

common letter-paper, and postage included.*

the public in saving the cost of the letter-paper were 1½, and 2 sheets to the pound for the seal, and marked of course be left with the

but for the purpose of examining the post-office and by means of money the cost is so mixed up with it is not possible to determine it with any accuracy. The subjoined estimate (Appendix A) under the conditions of a uniformity of rate, is certainly not too high.

collecting the postage.	Vendor's profit reckoned as a percentage on the cost to him.	Price (retail) to the public.
d. 025	01	d. 1
012	The profit on the paper. 1	1 + the price of the sheet of paper (say 1 d.).
mil.	15 less carriage. 1	1½
mil.	unknown. 1	1½
012		
016		

cost of collecting postage. The other estimate of the two, is of a 1d. per letter; while in delivery would be at

the old to the new system shall have been completed—say at the end of three or six months), an option must be allowed the sender of the letter to frank it by means of a stamp, or to leave the postage to be collected on delivery, making such postage 2d. per half-ounce, instead of a 1d.—that is double the price of stamps—in order to indemnify the post-office for the expensive machinery it would be necessary to retain.

ROWLAND HILL.

Bayswater, June 13th, 1839.

APPENDIX (A).

ESTIMATES OF THE COST OF STAMPED LABELS.

Mr. Dickinson has offered to contract to supply twelve half-sheets of letter paper for covers, printed with a large stamp for one penny, paying half the paper-duty (Ev. 2408-44). But in order to put the trade on a footing of perfect equality, I would recommend that the full duty be paid, in which case eleven half-sheets might be supplied for one penny.

d.

These eleven half-sheets measure about 730 square inches; consequently they would make 730 labels of one inch square. But as the cost of printing labels would be greater than that of printing covers, sheet for sheet, and as a glutinous wash would be required at the back, say 300 labels (instead of 730) would cost 1d. then 1,000 would cost 3½

The weight of 1,000 labels made of thin paper, would be about one ounce, therefore their distribution through the post-office would be charged 2d.; say the cost to the state would be one-half 1

Allow for expenses at the stamp-office in making up parcels, keeping the accounts, &c. 1

Total cost of 1,000 labels, including the distribution 5
Or, per letter 100

APPENDIX (B).

ESTIMATE OF THE COST OF COLLECTING POSTAGE BY MONEY-PAYMENTS AS AT

57
With Mr Pearson Hill's Court
Bromford 1116 (15)



THE JUBILEE

OF THE

UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE.

A Paper

READ BEFORE THE BALLOON SOCIETY

BY

MR. PEARSON HILL,

LATE OF THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE, GENERAL POST OFFICE, LONDON.

JANUARY 8, 1890.



SIR ROWLAND HILL, K.C.B., D.C.L., P.R.S., F.R.S.,

ORIGINATOR OF THE UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE SYSTEM.

BORN DECEMBER 3, 1795; DIED AUGUST 27, 1879. BURIED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

PRINTED BY CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED

LUDGATE HILL, LONDON, E.C.

5

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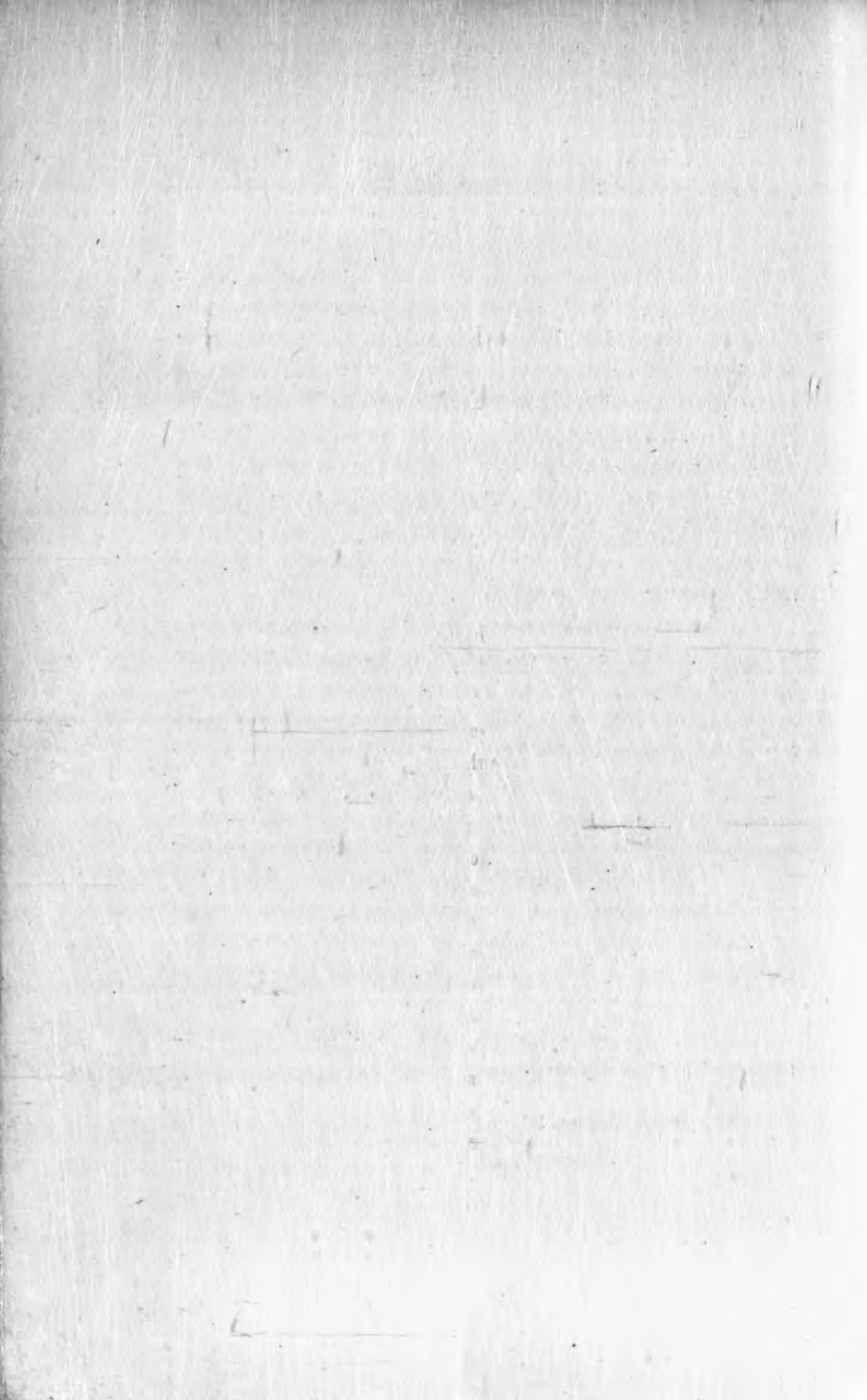
MEMORANDUM.

WHEN, some little time ago, I was asked to prepare a paper on the Jubilee of the Uniform Penny Postage system, I declined so doing—first, because the subject had already been sufficiently dealt with in a little work, "The Post Office of Fifty Years Ago," published by Messrs. Cassell and Co. in 1887; and, secondly, because it would be impossible for any one to deal fairly with the history of the great postal reform which commenced in 1840 without making laudatory mention of the services of my father, the late Sir Rowland Hill, and it seemed to me undesirable that such laudation should come from a member of his own family.

On the other hand, it was urged that the present time is the most suitable for reviewing the work accomplished in the last half century; and that from my personal knowledge of Sir Rowland Hill, my intimate acquaintance with the principles and details of his plan, and my long service in the Post Office under his guidance, I was probably better acquainted with the subject than any one now living, and was consequently best qualified to give the facts in a popular form. I therefore decided to make the attempt, doing this with the less hesitation as, while confining myself to a plain unvarnished statement of what was accomplished, I am able, as regards any laudatory expression used in this paper, to quote, if necessary, the published opinions of high authorities whose judgment is altogether free from the bias which necessarily affects my own.

6, *Penbridge Square, W.*

January 8, 1890.



THE JUBILEE OF THE UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE.

ON Friday, January 10, 1840, there came into operation in the United Kingdom a measure of social reform which, for its wide-spreading and beneficent influence on the happiness of mankind, stands in modern times perhaps almost unrivalled. That reform—the Uniform Penny Postage system—as every one knows, originated with the late Sir Rowland Hill, and, in spite of strenuous official opposition, was carried by him to completion. On Friday, January 10, of the present year the fiftieth anniversary of this reform will have arrived, and the present time seems a fitting opportunity to glance back for a moment at the condition of affairs when, for purposes of domestic intercourse, the people of this country, and indeed the whole world, may be said to have been practically destitute of postal facilities, and to show by the contrast thus presented the magnitude of the change which in the past half-century has been accomplished.

In a little shilling brochure entitled "The Post Office of Fifty Years Ago," compiled from official sources, and published by Messrs. Cassell and Co., there is reproduced in fac-simile Rowland Hill's celebrated pamphlet on Post Office Reform, and the book contains much information as to the postal system formerly in operation in this country, which those persons interested in postal history will doubt-

less find useful, and which may profitably be studied by the many who have by this time become so thoroughly accustomed to our present postal facilities that they seem almost to fancy that these advantages always existed, and are just as much a consequence of the eternal fitness of things as the attraction of gravity or the rotation of the earth upon its axis.

One wonders what would be the effect upon these easy-going individuals if they could, say for a week, be put back into the condition, as regards postal matters, which our grandparents so long and patiently endured!

As Miss Martineau, in her "History of the Thirty Years' Peace," points out, we look back now with a sort of amazed compassion to the old Crusading times, when warrior husbands and their wives, grey-headed parents and their brave sons parted with the knowledge that it must be months or years before they could hear even of one another's existence. We wonder how they bore the depth of silence; and we feel the same now about the families of Polar voyagers; but it does not occur to many of us how like this was the fate of the largest classes in our own country, even so recently as the commencement of her Majesty's reign. Up to and even for some considerable time after that date there was no full and free epistolary intercourse in the country except for those who, like members of Parliament, had the command of franks. There were few families in the wide middle-class who did not feel the cost of postage a heavy item in their expenditure; and if the young people sent letters home only once a fortnight, the amount at the year's end was rather a serious matter. But it was the vast multitude of the lower orders who suffered like the Crusading families of old and the geographical discoverers of all time. The hundreds of thousands of apprentices, of shopmen, of

governesses, of domestic servants were cut off from family relations as if seas or deserts lay between them and home.*

The lowest rate of letter-postage between any two post towns in the United Kingdom was fourpence, but this only sufficed for a distance not exceeding fifteen miles: beyond that radius the postal rates rapidly increased—letters from London to Liverpool or Manchester being subjected to a postage of elevenpence; while those to the further parts of Scotland and Ireland were charged one shilling and eightpence, or twentyfold the present amount, and even these high charges were at once doubled or trebled if the letter, however light, contained one or more enclosures.

These exorbitant rates of postage, especially at a time when wages were far lower than at present, rendered correspondence far too expensive a luxury for the poor, and even for large numbers of the lower middle-class. However painful in many cases the enforced silence must have been, letters (which were almost always sent unpaid) had constantly to be refused by those to whom they were addressed; though instances not infrequently occurred where mothers even pawned their clothes to pay for letters coming from their children.

Many were the instances of hardship brought before the Select Committee on Postage in 1838, appointed by Parliament to inquire into Rowland Hill's proposed reform. Mr. Emery, Deputy-Lieutenant for Somersetshire, and a Commissioner of Taxes, stated, as evidence of the desire but inability of the poor to correspond, that—

“A person in my parish of the name of Rosser had a letter from a grand-daughter in London, and she could not take up the letter for want of the means. She was a pauper, receiving two-and-sixpence a week. . . . She told the

* Martineau's "History of the Thirty Years' Peace," vol. iv., p. 11.

post-office keeper that she must wait until she had received the money from the relieving officer; she could never spare enough; and at last a lady gave her a shilling to get the letter, but the letter had been returned to London by the post-office mistress. She never had the letter since. It came from her grand-daughter, who is in service in London."

Struck by this fact, Mr. Emery made further inquiries, and received the following statement from the postmaster of Banwell:—

"My father kept the post-office many years; he is lately dead; he used to trust poor people very often with letters; they generally could not pay the whole charge. He told me—indeed, I know—he did lose many pounds by letting poor people have their letters. We sometimes return them to London in consequence of the inability of the persons to whom they are addressed raising the postage. We frequently keep them for weeks; and, where we know the parties, let them have them, taking the chance of getting our money. One poor woman once offered my sister a silver spoon to keep until she could raise the money; my sister did not take the spoon, and the woman came with the amount in a day or two and took up the letter. It came from her husband, who was confined for debt in prison; she had six children, and was very badly off."

The following was reported by the postmaster of Congressbury:—

"The price of a letter is a great tax on poor people. I sent one, charged eightpence, to a poor labouring man about a week ago; it came from his daughter; he first refused taking it, saying it would take a loaf of bread from his other children; but after hesitating a little time, he paid the money, and opened the letter. I seldom return letters of this kind

to Bristol, because I let the poor people have them, and take the chance of being paid; sometimes I lose the postage, but generally the poor people pay me by degrees."

The postmaster of Yatton stated as follows:—

"I have had a letter waiting lately from the husband of a poor woman, who is at work in Wales; the charge was ninepence; it lay many days, in consequence of her not being able to pay the postage. I at last trusted her with it."

Mr. Cobden stated:—

"We have fifty thousand in Manchester who are Irish, or the immediate descendants of Irish; and all the large towns in the neighbourhood contain a great many Irish, or the descendants of Irish, who are almost as much precluded as though they lived in New South Wales from all correspondence or communication with their relatives in Ireland."

Mr. Henson, a working hosier of Nottingham, stated:—

"When a man goes on the tramp—*i.e.*, when he travels in search of employment—he must either take his family with him, perhaps one child in arms, or else the wife must be left behind; and the misery I have known them to be in from not knowing what has become of the husband, because they could not hear from him, has been extreme. Perhaps the man receiving only sixpence, has never had the means, upon the line, of paying tenpence for a letter, to let his wife know where he was."

"Sixpence," said Mr. Brewin of Cirencester, a member of the Society of Friends, "is a third of a poor man's daily income. If a gentleman, whose fortune is a thousand pounds a year, or three pounds a day, had to pay one-third of his daily income—that is to say, a sovereign—for a letter, how often would he write letters of friendship?" *

* "Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage," vol. i., p. 305.

Costliness was by no means the only fault to be found with the postal service of this country as it existed 50 years ago: it deserved almost equal condemnation on the ground of its slowness and inefficiency. What would Londoners now say if their letters posted in the City after 2 p.m. were not delivered in Brompton till about noon next day; or, if any one writing at Uxbridge had to wait four days (or five days, if Sunday intervened) before he could possibly obtain an answer to a letter he had addressed to Gravesend—a distance of about 40 miles?

What would dwellers in the country think of a postal service under which in England and Wales—the most favoured portion of the kingdom—districts larger than Middlesex existed into which the postman never entered, while of the 2,100 Registrars' districts, 400 districts, each containing on the average about 20 square miles and about 4,000 inhabitants—say, a total population of a million and a half—were left absolutely without any post-office whatever?

Would our merchants who have business—say, with the United States—now be content with having their letters carried only once a month, and in slow sailing-brigs that took many weeks to cross the Atlantic, and with being charged for this indifferent service a sea-postage at the rate of two shillings and two pence per half ounce, in addition to the heavy inland rates at each end?

If anything could drive the British public into open defiance of all laws, what measure would be more likely to goad them into such a course than the re-imposition of the old postal system, with its daily and hourly irritations? Yet, perhaps the most marvellous fact connected with that system is the admiration with which John Bull then regarded it. Bad as it then was, it had, not very long before, been in a far worse condition; but in 1836, when Rowland

Hill commenced his systematic investigations into postal matters, the Post Office was still enjoying the prestige it had gained through the important reforms effected in the year 1784 by Mr. Palmer (proprietor of the Bath Theatre), who, by substituting mail-coaches for horse and foot posts, had greatly accelerated the mails, which up to that time had jogged comfortably along at the rate of about 3 miles an hour; and by the public at large the postal system as it existed in 1836 was regarded as a mysterious and almost perfect organisation: one with which none but experts could safely venture to interfere.

Fortunately for the world at large there were sceptics even in those days, and a few Parliamentary free-lances, led by Mr. Robert Wallace, member for Greenock, had long kept up a sort of guerilla warfare with the authorities at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and had succeeded in compelling them to adopt a few minor changes in the direction of reduction of charge and increase of convenience; but, taken as a whole, the postal service had remained unimproved for at least a quarter of a century, and notwithstanding the great advance in the trade and population of this country during the twenty years ending with 1835, the revenue of the Post Office (both gross and net) had remained stationary—the high charges having stopped all increase of correspondence, or driven it into illegal channels.

Fraudulent evasions of the postal duties were matters of daily occurrence. Members of Parliament and a few other privileged persons, by writing their names on the outside of letters, could free them through the post, and people constantly forged such signatures, undeterred by the fact that in 1771 a clergyman, the Rev. Dr. Dodd, was actually hanged at Tyburn for this offence.

Coleridge's story has often been quoted of how, when

travelling through the Lake District, he gave a shilling to enable a poor girl to have a letter from her brother, the postage of which she could not afford to pay, and which letter, even when the money was forthcoming, she seemed strangely unwilling to accept; and how, when the postman had gone, she confessed that the money had been wasted, as the letter was only a dummy, sent to her that she might know, by seeing the address in her brother's handwriting, that he was still in existence; and that they had been driven to adopt this fraud by the impossibility of their paying the high postage demanded.

Many very ingenious systems of fraud were adopted in commercial circles to evade the postal charges. Advantage was taken of the fact that newspapers were allowed to pass through the post without any payment beyond the Impressed Newspaper Duty Stamp, which all such papers bore; and much information was often conveyed by the manner in which the address was written.

Few persons would suspect that the cover of a London newspaper addressed—

“MR. JOHN SMITH,

Grocer, Teadealer, &c.,

No. 1, High Street,

EDINBURGH,”

could convey much information; yet to Mr. John Smith it told, as plainly as if printed in the largest type, that on Tuesday the price of sugar was falling, and that the remittances he had sent in discharge of his indebtedness had been duly received; while, on the other hand, if the paper had been addressed—

“ MR. J. SMITH,
 Grocer, &c.,
 High St.
 EDINBURGH,”

he would equally have known that on Wednesday the market was dull and stationary, and that the bills he had sent had been dishonoured.

The following was the system by which, as they subsequently confessed, Mr. Smith's London correspondents managed to evade the exorbitant postal rates :—

Six changes in the personal address were employed to indicate the *date* of the news conveyed, thus :—

Mr. Smith	meant	Monday.
Mr. John Smith	„	Tuesday.
Mr. J. Smith	„	Wednesday.
J. Smith, Esq.	„	Thursday.
John Smith, Esq.	„	Friday.
— Smith, Esq.	„	Saturday.

The *dispatch* of goods to him was indicated by the address “Grocer, Tea-dealer :” *e.g.*, if goods were sent on Wednesday, the newspaper was addressed “Mr. J. Smith, Grocer, Tea-dealer, 1, High Street, Edinburgh.”

The *receipt* of goods was understood by the omission of the trade: *e.g.*, “John Smith, Esq., 1, High Street, Edinburgh” implied that the goods were received on Friday.

The events of the market were thus indicated :—

Tea-dealer (alone)	.	.	.	.	price of tea rising
Grocer	„	.	.	.	„ tea falling
Grocer and tea-dealer	.	.	.	.	„ sugar rising

Grocer, tea-dealer, &c., . . . price of sugar falling
 Grocer, &c. Markets dull and stationary
 while "tea-dealer, &c.," "tea-dealer and grocer," "tea-dealer,
 grocer, &c.," and other variations were employed to give
 other information.

Pecuniary transactions were thus indicated :—

No. 1, High Street	meant remittances received
High Street	„ bills sent for acceptance
1, High St ^e	„ acceptances received
High St ^e	„ bills dishonoured

while by using flourishes, or red or blue ink, all the foregoing variations were made to give information on other matters.

These devices, however, but slightly diminished the daily and hourly inconvenience which the high rates of postage and the general inefficiency of the postal service inflicted upon the community, and for this state of things, so long as the Government were unwilling to jeopardise the large revenue they received from the Post Office, there seemed but little hope of amelioration.

The remedy, however, came at last. In the financial year ending 31st March, 1836, there happened to be a large excess in the revenue of the country generally over the expenditure, and the public of course looked to receive some important reduction in taxation. The abolition of the window-tax, of the duties on paper, bricks, glass, and many other articles was advocated by different people, but it seemed to Rowland Hill—who, though wholly unconnected with the Post Office, had taken great interest in postal questions—that the opportunity should be seized to reduce the heavy tax levied by the high rates of postage on all commercial and domestic intercourse. He had long before come to the conclusion that the then existing rates of postage were far too

high, even if the sole object of the Postmaster-General were to obtain as large a revenue as possible. A moderate reduction in the postal rates would, he believed, lead to a yet larger profit; a still greater reduction might therefore be made, and the Post Office net revenue would be merely kept to its then amount, and consequently a much larger reduction would be practicable without reducing the revenue to a greater extent than the flourishing state of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget would permit. Taking these considerations, therefore, as the guiding principle, the question to be solved was what amount of reduction would meet the case.

From his own experience as an organiser in his father's school at Hazelwood, and later on as Secretary to the South Australian Commissioners, Rowland Hill had long come to regard as almost the worst enemies of progress those noisy would-be reformers who rush in with crude and ill-considered schemes which they are unable to support by any reference to ascertained facts, and who thereby bring discredit on all who seriously seek to amend that which is defective.

He therefore set himself patiently to work to analyse the published accounts of the Post Office, and to endeavour to ascertain in the almost total absence of postal statistics what was the real cost to the Department of dealing with a letter in its passage from the writer to the recipient—a point essential to discover before attempting to calculate the probable effect upon the revenue of any given reduction in postage and consequent increase of correspondence.*

* The number of letters then annually passing through the post—a most important factor in estimating their average cost and yield—was absolutely unknown even to the officers of that Department, the official estimates varying from about 40 millions to about 120 millions—the real number being afterwards ascertained to be about 76½ millions.

Up to that time it had always been accepted as a thing scarcely open to question that the main cost which a letter occasioned to the Post Office was in its conveyance, especially when carried over long distances. That this belief was altogether wrong, at least as regards inland letters, Rowland Hill was soon to discover.

In the course of his careful analysis he found that the service which the Post Office rendered as regards each letter was properly divisible into three distinct portions:—

1st.—The service of **COLLECTION**, in which were included all duties connected with receiving, taxing, and sorting the letter in the post office of the town in which it originated.

2nd.—The service of **CONVEYANCE**, in which was included the cost of getting the letter from the town of origin to the town of destination; and

3rd.—The service of **DELIVERY**, in which all duties connected with preparing the letter for the letter-carrier and despatching it to its recipient were included.

The expenditure of the Post Office under the first and third services was, he saw, common to all letters whether local or other; the cost of *conveyance* being the only variable quantity.

This cost of conveyance, however, when carefully examined, proved to be infinitesimal—only the ninth part of a farthing *per letter* even for so long a distance as from London to Edinburgh.

So wholly unexpected was this last discovery that Rowland Hill at first could scarcely believe in its accuracy, and it was not until he had over and over again tested his calculations that he could assure himself that he had not arrived at a false conclusion. Every additional test, however, only confirmed the result, and this all-important discovery was the talisman that opened to his view a prospect of postal reform

far exceeding anything which he had hitherto even hoped might be possible, for he at once saw that the only just and fair rate of postage was a uniform rate wholly independent of distance*, and that uniformity would produce so great a simplification in the business of the Post Office, thereby cheapening the service, that the rate might also be very low, and still obtain for the Department a sufficient profit.

This uniform rate of letter-postage he then fancied could scarcely be reduced below twopence; but, ultimately, to his great satisfaction, he saw his way to adopt as the unit of charge for all inland letters the lowest rate then levied by the Post Office on any letters, viz., the penny rate charged upon local letters in the provincial towns. This great reduction he saw, however, would not be practicable unless the public could be induced to change its long-established habit of sending all letters unpaid—prepayment of postage being essential to secure that economy in the postal service which alone would render so low a rate of postage sufficiently remunerative.

Was this change of habit possible of accomplishment? Most people believed the public would never submit to it. Even Sir Francis Baring, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, after Rowland Hill's plan had been sanctioned, and an earnest well-wisher for its success, believed this was the rock upon which the scheme would suffer shipwreck. Over and over again Rowland Hill was urged to abandon this part of the measure; but he wisely gave the public credit for preferring to pay a penny on every letter it sent, rather than be

* If (argued Rowland Hill) two letters be posted in London, one for delivery therein and the other for delivery in Edinburgh, the Edinburgh letter should be charged only the ninth part of a farthing more than the local letter to cover the cost of conveyance. In other words *the postage on the two letters must be the same unless it can be shown how so small a sum as the ninth part of a farthing could be collected.*

charged twopence upon every letter it received. His opinion was amply justified by the result: the great reduction of postage reconciled the public to the change of habit, and prepayment of postage soon became the almost universal practice.

In January, 1837, Rowland Hill published his scheme in a pamphlet, which he privately submitted to the Government, through Mr. Charles P. Villiers, then (and still) member for Wolverhampton, hoping that the careful examination of his plan, supported as it was by an unanswerable array of facts, would suffice to ensure its adoption. He had yet to learn the vast amount of *vis inertia* existing in some Government Departments. The minds of those who sit in high places are sometimes wonderfully and fearfully made, and "outsiders," as he was destined to find, must be prepared to knock long and loudly at the outer door before they can obtain much attention. The postal authorities opposed his scheme with an animosity of which even after the lapse of half a century traces are not wholly extinct. The Postmaster-General of that time (Lord Lichfield) declared that "of all the wild and visionary schemes he had ever heard or read of it was the most extraordinary," and every possible discouragement was showered upon Rowland Hill by the authorities at St. Martin's-le-Grand.*

* The readers of Mr. Anthony Trollope's "Autobiography" may remember that he takes credit to himself for having, while in the Post Office, been constantly in opposition to Sir Rowland Hill, even up to the date (1864) when the latter retired from the service. Much good-natured deduction should, of course, be made from statements which would probably have been more carefully revised but for Mr. Trollope's sudden death. A life spent in writing romance is, perhaps, a somewhat hazardous training for one who late in life tries his hand at history; but, be the explanation what it may, there is no doubt of the fact that among his old friends at St. Martin's-le-Grand Mr. Anthony Trollope's "Autobiography" is justly regarded as one of his most amusing works of fiction.

A friendly hand was, however, held out to him by the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry, then sitting to consider how the working of the London District Post might be improved, and on February 13, 1837, Rowland Hill gave evidence before this Commission, and in course of his evidence he strongly urged the adoption of stamped covers for the collection of postage—a suggestion which, as he cordially admitted, was due to the late Mr. Charles Knight, the eminent publisher—and it was while discussing this point with the Commissioners that Rowland Hill hit upon, and at once suggested, the happy expedient of making the postage stamp adhesive, “by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which . . . by applying a little moisture” might be attached to the letter.*

This was the origin of the adhesive postage-stamp now almost universally employed in every part of the globe. Surely no grain of mustard-seed ever had so wide a growth!

The Commissioners reported favourably of Rowland Hill's scheme, and it was eagerly taken up by the public. In Parliament Mr. Wallace moved for and obtained a Select Committee which, in 1838, examined into and strongly supported the plan; but the Government were reluctant to adopt it, and probably nothing at that time would have been done but for a lucky chapter of accidents in the political world.

On April 9, 1839, Lord Melbourne's Government brought in what is generally known as the Jamaica Bill—a bill for suspending for five years the constitution of that colony. This measure was strongly opposed by the Conservative party (led by Sir Robert Peel) and by many of the Radicals. On the second reading of the Bill the Government

* See “Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry, 1837,” pp. 32, 33.

only escaped defeat by the narrow majority of five votes. The Ministry thereupon resigned. Sir Robert Peel was sent for by her Majesty, but, owing to the "Bed Chamber Difficulty," failed to form a Government. Lord Melbourne was recalled, and in the negotiations with the Radical Members for future support to the Liberal Government the bargain was struck, that that support should be given provided Penny Postage was conceded.

Thus one of the greatest social reforms ever introduced was, to speak plainly, given as a bribe by a tottering Government to secure political support.*

Of the endless difficulties Rowland Hill had to encounter, even after Parliament had authorised the adoption of his scheme, in forcing it down the throats of the postal authorities, of the shabby treatment he received at the hands of Government in 1842, of his further struggles and ultimate victory, it would be impossible in the limits of this paper to give anything like a sufficient description. Those persons interested in the question will find the facts duly recorded in the "Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage," published in 1880. It is, however, pleasant to record that official opposition gradually died away, old opponents, with few exceptions, becoming zealous helpers, and in many cases warm friends of the Reformer whose innovations they had once regarded with an animosity so bitter and prolonged.

In comparing the present postal facilities with those which preceded the adoption of the Uniform Penny Postage system one is almost puzzled by the abundance of evidence which meets one on every hand. Luckily the reforming spirit of Rowland Hill, and his earnest desire to render the postal service as efficient as possible, remained in the Depart-

* "Post Office of Fifty Years Ago," pp. 23, 24.

ment when he himself was compelled by ill-health to retire, and the tree he planted has ever since steadily grown while tended by the younger hands he had trained for the purpose.

Looking at home one finds that while the rates of postage have been largely reduced postal facilities have enormously increased; the town deliveries have greatly multiplied, and postal extension into the rural districts has been pushed to such a point that there is now no hamlet—one might almost say no country house—in the United Kingdom which is not reached by the rural postmen. The number of letters delivered has now increased from $76\frac{1}{2}$ millions per annum to the magnificent total of nearly 1,800 millions, including post-cards. The Book Post, which was non-existent in 1840, now distributes upwards of 400 million documents all over the United Kingdom; while the Parcel Post also conveys for the public about forty millions of articles annually, few of which would have been transmitted but for the special facilities the Post Office now affords; and an addition to all this must be made of some 220 millions of newspapers and telegrams before summing up the work now performed for the public by the Post Office.

Amongst other postal advantages which we now enjoy may be mentioned the Post Office Savings Bank, the Postal Order system, the widely-extended and cheaper Telegraph service, and the great increase in the number and rapidity of the postal communications between all parts of the United Kingdom—towns like Liverpool, Manchester, and Brighton now receiving about seven daily mails from London in place of the single daily communication which they formerly possessed.

In postal communications with our Colonies and with foreign countries the change is almost equally great. Frequent, regular, and swift communications by powerful steam

vessels have been established in every direction. The whole of Europe, the United States, Canada, Egypt, and many other parts of the world have been united in a Postal Union throughout which letters can be sent for a postage of twopence halfpenny per half ounce—a mere fraction of the rates formerly levied. Indeed, a letter can now be sent from London westward to San Francisco, or eastward to Constantinople or Siberia, for a less amount of postage than was charged in 1836 on one going from Charing Cross to Brompton.

But the contrast between the old and the new postal systems was perhaps never better shown than in the following letter written in 1843 by the late Miss Harriet Martineau, when letter-writing was not quite the lost art it has now become. Sir Thomas Wilde, M.P. (afterwards Lord Truro), to whom it is addressed, was at that time calling the attention of Parliament to the obstacles which official jealousy was then placing in the way of postal reform. It draws a vivid picture of the happiness which, almost at a burst, the Penny Postage system conferred upon the poorer classes.

THE BENEFITS OF PENNY POSTAGE.

LETTER FROM MISS HARRIET MARTINEAU TO SIR THOMAS
WILDE, M.P.

Tynemouth, 15th May, 1843.

SIR,—While testimonies to the effect of Post Office reform on the interests of Commerce, Science, Literature, &c., abound, the merits of this reform seem to me to be still left half untold.

The benefits it confers on social and domestic interests exceed, in my opinion, the whole sum of the rest. We hear less of this class of results than of others—partly because they are of a delicate nature, involving feelings which individuals shrink from laying open, and partly because they are so universal (where the privilege of cheap postage extends) that it seems to be no one's especial business to declare them; but there can be no doubt that this class of blessings is felt with a keenness and a depth of gratitude which, if they could only find expression, would overwhelm the author of this reform with a sense of the magnitude of his own work.

The first mournful event in the life of a happy family of the middle and lower classes—the family dispersion—is softened—has, indeed, assumed a new aspect—within the last four years. When the sons go forth into the world to prepare themselves for a vocation, or to assume it, the parting from parents and sisters is no longer what it was, from *the sense of separation* being so much lessened. Formerly, the monthly or fortnightly letter—a stated expense, to be incurred only with regularity, and the communication itself confined to a single sheet—had nothing of the familiarity of correspondence. At present, when on any occasion, on the slightest prompting of inclination, the youth can pour out his mind to his best friends—no sudden check upon family confidence being imposed, and no barrier becoming gradually erected by infrequency of intercourse—the moral dangers of a young man's entrance upon life are incalculably lessened.

In the preservation of access to parents and home, many thousands of young men are provided with a safeguard, for want of which many thousands formerly became aliens from family interests, and thereby outcasts from the innocence and confidence of home.

The State has the closest interest in the rectitude and

purity of its rising citizens, and therefore the public gratitude is due to a measure which promotes them: but when it is considered that the general sense of access to home which young men now carry abroad puts new valour into the heart of the brave, new reliance into that of the timid—that it encourages the enterprising, rouses the indolent, and, in short, brings all the best influences of the old life to bear upon the new, it is clear that the State must be better served in proportion to the improved power and comfort of its rising race of men.

Not less certain is the benefit to the daughters of the industrious classes. If the governesses of this country (in whose hands rest much of the moral destiny of another generation) could speak of the influence of this reform upon their lot, what should we not hear of the blessing of access to home? We should hear of parents' advice and sympathy obtained when needed most; of a daily sense of support from the scarcely ideal presence of mother or brother; of nights of sleep obtained by the disburdening of cares; of relief from the worst experience of poverty (however small the actual means may be), while expense is no longer the irritating hindrance of speech, the infliction which makes the listening parent deaf, and the full hearted daughter dumb. When we look somewhat lower, and regard the classes which furnish hundreds of thousands of workwomen, of dressmakers, of shopwomen, and domestic servants, the benefits of this access to home become clearly inestimable. Society seems to be awakening to a sense of the hardship of ill-requited labour—of the extreme scantiness of the recompense of the toil of women especially. However grievous the hardship may be, the case was worse when the solitary worker felt her affections crushed—felt as if forsaken under an enforced family silence. Far more important is the opening of the Post

Office to hundreds and thousands of these industrious workers than an increase of earnings would be ; for the restoration of access to home, which might then be an expensive indulgence, is now a matter of course for all—a benefit enjoyed without hesitation or remorse. Now while they can spare a few pence from the supply of their urgent wants, they can retain their place in affection and self-respect beside the family hearth, and who shall say to how many this privilege has been equivalent to peace of mind—in how many cases to the preservation of innocence and a good name !

Then, again, how many are the sick-rooms of this country, and how many of the active members of society are interested in each sick-room ? Among the richer classes, if any member of a family is ill, the rest can come together and await the event. Not so in the wide-spreading working classes. There, whatever may be their anxieties, families must remain asunder. For the most part the absent members were, till lately, obliged to be patient under a weekly bulletin, or if more frequent accounts were indulged in, the expense was a heavy aggravation of the cost of illness, and was indeed, in large families, out of the question. Look at the difference now ! How much more allowable is a daily bulletin now than a weekly one was then ; and though the sick are few in comparison with the numbers who have an interest in them, they are numerous enough, particularly if we include the aged and infirm, to deserve consideration for themselves. Who can imagine the importance of the post hour, in these days, to the sick and suffering ? Who does not know that to a multitude of these sufferers post time is the brightest season of the day ? Indeed, an entirely new alleviation, a most salutary source of cheerfulness, has been let into the sick-room by the new Post Office arrangement. It would be a blessing if only a few sufferers

were enriched with a flow of family and friendly correspondence, not only of letters but of drawings, books, music, flowers, seeds, and bouquets—of all the little gifts that the Post Office can convey. It would be agreeable that a small adornment of such graces should accompany the grand utilities of the system, but when it is considered to what an extent this benefit spreads, that not a day of any year passes that a multitude of sick and infirm are not thus cheered, these humanities and graces command a gratitude seldom due on so large a scale.

Then, again, there is a diffusion of the advantages gained by one member of a family or society, so that the recompense of one person's talents or merits becomes a benefit to many. If one member of a family attains a position in literature, or any other pursuit which gives him a command of information or other interests, he needs no longer to confine it to himself for want of means to communicate the luxury. The infirm father, the blind mother, whose pleasures are becoming fewer and fewer, may now not only enjoy the fame of an eminent son and daughter as a matter of complacency, but may share that portion of the results which consists in correspondence.

Instead of the weekly letter of one single sheet, there comes now a frequent packet, enclosing letters from all parts of the world—tidings on a host of subjects of interest, political, scientific, or literary—a wealth of ideas to occupy the weary mind, and of pleasures wherewith to refresh the sleepless affections. As for the advantages of a more business-like character arising from the present facilities for the transmission of family letters and papers, they are so great as to defy description, and so obvious as not to need it.

Some persons seem to think all these considerations of too private and delicate a character to be openly connected with any fiscal arrangement. The more unusual such a connection,

the more carefully, in my opinion, should it be exhibited. The more infrequent the occasions when a Government can, by its fiscal arrangements, directly promote the social and domestic virtue and happiness of a whole people, and engage its gratitude and affection, the more eagerly should such occasions be embraced. The present is such a one as, I imagine, has never before presented itself in the history of legislation. The best that one can ordinarily say in regard to revenue arrangements is that they produce the smallest practicable amount of evil, and that that amount of evil ought to be cheerfully borne for the sake of the indispensable object. Very different is the case of the new postage. By the same means which are yearly augmenting the revenue, there is a strengthening of social and domestic charities. The same arrangements which carry more money into the Treasury, which stimulate commerce and encourage science and literature, serve to expand the influences of home, and to repeal for the dispersed the sentence of banishment from the best influences of life. From this strong and honourable peculiarity our new Post Office system will, I imagine, take rank in history above all fiscal arrangements of any former time.

It will stand alone as being not only tolerated and obeyed, but as having won for Government a gratitude and attachment such as no other single measure could win, and such as will deepen with every passing year. My own belief is that at this moment such grateful attachment is already a set-off against a large measure of disaffection, partial and imperfect as is, as yet, the working of the system.

As regards the author of the penny postage system, I know, of my own knowledge, that a multitude of persons are, like myself, really oppressed by the sense of obligation as yet almost unacknowledged and wholly unrequited. The personal

obligations of every one of us are heavy, but when we think of the amount of blessing he has conferred on the morals and affections of a whole people, of the number of innocent persons and sufferers cheered by the knowledge spread abroad and human happiness promoted by his single hand, we are led to question whether any one member of society ever before discharged so much of the functions at once of the pulpit, the press, the parent, the physician, and the ruler—ever in so short a time benefited his nation so vastly, or secured so unlimited a boon to the subjects of an empire; and when other nations shall have adopted his reforms there may be an extension even of this praise.

I am, Sir, yours respectfully,

(Signed) HARRIET MARTINEAU.

Sir Thomas Wilde, M.P.

After his retirement from the Post Office in 1864, Rowland Hill received from all quarters, high and low, cordial acknowledgments of his services. At his death in 1879 he was awarded by public acclamation an honoured grave in Westminster Abbey, but it may well be doubted whether any recognition was to him half so acceptable as that which, in the darkest hour of the great contest, he received from the gifted authoress whose letter is given above; and even now, after the world has for fifty years enjoyed the fruits of his labour, it would be difficult to imagine any fuller or grander record than that furnished by Miss Martineau of the work which it fell to Rowland Hill's lot to devise and to carry to completion.