Philatelic Record" of the period.

From the best philatelic authorities the Chalmers claim has not received endorsement. In the long series of carefully compiled catalogues of stamps published by Mr Stanley Gibbons the myth and the stamps find no recognition. Into the hands of another well-known stamp-dealing firm, Messrs Ventom, Bull & Co., some of the Chalmers stamps did come, and were sold as rareties in November, 1907. On a slip of paper which this firm was so kind as to send me, they are described as "Dundee

essays," the title "essays" denoting that they were not adopted for public use; are uncanceled, and are said to have been "five specimens comprising one penny red and twopence red" (? blue), and as "printed on a large piece of gummed paper and dated [in its margin] 'Dundee, 10th February, 1838.'" They were probably duplicates of those sent by James Chalmers to the editor of the "Post Circular" of that month and year, and the date was doubtless affixed to them in their author's printing-office.

As regards the Chalmers stamps, the truth is simply this: that Rowland Hill's pamphlet, published in February, 1837—the same month and year in which its author gave evidence before the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry—reached James Chalmers at a somewhat later date. He forthwith became an active supporter of the plan, and opened up that correspondence with my father to which allusion has already been made. It was perhaps conviction that the reform which was so ardently longed for because so necessary must become law that led the Dundee printer, in the late autumn of the same year to begin his postage-stamp experiments betimes, congenial work no doubt to a man whose trade included the production of different sorts of labels. One cannot help regretting that the essays of so

earnest a postal reformer should have proved incapable of winning the Treasury's award. A Dead Witness, etc.

Now Rowland Hill habitually preserved correspondence likely to be of use, and James Chalmers' letters to him are still extant. In one he refers to these experiments, and again, as in his communication to the "Post Circular," is their date given, this time not in mere print but in his own handwriting. Thus comes in the dead man's testimony to support the truth, and to disprove the claim wrongfully set up on his behalf. He is in fact not his son's but the other side's most valuable witness.

Enough has now been said to show the falsity of the claim, but a few further remarks upon the claimant should be made. And once more must regret be expressed that it should be necessary to write harshly of the dead. But while the Chalmers myth, together with its accompanying misrepresentation of Rowland Hill and his great work, is paraded before the world as a truth, the noble old Latin saying must be disregarded.

Patrick Chalmers' conduct in keeping silence on the subject of the postage stamps for forty years after the successful establishment of the reformed system, setting up his fraudulent claim only when both his own father and mine had passed away—the two who could, and as men of

integrity certainly would, have denounced his action—can be explained in but one, and that the obvious, way.

While still the claim was in its infancy, its author approached my brother, and offered to withdraw it on receipt of a monetary consideration. My brother's refusal to comply with the request was apparently responsible for the unjustifiable manner in which the claimant thenceforth wrote of the dead reformer and of his great work.

More than once my brother challenged the claimant to submit the matter to legal scrutiny. Had this been done, and had the Law, after examination, of the case, given judgment in Chalmers' favour, the question must then have been settled for all time with scant hope of reversal of verdict. Had he believed in the claim himself, as some people think he came to do, would he not have seized on so golden an opportunity to substantiate his father's (supposed) just title to be accounted a great public benefactor, in that he saved from "collapse" a super-excellent scheme which somehow could not be made to work? Clearly, the libeller lacked the courage to face the ordeal. A clever lawyer would have speedily seen through the flimsy imposture, and rent it into shreds. The safer course was to go on writing defamatory pamphlets, and, at the judicious

distance of a few hundred miles, setting up an untruthful epitaph. Careless Editing, etc.

Yet this man's word—no more reliable than that of the second Charles, immortalized in yet another epitaph—is apparently accepted in sundry quarters as an authority on the history of postage stamps.

The people who regard this claim as genuine have probably never read the pamphlets its author wrote to "prove" it. These exist, or did exist, at the Guildhall Library, and form a strange collection which the faithful would do well to study. The perusal could scarcely fail to cause wonderment among the saner readers that such rubbish should have upset the mental balance of those presumably intellectual and should be wary persons who undertake the work of compiling books of reference. In the case of those responsible for the new "Encyclopædia Britannica's" article on the postal reform and reformer, can it be that the writer, having perhaps no reliable information at hand, was obliged to rely, and did so in perfect good faith, on the still more faulty article which appeared in the ninth edition of that work? Or was it a reflex from the remote past of that old hostility on the part of the upholders of vested interests and other inimical persons that was manifested at times during my father's battle for Penny Postage and throughout the greater part

Impostures,
Epitaphs,
etc.

of his official career, and unto which a former Postmaster-General, Lord Canning, once referred with righteous indignation?*

Than this Chalmers myth not even that of the once notorious, self-styled Tichborne, over which partizans wrangled long and vehemently, was more egregious. Of these two and of the Druce and "Spanish prisoner" impostures, to say nothing of others quite as extraordinary, why should the first-named only be singled out as deserving honorable position in those literary works to which we turn when seeking enlightenment?

Over Orton's grave an inscription is said to have been placed announcing that Sir Roger Tichborne lay beneath. As we have seen, the equally mendacious legend on the stone erected above James Chalmers' tomb by another claimant ascribed to the worthy Dundee printer and bookseller an achievement which was not his, and which he would have denied. Epitaphs are proverbially the reverse of truthful, and the two just cited rival in effrontery the old, but long discarded inscription that formerly disgraced the still standing shaft commemorating London's Great Fire of 1666 which, as Pope scathingly declared, "like a tall bully, lifts its head, and lies."

* *Sir Rowland Hill: The Story of a Great Reform*, p. 181.

When will the people who are responsible for the conduct of certain books of reference follow the bright example set in the case of the vanished legend on London's famous Monument, and from their works expunge the palpable falsehoods which misrepresent the character and career of one of the world's greatest benefactors and highest-minded citizens? Ay, literally a world's benefactor, for Rowland Hill's postal reform has spread far beyond the limits of the British Isles and even of their vast dependencies.

A Bright
Example

ELEANOR C. SMYTH.

Letchworth, 1911.

Lechworth: At the Arden Press.