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- ART. VIII.—1. *The Ninth Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Management of the Post-Office Department. Presented to both Houses of Parliament.* 1837.
2. *Post-Office Reform—its Importance and Practicability.* By ROWLAND HILL. London: 1837.
3. *First, Second, and Third Reports from the Select Committee on Postage; together with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix. Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed.* 1838.
4. *Facts and Reasons in support of Mr Rowland Hill's Plan for a Universal Penny Postage.* By W. H. ASHURST. 1838.
5. *The Post Circular.* Nos. I. to XIV. London: 1838.
6. *Du Service des Postes, et de la Taxation des Lettres au Moyen d'un Timbre.* Paris: 1839.

IN the beginning of the year 1837, a pamphlet was published, developing a plan by which, according to the calculations of its author, letters might be conveyed through the post, from one end of the kingdom to the other, at the uniform rate of one penny per half ounce, without any great ultimate loss to the revenue. This bold project did not obtain authority from the name of its author, who was little known to the world. It did not seem capable of being made subservient to the objects of party politics, and it was far out of the region of polemics. Its boldness was, therefore, likely to be quietly contemned as empirical rashness by a busy population like our own, whose curiosity has been palled by the fallacious hopes of advantages which have been so constantly obtruded on the public attention. No scheme, therefore, was ever promulgated with less probability of success from adventitious causes; and yet no scheme ever made its way in so short a time to the convictions of mankind, not only in this country, but wherever a post-office is to be found.

In two years and a-half, the theory of a private individual became the law of the land; and efforts are making in France, Germany, and other countries, to introduce into their own systems the principles on which the plan is founded.

It would be useful, and not less interesting, step by step, to trace the progress of this plan. It would show the rapid and consentaneous movement of the national mind in an aspect somewhat new, and highly satisfactory. The numberless individuals, bound together by no party ties, who sprang forward in all parts of the country, to labour, each in his own way, for the common object; the various public bodies who examined, discussed, sanctioned, and supported it; the newspapers in their unwearied exertions, although their conductors

might not unreasonably have been afraid that the facility of advertising by circular letters would be adverse to their interests,—all these acting towards one end, and influencing the public and the legislature solely by the array of facts and arguments which they were able to adduce, present a spectacle peculiar to our age and country ;—a spectacle, too, of the best omen, at a period when good omens are by no means too common.

But our space precludes the possibility of such details ; and we must be satisfied with a very hasty review of the principal steps in this extraordinary movement.

A Commission was sitting when Mr Hill's pamphlet appeared, charged with an ' Inquiry into the Management of the Post-Office ' Department.' The Commissioners, Lord Duncannon, Mr Labouchere, and Lord Seymour, had already concluded their investigation as regarded the general post, and were engaged in the twopenny post department of the metropolis. The Commissioners summoned Mr Hill, and subjected his plan to careful examination ;—comparing his statements and opinions, as they were expressed, with the evidence of Mr Smith, the chief of the department, who was examined at the same time. We may here remark, that the gentlemen of the Post-Office have necessarily been placed in a difficult and somewhat invidious position. All public offices are besieged by *plan-mongers*, whose projects, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, are not worth the paper on which they are set forth. Between these schemers, who are by no means a patient and long-suffering race, and the executive officers of the different boards by which the complicated machine of government is kept in motion, there is a feud of ancient standing. The projector and the officer are therefore of necessity placed in a hostile attitude. In short, they are natural enemies. The plan is considered by the officer, under the strong presumption that it is built on some fallacy which he is bound to detect and expose : add to this habit of mind, that it is not pleasant to find a stranger claiming to instruct one in his own art and mystery, and we shall not wonder at the slow progress which improvement must perhaps ever be destined to make, in places where the improver has no power of stimulating either by the hope of profit or the fear of loss.

But this state of things, be it remembered, is not productive of unmixed evil : the officer makes an excellent Devil's advocate. All the zeal which a knowledge of practical difficulties, and a keen suspicion, not to say insurmountable distrust, of every thing speculative, can bring to oppose the reception of a theory in which his microscopic glance can detect aught unsound, is brought into full activity.

In July 1837, the Commissioners, having concluded their investigation, reported in favour of Mr Hill's plan, so far as regards the department in reference to which the examination had been made. 'We propose (say they) that the distinction in the rates and districts, which now applies to letters delivered by the two-penny and threepenny post, shall not in any way affect correspondence transmitted under stamped covers; and that any letter, not exceeding an ounce in weight, shall be conveyed free within the metropolis, and the districts to which the town and country deliveries now extend, if enclosed in an envelope, bearing a penny stamp.'

In May of that year, a Petition in favour of the plan was presented to both Houses of Parliament, signed by merchants, bankers, insurance companies, men of science, solicitors, publishers, printers, and others, comprising in each class the most important names which the metropolis can furnish. About the same time a Memorial to a similar effect was presented to the Lords of the Treasury by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; and in the course of the same year, the question was warmly taken up by the Common Council of London and the Councils of several provincial towns.

Parliament met in November, and Mr Wallace, who has been a most zealous leader in the cause of Post-Office Reform, obtained a Committee—'To inquire into the present rates and mode of charging postage, with a view to such reduction thereof as may be made without injury to the revenue; and for this purpose, to examine especially into the mode recommended for charging and collecting postage, in a pamphlet by Mr Rowland Hill.'

It has been erroneously stated, that Mr Wallace had the nomination of this Committee. The nomination was made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Now, there are some qualities which so certainly enter into the composition of every Chancellor of the Exchequer who ever lived, that we have sometimes thought we could, Crambo-like, imagine that functionary in the abstract, without any reference to either the House of Commons or Downing Street. The most remarkable of these qualities is an *ex-officio* sensibility to an approaching depression in the revenue, of the most delicate kind. No one, therefore, was less likely to submit a plan which was founded on so startling a reduction of charge to a slight or partial examination. Neither, in point of fact, as most of our readers already know,

was the scrutiny less than most severe. The Committee sat sixty-three days; and they examined, besides the Post-Office functionaries and officers of the Stamp-Office, eighty-three witnesses. The Postmaster-General and the Secretary, though favourable to a reduction in postage, objected, it is known, to the penny rate, as destructive to the revenue; and expressed great doubts as to the principle of uniformity. They were, very properly, invited to send for examination whatever witnesses they chose to select; and several were examined, who entertained more or less the same objection to the plan as their chiefs. The investigation was therefore by no means *ex-parte*; and it is admitted on all hands, that the Committee spared nothing which could be supplied by zeal and industry to arrive at the truth. Nor is it less notorious that they contained within their body men peculiarly conversant with the subject of enquiry; and others who, from their avocations, were intimately acquainted with the bearing of the established rates of postage on the business and comfort of all classes of society. The result to which the Committee ultimately came, is no doubt fresh in the minds of our readers. They decided for uniformity of charge—for pre-payment by stamps; and they Reported, that in their opinion the establishment of a penny rate would, after some temporary depression, produce no ultimate loss to the revenue.

But having formed the opinion, that the terms of their appointment precluded them from recommending any plan which involved an immediate loss of revenue, they restricted themselves to a uniform twopenny rate.

This Committee, as we have seen, was appointed in November 1837. In the month of February following, several of the most eminent merchants and bankers of the city of London, with Mr Bates, of the house of Baring and Company at their head, formed a committee for the purpose of collecting evidence to lay before the Parliamentary Committee. This mercantile committee, including men of all political parties—men who had nothing in common, except that they stood at the head of their class for wealth, intelligence, and respectability—has of late been charged with undertaking this important and necessary duty from selfish motives, and with prosecuting it by unworthy means. With equal truth it has been asserted, that the public desire for the reduction of postage has been created by the labours of this body; whereas it has been seen, that before the mercantile committee came into existence, that feeling had obtained sufficient weight to induce the House of Commons, without a dissentient voice, to grant a committee of inquiry. No doubt, it was the prevalence of that feeling which called the mercantile committee

into existence: those who impugn its labours, therefore, are mistaking the effect for the cause. The popular desire for any measure, when it reaches a certain height, always produces an organization to give it practical effect; but to suppose that the mercantile committee could create such a feeling as we all witnessed during the progress of this measure, is to the last degree absurd. Are the clergy of Wells, who canvassed the city for signatures to the postage petition, under the control of the London merchants? Did the Board of Scottish Dissenters, or the Ministers of the Congregational Churches in Durham and Northumberland, petition for penny postage at the nod of the London mercantile committee? It has been a gratifying circumstance to observe the well-directed zeal of the clergy, as manifested in their support of the penny rate. If any class of men is acquainted with the wants of the poor, it is the working clergy of these kingdoms. It is therefore no mean testimony in favour of the measure, as a boon to the labouring classes, that it has called forth so much activity among the clergy of all denominations.

In the Session of 1838, 320 petitions, with 38,709 signatures, were presented to the House of Commons alone. In the session of 1839, which was after the publication of the evidence taken before the Parliamentary Committee, and the report thereon, the number was 2007 petitions, with 262,809 signatures. It should be remarked, however, that the number of signatures gives a very inadequate idea of the number of persons concurring in the petitions, or of the importance of the classes from whom they proceeded. For instance, in the Session of 1839, we find 148 petitions from town-councils, 58 from mechanics' institutes and societies of a similar nature, and 83 from various associations of professional men,* the greater number of which would, of course, bear but one signature to each.

Thus stood the question when Ministers brought in their bill for the adoption of Mr Hill's plan to its full extent. That, with an eye to revenue alone, a great reduction of the rates of postage was absolutely necessary, every man admitted—that, on the amount of that reduction, as on every question of mere degree, there was some differences of opinion, cannot be denied. But the nation at large had decided for Mr Hill's plan; and of those who thought its adoption would materially injure the revenue, some of the highest note expressed a decided opinion that his plan gave a better chance of success than any other. Thus, on the debate on the second reading in the House of Lords, the Duke of Wel-

* See 'Analysis of the Parliamentary Petitions for the Uniform Penny Postage.'

lington 'admitted that Mr Hill's plan, if adopted exactly as Mr Hill had proposed it, was of all plans the most likely to be successful.' And the Duke of Richmond pressed upon Ministers, 'that if they brought forward a plan for a uniform postage at all, they should bring forward Mr Hill's plan of a penny rate, and not one of twopence, as was recommended in the Report of the Committee of the other House. He felt perfectly certain, that if the measure were to be put in execution, it ought to be on the more liberal footing of a penny rate, or there was danger that the plan might prove detrimental to the revenue.'

Lord Ashburton and Mr Samuel Jones Loyd had expressed a decided opinion against the propriety of making the Post-Office a subject of revenue at all. Lord Ashburton thinks it the 'worst of our taxes:'—'none have so injurious a tendency.' And Mr Loyd is of opinion, 'that if there be any one thing which the Government ought, consistently with its great duties to the public, to do gratuitously, it is the carriage of letters.' Lord Lowther* had long ago called the attention of Government to the principles upon which the Post-Office was founded, as avowed in the early Acts, to show that public convenience was the primary object in view, and that revenue was a secondary and subordinate matter. Mean time, no counter plan was proffered; and none, we firmly believe, could have been set forth, which would not have been found beset with far more potent objections than have been yet discovered to the penny rate, after the most rigid scrutiny.

In this state of things, the path of Ministers was clear. A most obnoxious impost had been submitted to examination. Inquiries and discussions, almost without number, had resulted in the firm and universal belief, that the rates then imposed were pregnant with enormous evils, deeply affecting the welfare of the community. The question being thus narrowed in all minds to one of revenue, the House of Commons, by an overwhelming majority, pledged itself to afford a substituted tax, if, upon experiment, any substitution should be found necessary. Ministers did their duty, and the bill passed into a law.

But the introduction of the bill into Parliament produced some curious phenomena out of doors, worthy of a moment's attention. The Journals whose duty it is to prove Ministers in the wrong, whatever side of whatever question they may elect to take, had seized upon Mr Hill's plan as a godsend. That any Chancellor of the Exchequer should have the courage to adopt such a re-

* See Evidence of Lord Ashburton, 8126; of Mr Loyd, 10,378; also Lord Lowther's Report on Prices Current.

duction of rates never entered their imagination; but they knew very well that the change would be extremely popular, and that abundance of fact and argument could be adduced in its behalf. Here, then, was a prize—faction served and popularity gained by the same course. Accordingly, none were so loud and long in favour of penny postage as the 'Tory Journals—none so intolerant of delay. 'Of all reforms, the reform of the Post-Office' seemed to the *Morning Post*, on 30th March 1839, 'to be one most justified by common sense, and most called for by the circumstances of the country. It doubted, whether, in seeking revenue from the Post-Office, we are not abstracting seed, instead of gleaning from the harvest.' The *Standard*, on the 29th May, 'promised the hearty concurrence of the Conservatives to a practical measure like the penny postage;' and pronounced it a 'superior means to all others for promoting popular education.' 'The only question with the *Times* of the 16th April 1839, was—'Will the Ministers have the honesty and courage to try it?'—'It may well be termed the cause of the whole people of the United Kingdom against the small coterie of place-holders in St Martin's le Grand and its dependencies.' And on the 31st May it declared, 'into such a question it would be utterly repugnant to reason and common sense to allow party feeling for a moment to enter.'

But their prayers are at length heard—their aspirations for a penny rate are about to be accomplished. What, then, is their course of action? Do they rejoice in their success? Not at all. On such occasions, Journalists are in the habit of making somewhat liberal claims on the public approbation for their own share in the struggle; and they attribute, perhaps, sufficient potency to their own exertions and influence. But with exemplary modesty and forbearance, our Tory 'contemporaries' refrain from a single note of triumph. They rarely break silence at all, and when they do, it is to hint a doubt of the soundness of their own views. Their occupation is gone!—at least for a time. The change in the political atmosphere produced a corresponding change in the Dutch weather-house of Tory politics. Fair-weather Joan retired from view, and foul-weather John took her place.

Thus the field is not forsaken. No sooner had the Bill fairly passed, and the perilous attack on 'public credit' became inevitable, than a writer is seen to take the field, in order to assure us that the Post-Office revenue is gone for ever; that the Parliament, the Government, and the Nation, have been the dupes of a scheme at which common sense revolts;—founded on facts which turn out to be erroneous, and on calculations ludicrously false and inconsistent with each other. It is quite clear, unless

the censor is wrong himself—a contingency which never enters his own mind—that if the House had only been wise enough to refer the matter to a class in a national school conversant with the first four rules of arithmetic, the bubble would have exploded at once, instead of being inflated as it was for two years and a half by the breath of millions. How this patriot managed to sleep in his bed we wot not. Seeing, as he did, his countrymen labouring under a delusion which gathered strength day by day, until its destructive powers had consummated their object—he, the sole depository of the wisdom required for dispelling it, sits dumb, and refrains from uttering a single word in season. But no sooner is the catastrophe complete, than his silence is at an end; and he shows very satisfactorily that it arose from no want of words, or of disposition to utter them at sufficient length.*

Still, after all, if this had been done with common fidelity as to facts and references, there would have been no great room for censure. The question before the country and the legislature had, it is true, been settled. That question was, whether sufficient evidence had been adduced in favour of the plan to justify its trial; and Queen, Lords, and Commons, had decided in the affirmative. The measure will now therefore be judged of by its results, and by these alone,—for tried it must be. No one, then, can refer the attacks which are now made upon it to any thing but the spirit of faction; and no doubt, if there were any mode in which the obvious intention of embarrassing this great change could take effect, these lucubrations would deserve a reprobation far more severe than any we now think it worth while to bestow. Being, however, quite harmless in the direction in which they are intended to operate, they may even do good in another way, by inducing thought and reflection in the public mind, on the principles involved in this most important innovation—principles which, if well founded, as we firmly believe them to be, are capable of useful extension through many other departments of the public service.

Want of space will also prevent us from doing more than merely to point the attention of our readers to the just appreciation which the Tory Journals have made of the value of their own opinions, as measured by the length of time which they expect their readers to recollect them. After the lapse of 'one little month,' the courteous reader is deemed to have forgotten the ecstasies of the *Morning Post* in favour of the Post-Office Reform; and its indignation, that considerations of revenue

* See *Quarterly Review*, No. 128.

should be allowed to interfere with a reform, 'justified by common sense, and called for by the circumstances of the country.' And he is supposed to be quite ready for all its subsequent contradictions.

We shall then mainly confine ourselves to a survey of Mr Hill's plan, and the grounds on which it stands; and although neither our space nor our readers' forbearance would suffice for a full and complete answer to what has been urged against it, we feel but little doubt, that after we have drawn attention to its broad features, it will be seen that nothing remains to be done to place any fair mind in possession of all the merits of the controversy.

The overwhelming and admitted vice of the old system, is the enormous price of the articles furnished to the public, compared with its natural cost, as measured by the price at which competitors would be content with, if the carriage of letters were a free trade. From this enormous and artificial price results the evasion of the law by an illicit carriage of letters; and, where this is not practicable, an immense suppression of correspondence.

It is obviously impossible to make an exact estimate of the amount of evasion, or to approach the truth within very narrow limits. The evidence, however, clearly proves it to be much greater than could have been thought possible until actual enquiry had been instituted. The evidence of Mr Cobden,* who gives the result of investigations made by the Chamber of Commerce of Manchester, goes to show, that the proportion of letters from that town to London sent by post, is only as one to six sent by other means. At Glasgow similar enquiries produced a larger proportion against the Post-Office—viz. ten to one.† It would be too much to conclude that any thing like a similar proportion holds good throughout the country at large; and even as regards the towns in question, some considerable deduction must probably be made; inasmuch as the cases examined were those of persons engaged in trades in which correspondence was a heavy item of expense, and consequently where the motives were strong to reduce the cost as much as possible.

But suppose the number of letters which evade the post to be only equal to those which pass through it—a proportion which no one reading the Evidence will find too large, and which would seem to be admitted by the opponents of the measure—even then evasion becomes an evil, the magnitude of which cannot be tho-

* Evidence, 6683, &c.

† Ibid. 8948.

roughly felt without going through some considerable portion of the evidence before the Committee. It is quite clear, however, that an habitual breach of the law by all classes, is of itself a state of things much to be deplored, and pregnant with the worst consequences. ‘I have had my mouth stopped,’ writes a clergyman of the Established Church, ‘when I have been protesting strongly against more serious evasions of the revenue laws as disgraceful to those who practised them, by the question, “Pray, do you never send letters otherwise than through the Post-Office?”’*

With regard to revenue, it is obvious that the ‘principle of destruction’ is here in full exercise; for it is a mere truism to say, that the illicit correspondence of the country contributes nothing to *that*—a remark which equally applies to the correspondence suppressed, by the high rate of postage, in those cases in which there is no practicable mode of sending letters through other channels than the Post-Office. The vast amount of this suppression is abundantly proved in the Evidence; but the experience of our readers will suffice, not indeed to enable them fully to compute the enormity of the mischief, but to show them that it must be of the highest degree of importance. We are justified in saying, that, for the great mass of our countrymen, the Post-Office does not exist; for the higher and middle classes sink into nothing if measured by numbers against those below them; and it is only necessary to compare the income of a labouring man with his pressing wants, to see that it is idle to suppose he will apply his little surplus to the expensive enjoyment of post-letters. It would be easy to fill pages with instances of pain and misery which result from there being no post-office for the poor. We shall confine ourselves, however, to a few pregnant facts, drawn from the evidence. Mr A. Davidson,† needle-manufacturer, related to the Committee an instance in which a poor man was unaware of the death of his relative for six or eight months after he died; in consequence of the family of neither the one nor the other having been able to afford the postage. Mr Emery,‡ deputy-lieutenant for Somersetshire, and a Commissioner of Taxes, relates several facts which prove at once the desire and the inability of the poor to correspond. ‘A person,’ says he, ‘in my parish, of the name of Rosser, had a letter from a granddaughter in London, and she could not take up the letter for want of means. She was a pauper, receiving 2s. 6d. a-week; and, if you will allow me, I will repeat her own words, for I have taken them down:—“She

* Post Circular, p. 34.

† Evidence, 7687, &c.

‡ Ibid. 10084.

“ told the post-office keeper that she must wait until she 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 postmistress. She
“ never had the letter since.” That led me to inquire further; and,
‘ by going to the different local offices in the neighbourhood, (I
‘ went to almost every one of them within a circle of fourteen,
‘ fifteen, or twenty miles,) I made inquiry what effect it had on
‘ the poor; and I have taken down their answers, just as they
‘ gave them to me.’ These are the answers from the post-office
keepers as to the effect it had on poor people. The postmaster
of Banwell said,—‘ 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, when 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. I am
‘ quite sure, if the postage of letters were lowered to a penny, ten
‘ times the number would be written by all classes of people.’ What
follows is the answer of another postmaster, at a large village
containing 1500 or 1600 inhabitants, called Congresbury:—‘ I
‘ have sometimes had complaints made of the high rate of post-
‘ age; 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 says,
‘ The poor, and rich too, complain of the high charge of letters.
‘ I am quite sure, if they were not so high, Government would
‘ lose nothing, there would be so many more written. 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.’—‘ Sixpence,’ says Mr Brewin,* one of the Society of Friends, ‘ is a third of a poor man’s daily income. If a gentleman, whose fortune is £1000 a-year, or £3 a-day, had to pay one-third of his daily income, that is, a sovereign for a letter; how often would he write letters of friendship? Let a gentleman put that to himself, and then he will be able to see how the poor man cannot be able to pay sixpence for his letter. The people do not think of using the post-office; it is barred against them by the very high charge.’

This apt and forcible illustration has drawn down on Mr Brewin and M. Piron, the able and experienced *Sous-Directeur* of the French Post-Office, as well as on the Committee, who take the same view as Mr Brewin, the epithet of ‘ wiseacres.’ And their ‘ short-sighted sophism’ is thus exposed by the profound, though somewhat scornful, sage who has discovered it. ‘ These wiseacres wholly forget that a man of £1000 a-year would probably receive *thirty* or *forty* letters for every *one* which could be addressed to a poor labourer. There can be no doubt that, generally speaking, the number of letters which any man receives bears some proportion to his business, that is to say, his income; and if so, even on Messrs Brewin and Piron’s own argument, the tax falls pretty equally on all. But why confine this philanthropic principle to so slight and rare an incident in a labourer’s life as the receipt of a letter? But why, *we* would ask, is it a ‘ rare incident in a labourer’s life’ to receive a letter? Has the labourer no relatives—no friends? Do the children of the rich and the poor man observe the same proportion as their incomes; or has nature regulated the affections by the rule of three? A more severe condemnation of the established system could not have been pronounced by its bitterest enemy than is conveyed in the simple statement of the fact, that to receive a letter is a ‘ rare incident in a labourer’s life.’ The writer actually falls into the blunder of taking that infrequency of correspondence, which is the obvious and necessary effect of high postage, as its defence. He attempts, it is true, to show that soldiers and sailors make but slight use of their penny privilege; and cites the Duke of Wellington as his authority, who is said to have stated that, in a *Scotch* regiment, this privilege produced in six or seven months but sixty-three or sixty-four letters from about 700 men. The name of the regiment was not mentioned by the Duke; inquiries, therefore, cannot be made. But it would be giving much more weight to the

* Evidence, 7961.

anecdote than the Duke of Wellington could have intended, to treat it as an answer to the precise information of Captain Bentham, which is prudently left unnoticed. Captain Bentham, from his experience of the fifty-second regiment, in which he held his company, states that, upon the average, every soldier sent seven letters and a half yearly—that they appeared to value the privilege most highly—that an anxiety to write their own letters, led them zealously to profit by the regimental schools—and that the acquirement of the art of writing conduced to their respectability and good conduct.* Again, the Duke alluded to a *Highland* regiment. This has been changed into ‘*Scotch*,’ and an argument has been founded on the perversion; for, as it is truly observed, ‘the *Scotch* are remarkable above all our population for education.’ But it is known to all the world, that, as compared with the Lowland Scotch, the Highlanders are an uneducated people. Nor ought it, in common candour, to be forgotten, that soldiers and sailors, giving them full credit for all their good qualities, are not a fair sample of their class, either as regards the disposition or ability to correspond by letter. But Messrs Brewin and Piron receive their *coup-de-grace* by the following notable illustration:—‘Why not, it is asked, put the case thus? Is it not monstrous that a poor workman should pay for a loaf of bread half his daily income? What would a man of £1000 a-year say, if you were to charge him £1, 10s. for every loaf of bread consumed in his house? The same reasoning would apply to the pot of beer, the yard of cloth, the pound of leather—ay, and a *thousand times* more forcibly, we think, than to postages; and would, in short, require the repeal of all taxes that tend to exact from a day-labourer for *any* article, either of use or luxury, a greater *proportion* of his income than it would cost a man of £50,000 a year.’ The Committee find that the average tax on general post-letters is more than one thousand per cent on the prime cost. Now, we venture to think it probable, that if bread, beer, cloth, and leather were taxed at the same rate, and if the necessary consequence were, that the poor man must live on potatoes and water, and go naked and barefoot, the number of ‘*wisecracs*’ who might think such a system of taxation ‘*monstrous*,’ would be somewhat large; and that, peradventure, they might enforce their views with arguments more troublesome to deal with than any we have been able to find in the source whence this logic is drawn.

We have no room to dwell on the many ramifications into

* Evidence, 4759, &c.

which the mercantile correspondence of the country would shoot forth but for the pressure of the tax. Abundant testimony as to this will be found in the Evidence;* and an attentive consideration of the facts will show how much, not only the immediate revenue of the Post-Office, but all other branches, suffer from the consequences of suppression.

The mischiefs to which we have thus hastily adverted, although they could not be known in their full extent prior to the investigation consequent on the publication of Mr Hill's pamphlet, had led him to believe, that, if he had taken a correct view of the case, the history of the Post-Office revenue ought to support and illustrate his conclusions; and, on examination, it appeared that he was amply borne out by the facts. From the year 1815 to 1835, (the last year the accounts of which were published when he wrote,) he found that both the gross and net revenue had been stationary; or indeed, to some small extent, had been retrograde;—a portentous fact viewed in any light, but appalling, if the opinions on which we have been animadverting are founded in truth; for if, while the correspondence of other nations is rapidly increasing, our system is incapable of any but slight improvements, it is difficult to see how we are to keep our present high position. The experience of history is uniform to prove, that the progress of civilisation is intimately and essentially connected with facility of communication. If we trace it to its origin on the banks of the Nile, or among the great rivers of India, or to the islands and promontories of Greece, still we find it keep pace with the means which the nations possess for easy and rapid communication, and interchange of person and property, and with them of thought and knowledge.

In modern times, there can be no surer index of the state of a country than its correspondence; which is found to be extended by every improvement in wealth, in commercial activity, in education, and in the growth of kind affections among the people. If our correspondence, then, is to remain stationary, improvement must stand still, nay, must go backward; for our population makes a steady and rapid progress.

The excess of births above deaths is more than 1000 per diem. If, then, the number of letters written should remain the same,

* See Evidence of Messrs Christie, 3382, &c.; Dillon, 3525, &c.; De Porquet, 3930, &c.; Desborough, 3996; Moffatt, 4296, &c.; Murray, 5781; Ashlin, 6225; Maury, 6356; Brown, 6572; Cobden, 6682-3; Vickers, 7093; &c. &c.

or should be of slow increase, the inevitable conclusion must be, that we are losing ground in the great race. This, however, is the *reductio ad absurdum*. The Post-Office revenue, we have seen, is any thing but a test of the number of letters written, and still less a criterion of what our correspondence would become, if it were relieved from the pressure of exorbitant taxation.

Till of late, all the world treated the stagnation of Post-Office revenue for five-and-twenty years, as furnishing a conclusive argument that the system was unsound. But the writers to whom we have before alluded, have now discovered this view to be a mere delusion. 'Space,' they affirm, 'is the aliment of the 'Post-Office;' and thus they account for the increase of American postage. 'It is because the territory of the United 'States has been extended:' and yet, with great inconsistency, they pray it may be taken into account, on behalf of our Post-Office, that the increase between the commencement of the century and the year 1815 had been so rapid, that if we take the whole term, viz. from 1801 to 1835, correspondence increased in a greater ratio than population. Now, we beg to enquire which of the British Isles it is that was so much enlarged between 1801 and 1815, as to supply the Post-Office with its 'aliment of space;' and what it was in 1815 that produced a paralysis in that faculty of expansion. So far is the stagnation of the last twenty-five years from being explained by the rapid stream of the former fifteen years, that that rapidity furnishes another and insuperable difficulty to be overcome. To be sure, it is throwing away astonishment to wonder at any extravagance of writers, who, amidst their own irreconcilable contradictions, accuse Mr Hill of inconsistency, because he presents two accounts,—one showing, that if the Post-Office revenue had increased since 1815 only at the rate of population, it would exhibit an increase of more than £500,000,—the other, a table, showing that if it had increased as rapidly as the stage-coach duties, it would exhibit an increase of £2,000,000. Would our readers believe that grown-up gentlemen have gravely propounded for their readers' belief, that, because these two accounts give different sums, they contradict each other?

That correspondence ought to increase at least in the ratio of population, even if our position were in other respects stationary, we have already shown. But when we find that the number of travellers is so much greater than it was,—as is proved by the vast increase in the stage-coach duty,—it is reasonable to believe that other modes of intercommunication would make progress in an equal degree. We believe that correspondence, in a natural and healthy state of the Post-Office, would be multiplied far be-

yond either rate of increase. We never heard of a journey which did not, in one way or another, produce letters, and naturally so, for it multiplies the relations which subsist between the traveller and his connexions. When friends are removed from each other to such a distance that personal communication becomes rare or impossible, it is notorious that correspondence dwindles, and for the most part altogether ceases. 'Ten thousand inhabitants,' it is said, 'added to New York, would have little effect on the inland postage; but the ten thousand men pushing themselves in long lines down the west, must necessarily become customers to the Post-Office.' This assertion is not only not true, it is the direct reverse of the truth. Our proposition is, that a compressed population contributes more to the Post-Office, than the same numbers if spread over a wider space; and consequently, as far as the Post-Office is concerned, that it would have been better for the ten thousand men to remain in New York, than to depart, 'in long lines down the west.' And to prove this, let us take the correspondence of four towns with London—two at a short, and two at a long distance—by which it will be seen that space, instead of feeding the revenue, tends very much to exhaust it.

Chargeable Letters dispatched to London in the week beginning 15th January 1838, (1st Report, p. 435.)

	Letters.	Single Postage.	Total Postage.			Population.	Contribution per head, expressed in hundreds of a penny.
			£	s.	d.		
From Brighton,	3055	8	101	16	8	40,634	.60
— Reading,	1267	7	36	19	1	15,595	.56
— Belfast,	363	16	24	4	0	39,149	.15
— Aberdeen,	362	15½	23	7	7	58,019	.10

We find, too, from analyzing the returns, that of all the letters delivered in London, about one-half are posted within twelve miles of St Martin's le Grand, three-fourths within one hundred miles, and only one-fourth in all the world besides.

That the correspondence of the country labours under an unfavourable pressure, cannot then be doubted, nor indeed is it denied. The only difference is as to the degree. Before the question of

degree can be approached, it is, however, obviously necessary to estimate with exactness the cost of the article.

The cost of postage to the Post-Office is divisible into three heads:—the cost of receiving a letter into the office—of its transmission from town to town—and of delivery to the correspondent. The first and last of these heads, it is clear, must be pretty much the same for all letters: at all events, these heads of cost will not vary according to the distance which the letter travels. The item of transmission would certainly never at first sight be expected to be uniform. Mr Hill, however, as we think, has demonstrated, that it is so small in itself, and is so little increased by any increase of distance, that to consider it as uniform, is a nearer approximation to exact justice than can be made by any variation expressible in the smallest coin. We must refer to the report for the calculations, on which the exact amount is founded. All that we shall here do is, to examine the principle on which this uniformity is founded. It is quite obvious that the essential cost of transmitting light articles is not in the ratio of distance, but in the inverse ratio of numbers. Give a porter a letter to carry a mile, and you will pay him a shilling: give him a hundred letters, to be delivered at one place at a distance of five miles; and, even if he charges five shillings, it is obvious that each of these latter epistles will be despatched at a twentieth of the cost of the former. Indeed, the minute expense of mere transmission of letters in large numbers, has been used as an argument against the possibility of the Post-Office ever entering into successful competition with the smuggler. Colonel Maberly states—‘The price at which correspondence can be conveyed by a coach, is so infinitely lower than any price the Post-Office can put upon it, it is perfectly impossible that the Post-Office price can ever be one that shall at all meet the smuggler in the market.’

In using this argument, the Colonel forgot for the moment that transmission is only one of the heads, and that his supposed case did not provide for the cost of reception and delivery. It, however, satisfactorily proves the point for which we adduce it; viz. *that the cost of transmission does not depend on the distance travelled over, but on the number of letters which travel together: the cost of each being in the inverse ratio of such number.*

If, therefore, the charge upon letters of equal weight is to vary at all, such variation should be made upon the principle which these facts disclose. No one, however, has ever suggested the propriety of such a rule of charge. Yet it is to be observed, that all the objections to Mr Hill's principle of uniformity, are founded in reality on the difference produced by variation in numbers, and not in distance. Mr Hill took as his example the ex-

pense of transit between London and Edinburgh, a distance of four hundred miles; which he found to be—having regard to the whole weight of the mail—about one-ninth of a farthing for a single letter. To this example it is objected, that if he had taken the mail from London to Louth, a distance of one hundred and forty-eight miles, the cost per letter would have been found to be much higher; the number of letters between London and Louth being, of course, much less than those between London and Edinburgh. How this fact could be supposed to prove that the charge ought to increase in proportion to the distance, it is difficult to understand, when it shows that a transit of a hundred and forty-eight miles may be more expensive per letter than one of four hundred! The principle of uniformity of charge is, then, made out against all objectors at present in the field. If any should arise who would vary the charge, inversely as the number of letters sent, they certainly would stand upon better ground than any yet taken; although, if the time should ever arrive, it would be no hard task to prove that the abstract justice of such a charge, varying as it would from day to day, would be dearly bought, both to the public and the government, by surrendering the principle of uniformity. We must not, however, forget an objection which it is difficult to meet, only because

‘Your true no meaning puzzles more than wit.’

It has been urged, that inasmuch as newspapers and franks do not pay postage, therefore, when the cost of a letter is to be ascertained, they ought not to be taken into account! It is indeed a strange fallacy to say, that because franks and newspapers *pay* nothing, that therefore they *cost* nothing. The objector is paying himself and his readers with words. When he says they cost nothing, he ought to mean no more than that they cost nothing to the correspondents, either sender or receiver, which is a truism; but under this equivocal expression, he has deceived himself into believing that they cost nothing to the *Post-Office*. If the cost of production can thus be annihilated by refraining from asking the customer for the price of the article, an expedient is found for getting rid of the necessity, or even the justice, of paying for any thing. It is unfair to the public to give such valuable truths a limited application. This dead-weight of franks and newspapers must, no doubt, be taken into account, though not in the way proposed; it is a sort of revenue in *kind*, and must be considered as an addition to the money revenue paid by the Post-Office into the Exchequer; and the cost which it imposes on the Post-Office must be taken into account when the quantum of net money revenue is calculated as likely to proceed from the penny rate. And thus much as to

the principle of uniformity of charge, which our readers will at once see may be treated quite independently of any question as to its amount.

In order to ascertain the proper amount, the average rate of transit must be found—which is of course done by having regard to all the lines of road, long and short—prolific or sparing in correspondence. It, however, is shown in the Report, by a series of calculations, conducted with great care and unwearied assiduity, that such average for all the mails leaving London, is just what Mr Hill had found to be the actual cost between London and Edinburgh, viz. :— $\frac{1}{50}$ part of a penny.* So that not only is the principle of uniformity set at rest, but it is shown that what has heretofore been considered a principal item of cost, is exceedingly minute. To arrive at the exact fraction of a farthing, which represents this minute cost, doubtless required all the science and labour which have been bestowed upon the task; but the demonstration of the principle may be compressed into a few words. The charge by the mail-contractors will of course be made, and is, in point of fact, made according to the space which they construct in their coaches for the Post-Office bags; it being of little importance to them to what extent that space is filled; and if this charge is to be divided among all the letters, according to the bulk which may be fairly enough considered as measured by their weight, it is evident that the cost per letter will be high when the *boot* is empty, and low when it is full. Now, it is found that the number of chargeable letters might be increased twenty-four fold, without overloading the mails, and without any material addition to the sums paid to the contractors; hence it follows, that even the contemplated increase from the establishment of the penny rate, large as it is, will add little or nothing to the cost of transit of the whole body of letters; while it is clear that it will reduce the cost for each letter to a fraction still more minute.

The cost of transit being thus disposed of, let us see what has been done for that of reception and delivery. This cost, it is clear, must be considerably enhanced by the practice of collecting the postage on delivery—a practice which also causes delay, and may be considered as adding to the price of the service performed, by diminishing its worth;—celerity being one of the most valuable qualities in the article of which the Post-Office is the vendor. But to collect the postage at all through the means of the Post-Office, entails a heavy expense on that department, and leads to serious evils.

* Third Report, Notes, p. 11.

Each letter forms an item in several accounts—accounts between the various post-offices, and between them and the postmen. The duty of taxing or affixing the charges upon the letters, is another source of expense, and is at once complicated and laborious.

The adoption of a uniform charge for uniform weights, affords an opportunity for transferring the collection of the revenue to the Stamp-Office, from which the public will be supplied with stamped covers and labels, and by which every letter-writer will become his own M. P., and frank his correspondence himself. Into the controversy respecting the practicability of this part of the plan, we shall not enter. The details, we know, have received the most careful and anxious attention. The most eminent men of the country, in practical science, have given them the benefit of their labours; and we have the fullest belief, that in a few years the objections which have been made will appear as ludicrous as those insuperable obstacles now do, which the wisdom of our ancestors predicted would obstruct the route of Mr Palmer's mail-coaches.

The advantage to the revenue of collecting the postage by the sale of stamps, is manifest. At present the receipt of the postage is a retail operation; but, when we buy penny stamps, we shall buy for the most part many stamps at once. Moreover, it has been found by experience that the collection of the stamp revenue is made at less expense than any other having reference to the number and amount of the sums to be received.

To the public the advantages are equally clear. If the postage is paid by the sender, the temptations to fraud in his servants are considerable, and the trouble of petty disbursements is not slight. If paid by the receiver, then comes the delay in delivery.

The whole cost attendant on receiving, transmitting, and delivering a letter, according to the present system, the Committee found to be $\frac{7.6}{100}$ of a penny, of which the cost of transit is $\frac{1.9}{100}$, and that of receipt and delivery $\frac{5.7}{100}$. The fraction $\frac{1.9}{100}$ will be, of course, reduced by every addition to the total correspondence. The other fraction $\frac{5.7}{100}$, it is quite evident, would be greatly reduced by relieving the Post-Office from the collection of postage; and, as a large business is always carried on at a less proportionate expense than a small one, the expected increase of correspondence will also operate on this part of the charge, though not so powerfully as on the cost of transit.

On the assumption of a fivefold increase, Mr Hill estimates that the total Post-Office cost of a letter of average weight will be reduced to a halfpenny—an estimate which any one who will take the pains to follow him through all the steps of his investigation, will think sufficiently high.

We have now ascertained two important points ; first, the actual cost of a letter on the present system, and the cost estimated with great care of a letter on the new plan ; but on that plan a five-fold increase of chargeable letters will be necessary to preserve the revenue from a greater loss than somewhere about £300,000 per annum ; while a sixfold increase would more than support it.

It now then remains to examine what are the grounds for expecting a large increase in the number of letters sent through the post.

That a very considerable portion of the letters now written evade the Post-Office, has been already seen ; but all the witnesses, as might be expected, agree in stating, that with charges at all approximating to those of the contrabandist, the Post-Office would be preferred. We may then fairly expect to add by far the greater part of this class to the present number. It is, however, proposed to increase the facilities of sending by the post very materially. Indeed, the railway system at one and the same time urges forward such improvements, and furnishes the means of carrying them into effect ; and the railways already operate on the transmission of letters far beyond what would be supposed by considering them only as connecting their *termini*, and the intermediate places on their lines. A common road may be compared to a river with a narrow basin ; while a railway resembles one with a very wide basin, draining therefore a great breadth of country. Its power of drawing every thing to itself from places which lie at a distance from its line, is prodigious ; and this lateral attraction has already loaded the railway mails with letters, which, merely looking to the map, no one would suppose could have their route so much inflected from the straight course, without a loss of time for which even railway speed could not compensate. This fact, we may remark, in passing, explains how the higher charge for the mails which go by the railway, does not of necessity imply that the cost per letter is greater than before. Space for space, the railway serves the public at a less cost than was paid to the coach proprietors. But it can hardly be expected that a travelling post-office, containing many hundreds of cubic feet, can be conveyed, even laying the increased speed out of calculation, for the same sum as the public formerly paid for less than a twentieth part of such room in the *boot* of a coach.

That increased facilities of sending by post will increase the correspondence, is proved by the experience both of England and France. Palmer's improvements, even in the face of enhanced rates of postage, trebled the number of letters in twenty years. ' The new facilities of transmission afforded by the Man-

‘chester and Liverpool railway, increased the number of letters between the *termini* nearly fifty per cent in six years; postage remaining the same.’ And in France it is stated by M. Piron, that within a few years a diminution in the time of transmission between Paris and Marseilles, from one hundred and eighteen hours to sixty-eight hours, has doubled the correspondence between those two cities, the rates of postage remaining unaltered.*

The experiment of morning mails is too new to enable us to speak to numbers; but it has been clearly ascertained, that it has produced so large an addition as much more than to justify the change even as a measure of finance. These, and other improvements which are in preparation, would afford a stimulus of a cognate kind with that arising from a reduction of postage. It would give a better article at the same price. But the great public want would still remain unsatisfied. The community who would write more frequently if the mails were despatched more frequently, or travelled with greater speed, are few indeed compared to those who would be satisfied with even a slower rate than the present, if the price could be brought within their means, or down to a fair proportion between the object to be obtained and the price of obtaining it.

The degree in which reduction of postage would operate, cannot be accurately estimated; but Mr Hill has indicated a guiding principle which points at a *minimum* of increase, leaving its *maximum* still to be ascertained. His position is, that no reduction hitherto made in the price of any article in general demand, has diminished the total amount of public expenditure upon that article. And he adduces the following evidence in proof of its correctness:—

‘1. The price of soap, for instance, has recently † fallen by about one-eighth: the consumption in the same time has increased by one-third. Tea, again, the price of which, since the opening of the China trade, has fallen by about one-sixth, has increased in consumption by almost a half. The consumption of silk goods, which, subsequently to the year 1823, have fallen in price by about one-fifth, has more than doubled. The consumption of coffee, the price of which, subsequently to 1823, has fallen about one-fourth, has more than tripled. And the consumption of cotton goods, the price of which, during the last twenty years, has fallen by nearly one-half, has in the same time been fourfolded.”—*Post-Office Reform*, p. 70.

‘2. The sale of newspapers for the twelve months before the

* *Du Service des Postes*, p. 4.

† That is, at the close of 1836.

‘ late reduction in stamps was—35,576,056,* at an average price, say of 7d., costing the public, £1,037,634.

‘ For the twelve months subsequent to the reduction it was—53,496,207,† at an average price, say of 4½d., costing the public £1,058,779.

‘ 3. The annual number of advertisements before the late reduction in the advertisement duty, was—1,010,000, at an average price, say of 6s., costing the public £303,000.

‘ It is now—1,670,000, at an average price, say of 4s., costing the public £334,000.

‘ 4. The number of persons paying for admission to the Tower was, in the ten months prior to the late reduction—9508, at 3s. each (including the warder’s fee),—£1426.

‘ In the ten months subsequent to the reduction it was—37431, at 1s. each,—£1871.

‘ The rule established by these facts, viz. that the demand for the article increases in a greater proportion than the price decreases; so that, if one thousand are sold at 1s., many more than two thousand would be sold at 6d., is, it is believed, without exception.—Certainly the article of postage does not furnish one.

‘ The reduction of the Irish postage rates which was made in 1827, was immediately followed by a considerable increase in the Irish Post-Office revenue, though precisely to what extent it would be difficult to state, owing to a transfer that was made at the same time of certain receipts from the English to the Irish Post-Office revenue. An alteration was made in the year 1831, which was equivalent to a partial reduction, by exempting the correspondence of a portion of the metropolis, which had paid the general-post rate, from paying an additional two-penny-post rate. Consequent on this reduction, though at first attended with some loss, the Post-Office revenue was improved to the amount of £10,000 a-year, instead of there being a loss of £20,000 a-year, as had been expected by the Post-Office. A reduction made in 1835, on the rates of ship-letters, has been followed by a considerable increase in that branch of the revenue.‡—*Third Report of the Select Committee on Postage.*

‘ The postage of letters between Edinburgh and the adjacent towns and villages was, in 1837, reduced from 2d to 1d. In rather more than a year the letters had more than doubled, and were on the increase when the last returns were made.||

* No. 307, Session 1838.

† No. 184, Session 1839.

‡ The increase has been from £84,000 to £116,000 per annum.—(Vide *First Report on Postage*, p. 472.)

|| *Third Report*, Abstract, p. 24.

We are informed, on authority on which we can rely, that with regard to all places where the penny rate has been established in lieu of a higher, the result, taken as a whole, has been the same as at Edinburgh; and we have ascertained for ourselves some facts which go strongly to support Mr Hill's position. His account of the Tower fees was taken before the last reduction in May, which brought the fee down to sixpence. Comparing the proceeds during similar months at each rate of admission, the account will stand thus:—

Number of Visitors from May to November.

Three Shilling Rate. 1837.	One Shilling Rate. 1838.	Sixpenny Rate. 1839.
7,533	31,333	56,213
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Produce, £1,129, 19s.	£1,566, 13s.	£1,405 : 6 : 6

It should be borne in mind that the Coronation, which took place in June 1838, must, by the concourse of strangers which it caused to repair to the metropolis, have greatly added to the number of visitors to the Tower in that year; and this may be the reason why the increase under the sixpenny rate has not been larger than it is.

From the 1st of July the tolls on Waterloo Bridge, on horses and carriages, were reduced somewhat more than 50 per cent—the penny toll on foot passengers remaining as before; and the result of the reduction, even in its first period, up to the 1st December, 1839, compared with the corresponding five months of 1838, has made, upon an annual toll of about L.3250, a diminution of only L.60. There is now an actual weekly increase, and there can be little doubt that the ensuing year will exhibit a considerable gain caused by the reduction.

But the effects of the reduction of the duty on tea, furnishes a still stronger case in point. In 1784, Mr Pitt made a large reduction in the duty on tea, which of course led to a diminution in the price of that article. The following table shows the effect on the consumption and on the total expenditure. The quantities of tea sold, are taken from a return ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on the 23d March, 1813;—the average prices, which are those of the wholesale dealer, and which include the duty and excise, have been determined by careful enquiry.

Before the Reduction.

Years.	Quantities of Tea Sold in lbs.	Average price per lb.	Total Expenditure in Tea.
1781.	5,031,649	6s.	£5,221,352.
1782.	6,495,518		
1783.	5,877,340		

After the Reduction.

Years.	Quantities of Tea Sold in lbs.	Average price per lb.	Total Expenditure in Tea.
1785.	14,921,893	4s.	£9,417,699.
1786.	15,943,682		
1787.	16,222,923		

The result of the reductions in fees for admission to the Tower, is of the most cheering kind. Here is a reduction in the ratio of 6 to 1, and the increase is as 7 to 1. Mr Hill finds that taking all correspondence, short and distant—single letters, double, and treble letters, &c., together—the average postage is $6\frac{1}{4}$ d., and he computes that, taking letters of all weights on his plan, the average postage would be a penny farthing.* A fivefold increase of numbers would therefore bring up the gross revenue to the same point; and, to produce that effect, he proposes to reduce the postage in the same ratio; and this he does in addition to the various improvements to which we have alluded.

* The very obvious fact, that with a charge of a penny for half an ounce, twopence for an ounce, &c., the average postage *per packet* must be higher than one penny, seems to have been beyond the comprehension of the writer to whom we have so often referred. Mr Hill—he says, ‘raises the rate per letter, from *one penny* to *one penny halfpenny*, an addition of fifty per cent, which he justifies, no doubt, by the increased rate on the excepted classes of letters; but if these excepted letters be so numerous as to swell the total by *one-half*, what becomes of all the talk about uniformity, dispatch, simplicity, and so forth? The calculation becomes by one-half less incredible, but the principle of a *single and a uniform penny postage* is gone.’—(*Quarterly Review*, No. 128.) Mr Hill does not raise the rate, nor does he deviate in the slightest degree from the principle, that all letters shall be charged at the uniform rate of one penny PER HALF-OUNCE. Nor is there, in the whole course of his pamphlet or evidence, the most distant allusion to a three-halfpenny rate. Were it not idle to waste words with a critic so unscrupulous as to facts, we would point out how, on the one hand, he reduces the number of ship letters from 1,210,000 to 90,000 per annum, and, on the other, enhances the postage of ‘some houses’ in London to L.10,000 a-year!—an unfounded and preposterous estimate, which has created some merriment in the city.

What, then, is there unreasonable in the hopes which he entertains? Is it to be said that the reduction is too great, and that the principle holds good only within narrower limits? Without denying that there is a limit, though as yet undiscovered—we answer that the principle has held good wherever it has been tried; and we cite the instance of the Tower, to show its success in a bolder application of it than is to be made in the case of postage. Is it to be said that postage is a luxury? Without conceding the fact, we answer that the admission to the Tower is a luxury; but we answer also, that cheap luxuries are demanded with great avidity by very large and, we devoutly hope, rapidly increasing classes of the community. And, if correspondence is to be called a luxury to the labouring poor, can it any longer be doubted that it is a luxury which they highly prize and anxiously desire? neither is there one the increase of which would so truly mark their improvement as this. Such increase might be viewed as an *exponent* of much great and unobtrusive good—of advance in education, and of increasing strength of the domestic ties. The letters would be from parent to child with heart-warm prayers for his welfare, and with advice which must win for itself respect and confidence never to be obtained by a stranger; from child to parent with the outpourings of gratitude and affection, which may have been checked at home by the common-place feelings induced by daily intercourse, but which become strong to overflowing by separation, unless, as it too often happens, they evaporate from the mere want of their natural outlet.

Nor would there be letters of kind feeling only; many a small sum of money would be thus remitted to assist the parent yet struggling under the burden of his family, or pining under the diminished income of old age. The aid so afforded might often be slight and inefficient; but who does not feel that every shilling so bestowed, would have within itself a power of good which arithmetic is unable to calculate?

These are no mere speculations of ours; the experience of the poor-law authorities has pointed out the absence of the means of transmitting small sums, as a serious hardship on the labouring population.* It is known that much abortive trial and suffering is often sustained by labouring men in seeking for employment. They go into districts where the labour market is overstocked, whereas, had the means of intercommunication been easy, they would have bent their steps in an opposite direction. During this absence of the father, his family

* Fifth Poor-Law Report.

often suffer much discomfort, and even great misery. Mr Henson, a working hosier of Nottingham, says that—‘ 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 whole line, of paying tenpence for a letter, to let his wife know where he was.’

We have said little of the multiplication of letters on business, and the mode of advertising by means of circulars. That these are prolific sources of increase is sufficiently obvious; and every one, with regard to his own affairs, must be aware how much greater a number of letters he would write, even if his correspondence, measured by the quantity of matter, should not increase.

It has been objected, that circular letters would become so common, that at length the public would be disgusted and refuse to read them, and that consequently they would be discontinued. But this objection applies with greater force to advertisements in newspapers; because in the latter case the advertiser cannot select the class of readers to whom he would address himself, so as to be sure that his advertisement shall come into their hands, as he can in the former; and yet how rapidly advertisements multiply, even under the pressure of heavy taxation, has been seen; and it is equally well known that in the United States, where they are untaxed, their numbers are almost infinite. We therefore, in common with witnesses selected from a great variety of trades, cannot but expect a vast addition to this class of letters.

We now present Mr Hill’s own estimate, in which we see nothing immoderate. He gives it, and we adopt it, only as an approximating estimate of the results which may be expected in no very long time from the adoption of the penny rate.

‘ *Estimate of the Mode in which the required Increase of General-Post Letters may be presumed to take place.*

From the present Letter-writing Class.	{	‘ Present number of chargeable General-Post Letters, call this	1
		‘ Contraband Letters, and evasions by writing in newspapers, &c. [Estimated by many at double the Posted Letters, but consider it equal only]	1
		‘ Total of Letters now written	2
		‘ Assume the rate of increase to be only 2 to 1	2
		‘ Estimated future General-Post Letters, from the present Letter-writing class	2

‘ Invoices—[Estimated by Mr Cobden, and other mercantile men, as ‘ equal to the present Post Letters, say half only]	1 2 4
‘ Additional printed circulars, catalogues, small parcels, &c., say	3 4
‘ Letters from numerous classes, who may now be said not to use the ‘ Post-office at all, say	3 4
‘ Required increase of General-Post Letters to sustain the gross re- ‘ venue, (Vide <i>Third Report</i> , p. 55.)	6
‘ That is to say, an addition of fivefold.	

That some years may elapse before the Post-Office revenue recovers its position, is highly probable; but in our minds this does not at all affect the propriety of adopting the plan. If its principles are well founded, there should be an increase from year to year; and when the amount arrives again at its present height, there will be nothing in this circumstance to make it stationary. It will go on to a surplus on which we may fairly calculate to counterbalance the deficit of the early years.

It ought always to be borne in mind, that the revenue from the Post-Office differs altogether and in principle from ordinary taxation. It results from the profits of a trade protected by a monopoly, like the monopoly of tobacco in France, and of salt in India, and of most articles in Egypt. The policy of government monopolies is, to say the least, very doubtful. In our own country, as we have advanced in knowledge and freedom, they have diminished in number, until the carriage of letters is the sole remnant of a system which doubtless has antiquity to recommend it, but possibly little else. We, however, do not ask to have it thrown open. Thus much, however, we think the people have a right to expect, that if the Government will enter into trade, it should conduct its operations on sound and enlightened commercial principles. Now, let us suppose this monopoly handed over to a joint-stock company. It is quite clear that the fact of a present loss of profit, or even the necessity for a large immediate outlay of capital, would not deter the undertakers from lowering postage, if, upon a well-considered estimate, the immediate sacrifice would be recompensed by ultimate gain. The railway companies have made, and are making outlays to be computed by tens of millions, for the purpose of carrying passengers at lower fares than were charged by stage-coaches going at half their speed; and this they have done on a mere dry calculation of profit and loss. Let, then, any temporary diminution of income be regarded as an outlay. It would be but slight considered with reference to the objects in view, and yet all that is demanded for the mightiest social improvement ever attempted at a single effort. Suppose even an average yearly loss of a million for ten years. It is but half what the country has paid for the abolition of slavery, without the

possibility of any *money* return. Treat the deficit as an outlay of capital, and those who make a serious affair of it, suppose that a great nation is to shrink from a financial operation which a joint-stock company would laugh at. But enough of revenue. Even if the hope of ultimate profit should altogether fail, let us recur to a substituted tax; and if we are asked, What tax? we shall answer, Any tax you please—certain that none can operate so fatally on all other sources of revenue as this. Letters are the *primordia rerum* of the commercial world. To tax them at all, is condemned by those who are best acquainted with the operations of finances. Surely, then, cent per cent will hardly be deemed too slight a burden; and yet that—nay, more than that—the new plan will yield.

But the country will never consent to adjudge this great cause on points of revenue. That the Post-Office ought to be open to all in practice, as well as in theory, is now felt to be as necessary to our progress in true civilisation as the liberty of the press—the representation of the people in Parliament—public education—sound law reform—the freedom of commerce—and whatever else we require to maintain our ‘high prerogative of teaching the nations how to live!’

No. CXLIII. will be published in April.

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