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Hill (Pearson)

CHALMERS VERSUS SIR ROWLAND HILL.



In this number of the *Philatelic Record* the Philatelic Society of London make known the decision they have arrived at in respect of the charges brought by Mr. Patrick Chalmers against the late Sir Rowland Hill. The Philatelic Society can certainly not be accused of having jumped to a hasty conclusion. For eleven months, which is quite two months beyond the usual period of gestation, they have waited with exemplary patience, and somewhat strained impartiality, for such further evidence—beyond that contained in his published pamphlets—as Mr. Chalmers might possibly advance in support of his charges, and they have, as we expected, waited in vain. More than once we have been tempted to express our own opinions upon the subject, but have been restrained by the reflection that it was still *sub judice*, and before a tribunal in the justice and learning of which we have every confidence. As a knowledge of the history of stamps ancient and modern, and an acquaintance with postal legislation, are the pleas for the existence of this publication, we had no ambition to expose ourselves, through giving a hasty opinion, to being classed amongst those journals whose *dicta* Mr. Chalmers has been at such pains, if not to inspire, at least to collect and publish. The *Hornsey Journal*, *Banner of Wales*, *Blairgowrie Advertiser*, *Totnes Times*, &c., may be excellent retailers of local gossip, but their opinion upon such questions as those at issue between Mr. Chalmers and the natural champions of a dead man, but a living and revered memory, are less than worthless. What do the editors and sub-editors of any one of these pillars of the press know of the matters in dispute? If any one

ever, I am told, adopts the plan of sending a well-paying advertisement, several news-items and a paragraph also to be inserted—He then quotes a paragraph as an independent Editorial comment upon his

of them can satisfy us that they have arrived at the conclusions they have so hastily put forth upon any grounds other than a perfunctory perusal of Mr. Chalmers' pamphlets, we will condescend to argue with them, and show them that they are mistaken. But, in the first place, they must convince us that they have some knowledge of the postal history of the past fifty years, or even that they have taken the trouble to collate the assertions of Mr. Chalmers with that celebrated *Fifth Report* upon which he bases the chief weight of his arguments.

The dealings of Mr. Chalmers with this celebrated Parliamentary Blue Book are rather ingenious than ingenuous. In his earlier brochure, entitled *The Adhesive Stamps: a Fresh Chapter in the History of Post-office Reform*, in which he endeavours to claim for his father the invention of the adhesive postage stamp, he rightly speaks of it as "a report, carrying great weight, from an official body appointed to examine into desirable reforms." Of this same report, however (of which, of course, every member of Parliament and every Public Department received a copy), when he is endeavouring to fix upon Rowland Hill a charge of having fraudulently appropriated its suggestions without acknowledging their source, he speaks as though it were a rare *opuscula*, the unearthing of which is due to his extraordinary sagacity of research, oblivious of the fact that from all who are interested in philately and postal history it has no secrets. Mr. Chalmers would have us believe that in the January following the publication of the *Fifth Report* the commissioners who signed it sat and listened to Rowland Hill calmly reproducing their suggestions as his own, without even uttering a word of surprise at the unparalleled impudence of such a proceeding. If, as Mr. Chalmers suggests, these commissioners did not point out at the time the plagiarism of which he asserts the great reformer was guilty, in the expectation that the latter would offer an explanation "at such time and upon such opportunity as he himself would select," why did they not, when he was reaping the rewards of the plan, without having offered such explanation, step forward and set matters right? The Post-office authorities of 1837 met Rowland Hill and his plans with the most uncompromising hostility. Are we to believe that they were ignorant of the recommendations of the *Fifth Report*, or that, knowing them, they also joined in keeping the secret? Would they not rather have

done Rowland Hill an ill-turn by revealing it had the facts been such as Mr. Patrick Chalmers states? In this *Fifth Report* it was suggested that "Prices-current and publications of a similar nature" should, in effect, be treated like newspapers, and, when like them, printed on stamped paper, be allowed the newspaper privilege of passing and re-passing through the Post-office as often as desired for a single stamp duty of one penny, whatever their weight might be, or for a halfpenny if they did not exceed the half-ounce. Mr. Chalmers calls upon us to read *letters* of a certain weight for *circulars*, and to give to the commissioners the credit of a reform which never entered their heads, and which has been for the last 45 years most justly ascribed to Sir Rowland Hill. But, as a matter of fact, it was Prices-current which were recommended for the reduction in charge, and not letters; and to this day the distinction between letters and printed matter has been upheld. That the charge of postage on newspapers has never been regarded as a guide to what should be charged on letters, any one would soon discover who, in his zeal for further reform, might try to get the Post-office to agree to carry letters, of any weight, for a postage of one halfpenny, merely because newspapers are now carried on these terms.

As regards the invention of the adhesive stamp, its application to bottles, boxes, and pots of patent medicines, long before the burning question of postal reform came before the public, is a matter of notoriety. Mr. Chalmers has certainly failed to prove that his father was the first to suggest its application to prepaid letters; and the letter addressed to Rowland Hill in 1840 by Mr. James Chalmers, on whose behalf the claim—some forty years after date—is put forward, is decisive evidence against such a claim, which indeed he himself honestly abandoned.

We do not pursue these matters into further detail simply because, for the public for whom we write, which is not the public of the *Hornsey Journal*, it is unnecessary that we should do so, especially as we can refer our readers to the very full information furnished by Mr. Pearson Hill, and published in the *Philatelic Record* of December last. We shall only say, in conclusion, that we are glad the matter at issue has been settled to the satisfaction of those with whom we are immediately concerned; viz., those

who have for years made Postal History their study. Their numbers may be, nay are, comparatively small ; but it is they who, after all, are most competent to form a judgment. That their verdict will prove acceptable to Mr. Chalmers and his converts, if he have any, we cannot hope. There are yet people who believe in the justice of the claims set up by "the unfortunate nobleman," and there may be some few others of equal intelligence who must be allowed, if they think fit, to pin their faith to Mr. Chalmers' statements. Their belief or unbelief will, however, in no way affect the public opinion, that the universal appreciation of Sir Rowland Hill's merits whilst living, and gratitude to his memory since he has been removed from amongst us, were hardly earned and honestly deserved.

[†]This refers to "The Clarendon" Arthur Orton - alias
Castro: alias "Roger Teclbourne" - then imprisoned
at Dartmoor for forgery -



Proceedings of the Philatelic Society of London.

THE second meeting of the season was held on the 28th October, 1882, at 13, Gray's Inn Square, the President in the chair. The Secretary read the minutes of the previous meeting, which were approved.

The President then read the following report of the proceedings at the previous meeting in connection with Chalmers *versus* Hill :

"At the meeting of the Philatelic Society, London, held on the 5th November, 1881, Mr. Pearson Hill read a paper, which was afterwards printed in *The Philatelic Record* for the same month (vol. iii.). The paper, so far as it relates to the matter to be considered, commences at page 195, and brings to the notice of the Society the fact that Mr. Patrick Chalmers, of 35, Alexandra Road, Wimbledon, had recently asserted and circulated in a pamphlet * the statement that his late father, Mr. James Chalmers, bookseller, of Dundee, had anticipated the late Sir Rowland Hill in suggesting the use of adhesive postage stamps, but had been fraudulently deprived by him of the credit of that invention.

"Mr. P. Chalmers had also, in another pamphlet,† then recently published, announced that Sir Rowland Hill had taken his plan of postal reform from the Fifth Report of the Government Commission of Post-office Enquiry, published April, 1836, without acknowledgment, and charged him with 'exceptionally avoiding all reference to that document,' and 'not dealing openly and candidly with his countrymen.'

"The object of Mr. Pearson Hill's paper was to vindicate his father's character. An original letter was laid before the Society from James Chalmers to Rowland Hill, dated 18th May, 1840, in which the writer, in clear terms, admits that he did not know Mr. Hill had 'suggested anything like the same scheme,' and excuses his claim to participate in the Government reward on the ground of such ignorance, this claim having reference to the postage adhesive stamp.

"Copies of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' pamphlets, and of several letters which had passed between him and Mr. Pearson Hill respecting these charges, were laid before the meeting, and it was unanimously resolved to forward a printed copy of the paper read by Mr. Hill to Mr. P. Chalmers, with an intimation that the Society would be prepared to consider any communication

* *The Adhesive Stamp—a fresh chapter in the History of Post-office Reform.*

† *The Penny Postage Scheme of 1837: Was it an invention or a copy?*

he might choose to make before it proceeded to deal with the matter. Since that period (eleven months ago) Mr. Chalmers has addressed to the Secretary several prints, one entitled, *Opinions from the Press*, on his previous pamphlet, with a heading to the effect that 'a fresh and interesting statement on the subject will shortly be issued'—1st June, 1882. Another, *The Position of Sir Rowland Hill Made Plain*—1882, the latter containing many quotations from newspaper notices, and much relative to the proceedings of the Rowland Hill Memorial Fund. In his preface to the last-mentioned pamphlet—page 13—Mr. Chalmers quotes from a letter written by him on the 15th March, 1882, to the Corporation of London, to the effect that Mr. Pearson Hill having, in a paper contributed to a scientific society, attacked him 'in a violent and unfounded manner, and which attack that Society has called upon me to meet,' no choice was left him other than to resume the subject, concluding that if 'the result be not such as the best friends to the memory of the late Sir Rowland Hill may desire, upon his own son, and not upon me, will rest the responsibility.' In the same preface he speaks of 'a delusion practised upon a generous nation' as to the main scheme, and the claim to the invention of the adhesive stamp as 'an usurpation of his (father's) rightful claims practised upon a simple-minded man.'

"In reply to definite and repeated enquiries, Mr. Patrick Chalmers has failed to send to the Society any further replies to Mr. P. Hill, but has written that at some future period he means to publish a pamphlet on the Adhesive Postage Stamp question, which he will forward to the Society. The Society, feeling that an ample interval had elapsed to enable Mr. Chalmers to substantiate his charges against the late Sir Rowland Hill, discussed the whole subject at a very full meeting held on the 14th October, neither Mr. Pearson Hill nor Mr. Chalmers being present. The documents and pamphlets already referred to were produced and considered, and the view taken by the meeting was unanimous. The Committee were requested to embody that view in a report. The meeting considered that—

"Franking letters by means of stamped covers or envelopes dates back to, at least, 1818, when covers of watermarked paper, impressed with an embossed stamp, were introduced into service in Sardinia, following in part the idea of M. Velayer, who used a sort of franked envelope for a district post in Paris in 1653.

"The use of adhesive stamps for payment of a Government duty was practised in Great Britain at the commencement of the present century, when the familiar stamps affixed to patent medicines were adopted.

"The germ of the idea of uniformity in a postal rate might be traced in the right of passage through the post accorded to newspapers; for so long ago as the reign of Queen Anne, when every copy of a newspaper printed had to bear a stamp denoting fiscal duty, the privilege of passing it free by post under certain restrictions, but irrespective of distance, was enjoyed; and a somewhat similar observation might be applied to the system of franking letters by certain privileged persons.* The Society considered that these facts, though they undoubtedly preceded in point of time, in no sense

*? Is free postage a uniform charge any more than a mileage rate? Nothing a mile for a 1000 miles is still nothing. (Pearson Hill)

practically anticipated the plan of uniform penny postage, the origination and bringing of which to a successful issue mainly resulted from the untiring efforts of Sir Rowland Hill.

"It did not appear to the Society that the credit which attaches to the name and labours of Sir Rowland Hill as a Postal Reformer was in any degree diminished by facts which for years had been before the world, but had resulted in no practical outcome, nor that the popular appreciation of his services exceeds his real merits.

"As to the statements that Sir Rowland Hill took his plan of postal reform from the Fifth Report of the Commission of Post-office Enquiry of April, 1836, the allegations of Mr. P. Chalmers appeared to be conclusively disproved by the dissimilarity of the plans, and the fact that Sir R. Hill's first evidence in support of his scheme of reform was given early in 1837 before the very same Commissioners who signed the report of 1836, so that concealment, had there been anything to conceal, would have been impossible; and as to priority of invention of the adhesive postage labels, the clear terms of Mr. James Chalmers' letter of 18th May, 1840, themselves disproved his claim, even if the other facts were excluded. Those facts, however, which had lately come before the Society in the papers and discussions on the stamps of Great Britain absolutely negative any priority of claim."

The foregoing report of the proceedings of the meeting of the 14th October last, having been drawn up by the Committee in conformity with the request of the Society, was laid before the Society's regular meeting held on the 28th October, 1882, when the report, having been read and discussed, was adopted. The Society, taking the specific allegations made by Mr. Chalmers into consideration, resolved unanimously that Mr. Patrick Chalmers has failed to substantiate any of these allegations, or in particular either—

- I. That his late father, James Chalmers, of Dundee, anticipated Sir Rowland Hill in suggesting the use of adhesive postage stamps; or—
- II. That Sir Rowland Hill took his plan of postal reform from the "Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Post-office Enquiry of April, 1836."

It was further unanimously resolved—

- III. That no ground has been shown for charging Sir R. Hill with having fraudulently or otherwise appropriated or attempted to appropriate to himself the credit belonging to any other person in the aforesaid reforms, or for stating that he dealt with the public otherwise than openly and candidly, or for any of the allegations made against his good faith and uprightness by Mr. P. Chalmers.

IV. That the Society regrets that Mr. Patrick Chalmers should have made such charges without sufficient foundation, and should have persisted in his attacks on the character and memory of the late Sir Rowland Hill.

V. That a copy of the foregoing resolutions be sent to Mr. P. Chalmers and to Mr. Pearson Hill.

Although the Philatelic Society had received and read all Mr. P. Chalmers' published statements, and had waited, at his request, nearly a whole year for such further "proofs" as he might desire to

submit, and moreover did not proceed to judgment until he had had ample warning that they should do so on the facts before them, unless he furnished them with anything more, he has the impudence and dishonesty to assert that this judgment of the London Philatelic Society—the highest authority on such matters—is worthless, *as the Society had decided the question without waiting to hear what he had to say*!

Either he had hoped to delay what he well knew must be an adverse judgment, or he was deliberately preparing (as he has done in other cases) a small substratum of fact upon which to erect a mass of misrepresentation, purposely keeping back some worthless evidence, so that he might afterwards say he had not been fully heard.

After the judgment was delivered he published letters which he said he had received from old people in Dundee, who, if the letters are genuine, assert they can recollect James Chalmers making stamps, and they believe it was in 1834—a date which had doubtless been suggested to them—but in support of their marvellous memory for dates nearly fifty years gone by, they do not apparently produce a single scrap of documentary evidence.

It is important to notice the date of these alleged letters. In December 1881 Mr. Pat. Chalmers received copies of the Philatelic Record containing my charges against him. These letters from Dundee are dated April and May 1882. The London Philatelic Society did not pronounce its decision till October 1882. These letters, therefore, must have been in his possession for five or six months before the decision was given, so that he had ample opportunity to submit them to the Society while it was investigating the matter, had he believed they would bear examination.

For a long time before I brought the matter under the notice of the London Philatelic Society, Mr. Patrick Chalmers had been urging an examination of his claims. He applied to the City Commissioners of Sewers, and the Rowland Hill Memorial (Mansion House) Committee—bodies of gentlemen not very likely to possess the knowledge necessary to sift out the truth—yet when I had made for him the opportunity for investigation by the most competent authority, and when it was, therefore, so important for him to secure a verdict in his favour, he deliberately kept back the evidence which he now pretends is of such great importance.

In James Chalmers' letters there is not the slightest hint of his having invented adhesive stamps prior to the date he himself fixed viz. November 1837—and the sole evidence of his having done so in 1834, consists of these letters which Mr. Patrick Chalmers dared not submit for investigation, or rather the sole evidence consists of his assertions as to what these letters contain. Mr. P. Chalmers has over and over again been convicted of giving false dates, and false and garbled versions of letters and other documents, even when these documents were readily accessible and exposure was certain sooner or later. It is not difficult therefore to guess what liberties he would take with letters which, if they exist at all, are safe in his own possession.

I am told the man is mad.

PEARSON HILL.

It is important also to state that Mr Chalmers has, since the judgment, appealed to the London Philatelic Society for its reversal. The Society has read every thing he has published in the way of pamphlets, &c. &c. innumerable, but has answered him that they see no reason to alter their decision.—Chalmers suppresses all mention of this fact.