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ART. IX.—1. *Post-office Reform: its Importance and Practicability.* By Rowland Hill. London. 1837. pp. 104.

2. *Du Service des Postes et de la Taxation des Lettres au moyen d'un timbre.* Par M. A. Piron, Sous-Directeur des Postes. Paris. 1838. pp. 148.

3. *First, Second, and Third Reports from the Select Committee on Postage.* 3 vols. fol. 1838.

POST-OFFICE Reform, as it is called, has excited of late a great deal of interest, though but very little attention. No question has been more talked and less thought about. It has never been publicly discussed, nor even so much as fairly stated; and the sudden vote of the House of Commons on the 12th of July last seems to us one of the most inconsiderate *jumps in the dark* ever made by that very inconsiderate assembly, whose natural proneness to every change, and particularly to any which promises a reduction of taxation, was (in this instance as in so many others) instigated and enforced by that curious combination of alternate errors—weakness and rashness, delay and hurry, obstinacy and inconsistency, which distinguish—from any other that ever existed—Lord Melbourne's enigmatical administration.

But the question is too important, not merely as to its financial results, but in its possible effects on our social system and the statistical and moral interests of mankind, to be allowed to pass without further examination, on such slight and *ex parte* authorities as Mr. Rowland Hill's pamphlet, the partial, yet inconsistent report of the Committee of the House of Commons, and the vague and contradictory speech of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, adopting a proposition which he evidently disapproved, and refusing to provide any specific guard against a danger which he foresaw and admitted.

We therefore think it a duty to lay before our readers a history of this very singular affair, its origin, its principle, its details, and its promised, and, as we conceive them, its probable results.

The management of the Post-office had been for a series of years a subject of general approbation. It was always said to be the best conducted department in the state; and though this praise was in truth somewhat indiscriminate and excessive, yet undoubtedly the celerity, the certainty, the security, with which so vast a machine executed, with so few mistakes, such an infinite complexity of details, were admirable. The merits of the Post-office administration would, however, not have been so long and so generally acknowledged but for the fortunate provision of the law, which excluded all its efficient officers from the House of Commons, and even from voting at elections. This,

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in a great measure, released the department from the cavils and criticisms of *party;* and Sir Francis Freeling was as acceptable to Mr. Fox as to Mr. Pitt, to Lord Grey as to the Duke of Wellington. At length, however, it began to be suspected that the administration of that excellent public servant had, perhaps, lasted too long. Sir Francis had been himself, in early life, a post-office reformer, and to his last hour professed to be, and we are satisfied was, sincerely desirous of continuing the system of improvement and advance on which his early reputation was founded; but as improvements proceeded, there would be every day less room to improve, and the hourly increasing complication of duties and interests rendered every change of more doubtful expediency, and of more uncertain result. There is no branch of the public service in which alterations, apparently slight, may produce such extensive derangement; but the great impediment to changes in the post-office did not arise within the department itself, but from the Treasury. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was naturally averse to any risk of such an important revenue; and there is no doubt that, under this apprehension, the rates were kept too high, and some inconvenient delays and anomalies were suffered to exist; but that these considerations produced or protracted any culpable neglect or serious abuse, we think we may confidently deny—and inquire what serious grievances have been remedied, or what substantial improvements have been made, since the men and doctrines of the new school succeeded to Sir Francis Freeling?

We, at least, in a pretty extensive correspondence, find none; and, on the contrary, more mistakes and delays have fallen under our personal knowledge in the three years since Sir Francis's death, than had occurred in ten years of our previous experience. Not that we blame the new administration for these accidents. We believe their increase is mainly attributable to an over-anxiety to attempt improvements which could not, even under the most cautious guidance, be effected without some temporary derangements, and of course still less in the utterly inexperienced hands of *Lieutenant-Colonel* Maberly, who was so strangely selected to succeed Sir Francis Freeling in this very peculiar and technical department.

But even Lieutenant-Colonel Maberly's good intentions, when he had acquired experience enough to form any, were defeated by the mingled negligence and rashness of the ministry. One instance is too remarkable to be passed over. Postage, as all our readers know, is now paid by distance; not, however, as one would have thought, the distance of the place where the letter is posted to the place where it is delivered, but the distance through

through which the post-office may, for its own convenience, cause the letter to pass; so that the letters addressed in a town thirty miles from London on one road to another only five miles distant on a parallel road, would be sent up to London and down again, and, in addition to the vexatious delay, would be charged with sixty miles of postage instead of five. This grievance Colonel Maberly proposed to the late Chancellor of the Exchequer to remedy, at the calculated risk to the revenue of 80,000*l.* This proposition Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer rejected. He could not spare so much revenue:—but a year or two after, in the last dying moments of his own official life, he on the sudden, and in the most irrational hurry, abandoned—not 80,000*l.*, but 1,600,000*l.*—the *whole* post-office revenue—to the perilous chances of Mr. Rowland Hill's plan, and against the advice of his own selected officers, the postmaster-general, the secretary, and all the officers of the department.

It is one of the characteristics of the reformed parliament—(and indeed it was foreseen as one of the consequences of such a reform as was inflicted upon us)—not only that the House of Commons are prone to usurp into their own hands the executive administration of affairs, but that individual members are led to seek distinction, to acquire importance, or even to gratify a personal taste, by appropriating to themselves some special business—

'Within whose circle none dare walk but they!'

It is not our business to inquire with what motive, or by what accident, Mr. Wallace, the member for Greenock, was induced to take the Post-Office in hand. We find him, soon after his appearance, and ever since, making from time to time motions for papers and returns from the Post-office, for which, as far as we can discover, there was no rational ground, and from which we know not that any good has been, or could be, produced. They seemed to us to have been, for the most part, of that kind of random motion with which a member *fishes* for *abuses*, but is still more anxious to *catch notoriety*.

We must here observe on a very serious inconvenience which the *insouciance*, and still more the desperate weakness of the ministry, has of late years produced in parliamentary practice. In the good times of the constitution, the minister never consented to the production of any public documents, unless *primâ facie* grounds were expressly stated to justify the proposed inquiry. Without some special motive, it was justly considered that the House of Commons ought not to interfere with the executive government. This was a wise and wholesome regulation, and, though it may at first sight seem paradoxical to say so, produced more publicity, discussion, and inquiry, than the present

present system of allowing any individual member, often without notice, and generally without comment on either side, to move for any papers he may have a curiosity to see.

In Mr. Wallace's case, for example, if he had been obliged to state each alleged abuse to which his motions pointed, and if, as was their duty, the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Secretary of the Treasury had inquired into the facts, and come down prepared either to remedy the grievance, if true—or to defend and vindicate the department, if unjustly arraigned—Mr. Wallace would not have been suffered to have gone on for six or seven years hammering away about post-office abuses until, by the unchecked accumulation of motions and papers, the House and the public were deluded into an impression that the government could not have sanctioned such a waste of official labour and public time, unless there were really 'something rotten in the state of' St. Martin's-le-Grand. If the matters had been sifted in debate, the truth must have been elicited.

But the parliamentary apathy of the ministers was even worse than it at first sight appears; for while all this was going on, there was sitting a commission of general inquiry into the Post-Office, composed of three members of the government, Lord Duncannon, Mr. Labouchere, and Lord Seymour, whose *official* labours—which seem to have been diligent and useful—should have rendered Mr. Wallace's *officious* interference worse than superfluous. But with so narrow and precarious a majority in the House of Commons, the ministry cannot venture to incur the risk of offending any one of their supporters, and having, moreover, adopted for their own use a perversion of Lord Nelson's celebrated signal—by 'expecting every man to do *their* duty'—Mr. Wallace was allowed to continue without interruption what looked very like a course of probation for the place of *Commissioner* of the Post-office in *the new Board*—for the creation of which a bill passed (more than once, we believe) the House of Commons, but which was rejected by the House of Lords, chiefly by the testimony and authority of the Duke of Richmond, the active and intelligent postmaster-general of Lord Grey's ministry.

But while Mr. Wallace was thus tinkering away, there suddenly arose a very different kind of post-office reformer, who threw Mr. Wallace and all other petty grievance-mongers into the shade, and who, without making any complaint of the former management, opened new views and new principles on the general system of post-office communication, which have given to that subject, not only in England, but all over Europe, an entirely different aspect, and may be productive of very important results, be they good or evil.

Early

Early in 1837, Mr. Rowland Hill—originally, we understand, a schoolmaster, and afterwards secretary to the South Australian Commission—observing that the post-office revenue had remained stationary while the population and all other measures of public prosperity had greatly increased, and attributing this fact, as had been already done by some competent authorities, to the excessive rate of the postage; observing also that the charges of management bore what he thought a very great and excessive proportion to the gross revenue—and finding, according to his calculation, that the actual cost of the conveyance of letters was infinitely small as compared with the rates of postage—Mr. Hill, we say, imagined a scheme for sweeping away the whole of the financial and account branches of the Post-office, and reducing its duties to the mere *mechanical* functions of receiving, conveying, and delivering letters, of which the postage should be collected by anticipation, at the Stamp-office, by means of a stamp to be affixed to the letter, and which, at the *uniform* rate of *one penny*, was to convey it, free of any other charge, to *every part of the empire*—and all this, as he promised, without any permanent loss, nay, with a probable future advantage to the revenue.

The apparent justness, in point of fact, of most of the preliminary considerations on which the scheme was founded—its obvious simplicity—its alleged economy—its practical convenience, and above all, we believe, its bold novelty, tended to create an immediate and considerable sensation in its favour; and we confess that *we ourselves* were dazzled by the brilliancy of a theory supported, as at first sight it seems to be, by a sober and candid statement of financial and statistical details. But, after the first moments of surprise, when we came to examine these details more carefully, to consider whether the facts did really justify Mr. Hill's conclusions as to the present management of the department, and his predictions as to the future results, we found, or fancy that we found, that both his inferences and his expectations involved a great deal of gratuitous assumption—that many of the facts seem to lead to exactly opposite conclusions—and that this brilliant theory was after all but a *theory*, on which, in the present state of our information, and without much more consideration and some kind of *experimental test*, it would be highly imprudent to risk such vast and vital interests as might be seriously impaired if the abolition of the old system were to be followed by the failure of the new speculation.

The inquiry that did take place in the course of last year, by a Committee of the House of Commons, was in our opinion very unsatisfactory—we might almost say illusory. That Committee was moved for, and, we suppose, selected, by Mr. Wallace. It

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was entirely composed of gentlemen belonging to what—though some of them were members of the government—may be called the *Movement** party—with only two exceptions—Sir Thomas Freemantle, who seems to have seldom attended and never voted, and Lord Lowther, who, Conservative as he is on all other points, happened also to be a post-office reformer,—a moderate, cautious, and conscientious one, but still having so strong a predisposition to change the system of the post-office, that he was assuredly no exception to the general complexion of Mr. Wallace's Committee.

The reference of the House to this Committee was in these words:—

'Ordered, That a select Committee [*select* with a vengeance] be appointed 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 published by Mr. Rowland Hill.*'—*Votes*, 23*rd Nov.*, 1837.

In old times we might have felt some surprise at this parliamentary notice of a pamphlet, and still more at such a devolution upon a Committee of the House of Commons of the obvious duties of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—but we are habituated to much less excusable evasions of ministerial responsibility. Mr. Rowland Hill's plan was certainly worthy of parliamentary consideration, and we only complain that the tribunal was so very *select*.

Mr. Hill's scheme was not only thus dignified by parliamentary notice, but it also acquired a still more powerful, though somewhat concealed auxiliary in a combination of some extensive merchants and bankers in the City of London, who, as we learn, formed a Committee, and subscribed and expended a very large sum, and were prepared with a still larger if necessary, to organize (as has been the most approved mode of carrying political objects ever since we have had a mock government) an *agitation* in favour of Mr. Hill's plan.

This agitation produced that enormous number of petitions which loaded the table of the House of Commons during the two last sessions, and which has been so triumphantly displayed—no doubt at the expense of the City Committee—in some of the public papers; but which, as in the case of all petitions thus got up, really expressed little more than the wishes of the directing Committee. We readily admit that there is not a man in the empire who would not, as an abstract proposition, prefer paying a penny rather than sixpence for a letter; but, assuming that a *mil-*

* For instance—they all, we believe (but Lord Seymour, a Lord of the Treasury) have voted for the *Ballot!*

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lion and a half must be *somehow* raised for the public service, we very much doubt whether the City Committee could, with all their zeal, have got ten individuals to agree in a petition for transferring that charge from postage to any other *specific* object of taxation: they therefore very prudently, though not very candidly, kept altogether out of sight the possible defalcation in the revenue, or, when the point was at all alluded to, insisted that there would be increase rather than diminution.

But it will be said, and with great *primâ facie* justice, that the very combination of these eminent, intelligent, and experienced merchants, is of itself the strongest evidence in favour of the plan. We fully admit it, and should readily accept the evidence of Baring, Brothers, and Co., or of Messrs. Glynn and Co., as worth more, single-handed, than thousands of such petitions as we allude to—if that evidence were wholly unbiassed by individual considerations; but when we are told that some of the houses who were most active for this post-office reform, now pay such (to us almost incredible) sums as 6000*l.*, 8000*l.*, 10,000*l.*, and even 11,000*l.* a-year in postages, we cannot receive their testimony in favour of a uniform *penny* rate as altogether disinterested. It is true that these great houses, like smaller traders, are very certain to recover their postages from their customers, and with interest too, in one shape or another. In some businesses the postage is *specifically* charged against the correspondent, and the proposed change would therefore no otherwise affect *them* than by relieving them from so serious an *advance*, and by the general impulse which might be given to trade; but there is another class to which we are informed that the most zealous members of the agitating committee and many of the most decided witnesses belonged:—namely, those with whom it is not usual to make *direct* charges against their correspondents for postage, and for whom, of course, the reduction of the taxation would be nearly, if not altogether, so much *clear gain*. Every one who has paid even the slightest attention to the practical operations of finance knows that, in the long run, all taxation falls on the consumer, and that, on the other hand, the greater share of any sudden reduction falls, in the first instance, into the pocket of the dealer. So, if we are rightly informed that a firm, one of the most active promoters of the penny rate, pays 11,000*l.* per annum in postage, and repays itself by its general profits, it is clear that the adoption of Mr. Hill's plan would put something like 10,000*l.* per annum clear into *their pockets;* and to make up for that defalcation in the Post-office revenue, the people of England must be taxed to exactly the amount that shall be conveyed by this reform into the private purses of Messrs. *This* or *That*.

Far

Far be it from us to insinuate—what we really do not suspect—that the respectable gentlemen of the agitation committee were actuated by narrow and merely selfish motives:—they saw clearly that a great and immediate advantage would accrue in their own concerns, and they may reasonably have inferred that similar advantages would be felt by others, as well by the direct saving of the out-goings on postages as by the general extension of correspondence:—all we mean to say is, that neither their individual authority, nor the evidence which they so carefully prepared and so cleverly produced before the Committee of the House of Commons, can have the weight which belongs to a disinterested testimony; and we think that the great and immediate profit to themselves has intercepted or obscured the views that they might otherwise have taken of the serious difficulties and disadvantages to which many other individual as well as public interests may be subjected.

We have read the whole of that voluminous evidence with great care, and certainly without prejudice—for our first impressions were in favour of Mr. Hill's plan, and we still are most zealous friends, on the same general principles as Mr. Hill, to the greatest possible reduction of the postages which the state of the revenue and of the country would permit—but we are bound to say, after the perusal of the evidence and a mature consideration of all the arguments of Mr. Hill and his advocates, that, whatever may be thought of the *abstract* advantages of a general penny-postage, *Mr. Hill's specific plan* has broken down on almost every point, both as to the facts on which it professes to stand, and on the results which it promises. The plan may be good, and Mr. Rowland Hill may be eventually a public benefactor, but certainly not for the reasons stated either by himself or his partisans, as we shall now endeavour to show.

In the very outset, the first, most prominent, and most important ground and basis of Mr. Hill's proposition has already failed, and worse than failed, for it operates against him. The *first* paragraph of his pamphlet is as follows:—

'The last quarterly accounts [the date of writing is January, 1837] show that the present revenue of the country *greatly exceeds* the expenditure; there is therefore reason to hope that a reduction of taxation may shortly take place.'—*Post-office Reform*, p. 1.

And he proceeds in a very summary way to decide that any such reduction of taxation would be most beneficially directed to *postage*. Now we admit that, *if* a great reduction of taxation were to be made, a considerable proportion of it ought to be allotted to the postages, which are in many cases too high, and in many more clogged with vexatious anomalies, such as that we before

before noticed, of the charging by the circuitous instead of the direct distance, and several others. These are matters which in any state of the general revenue might, and should, be remedied; and would, we confidently believe, have been so if Sir Robert Peel's government had lasted, and Lord Ashburton and Lord Lowther remained at the Board of Trade. It is rather a curious circumstance that the two persons on whose experience and judgment the Whigs lay the most stress in this great commercial question are the very two whom they ousted in 1835 from the Board of Trade, to be replaced by Mr. Poulett Thomson and Mr. Shiel!

We entirely concur in the fair and legitimate meaning of an axiom which the penny-post reformers have, we think, grossly perverted, namely, that the *revenue* derived from the Post-office is a *secondary* consideration—the public convenience and general facility of intercourse being the *first*. This axiom, advanced most prominently by Lord Lowther, who has taken, both in and out of office, an active interest in Post-office reform—has been much relied on by the advocates for a universal penny-post; but we shall show hereafter that they push Lord Lowther's authority a great deal further than, either in his Lordship's meaning or in sound argument, it ought to go, and that it has been, as we have just said, perverted to what we think a very dangerous conclusion.

No one can rate higher than we do the paramount advantages of a cheap, rapid, and certain post-communication, to the commercial, intellectual, and social interests of mankind. *That*, we repeat, is the first object—the consideration of revenue is subordinate—very important, no doubt, but subordinate. If, therefore, Mr. Hill's fundamental statement were true—if there were an excess of income to be disposed of—we are not prepared to say that it could be more beneficially applied than in the *alleviation* of postages.

But what turns out to be the fact?—there is no '*great* excess' of income—there is no excess at all; on the contrary, a great and growing *deficit*—which threatens, even without any help from Post-office reform, to disarrange our whole financial system—to endanger the security of the public creditor—and, need we add, exposes us to all the risk of the worst species of anarchy. This deficit began the very year (1837) in which Mr. Hill speculated on a surplus: by the close of that year the deficit was no less than 655,760*l.*: upon which, in the next edition of his pamphlet, (1838,) Mr. Hill quietly observes, 'that the depression of the revenue is, there *can be little doubt*, temporary;' and with this comfortable confidence he persists in arguing on the imaginary surplus,

surplus. But at the close of 1838, the deficit was further increased by a sum of 345,227*l.*; and now, Mr. Rice has gone out of office bequeathing to his successor an estimate for the year 1839 of a further deficit of 860,000*l.*—being an accumulated defalcation of 1,860,987*l.*

Here, then, was an argument founded on Mr. Hill's own preliminary admission, by which a wise and honest government ought to have resisted with its whole power an experiment which risked no less of annual revenue than 1,600,000*l.*—which was the net produce of the Post-office for the last year.

But the government is neither wise nor honest—in fact, they are not even a government—their situation is so precarious and *squeezeable*—to use the happy vulgarism of one of the *squeezers*—that they are at the mercy of any two or three of their supporters; and the radical section of their narrow majority having, for motives sufficiently obvious, insisted on the concession of the penny-postage, the ministers submitted—with, however, to do them all justice, as much reluctance and as bad a grace as if they were doing some constitutional and meritorious act.

But although this preliminary objection is one which ought to have been decisive with the government against making so perilous an experiment *at such a crisis*, we do not rest this question on grounds so narrow as the temporary pressure of financial difficulties. If no such difficulty had supervened, we still think, and we expect to be able to show, that Mr. Hill's project is in itself very problematical—*by the means and for the purposes* which he proposes, and that the report of the Committee which pushes Mr. Hill's *principle* still farther than he *at first* pretended to do is still more objectionable.

After Mr. Hill's preliminary postulate of an *excess of revenue*, (which so unfortunately for him and for us has failed him,) he proceeds to lay more general and more solid grounds for his proposition, by showing that the Post-office revenue is not so great as it ought to be—that this is attributable *solely* to the excessive rates of postage, and that a diminution of these rates, after perhaps a slight temporary depression, would tend, according to all analogy, to an ultimate and progressive increase in the revenue.

We have already stated our long-formed opinion that the rates are in some cases too high, and the practical service in many instances imperfect and anomalous; and that these defects ought, even at some sacrifice of revenue, to be immediately amended,—and we believe that *such* improvements would probably soon repay the loss—but Mr. Hill pushes this principle to an extent in which we cannot concur.

He begins by stating the very startling fact, that since the year 1815—

1815—during twenty-four years of unexampled internal progress in population and general prosperity—the post-office revenue has rather diminished than increased: this he illustrates by the following table:—

Year.	Population.	Net revenue actually obtained.	Revenue which would have been obtained had the receipts kept pace with the increase of population from 1815.	Comparative loss.
		£	£	£
1815	19,552,000	1,557,291	1,557,291	.....
1820	20,928,000	1,479,547	1,674,000	194,453
1825	22,362,000	1,670,219	1,789,000	118,781
1830	23,961,000	1,517,952	1,917,000	399,048
1835	25 605,000	1,540,300	2,048,000	507 700

In addition to this he shows, by a similar table, that, compared with what he considers the strictly analogous case of the stage-coach duty, the loss on the Post-office is still greater, for as this revenue has increased from 217,000*l.* to 498,000*l.*, the Post-office would, in the same proportion, have reached 3,550,000*l.*, which implies, he says, a positive loss of upwards of *two millions*; and then he quotes the opinions of Sir Henry Parnell and Mr. M'Culloch, that this stand-still can only be accounted for by the excessive rates of postage. The fact is striking—and the high rate of tax has probably been a considerable, though we cannot think the only, cause of this remarkable result—so remarkable indeed as to appear to us unaccountable, even on Mr. Hill's hypothesis: for we certainly do not live in an age in which either business or pleasure is much impeded, even among the lower orders, by considerations of petty economy—under which the denying oneself a useful or agreeable letter might be classed; but there are some circumstances which alleviate, if they do not altogether remove our surprise, and which it is at least right to suggest in explanation of what, on Mr. Hill's statement, would appear an inexplicable phenomenon.

In the first place, we wonder that it did not strike so sharp an accountant as Mr. Hill, that when his two calculations gave such very different results, one of them must be erroneous. One of his tables shows a loss of 500,000*l.*, the other a loss of *four times* that sum: it is therefore clear that one or the other must be a fallacious criterion; and we believe that both are attempts to measure things which are not commensurable. In the next place, Mr. Hill takes as his standard that remarkable and glorious year 1815, which, from the overthrow of Buonaparte and the astonishing events which immediately preceded and followed it, created a universal stir and excitement, and gave a general movement to every

every kind of affairs, unparalleled in the annals of the world: whereas if he had taken the account, as in *fairness to the argument* he ought, from the period at which the *largest increase* of the tax was made, viz., 1801, he must have shown that the net post-office revenue of the United Kingdom had just *doubled;* the sums being—

1801 . . . . £772,675
1835 . . . £1,540,300

while the population was, according to the census nearest the two periods—

1801 . . . 16,338,102 persons.
1831 . . . . 24,271,763.

So that the post-office revenue had nearly doubled, while the population had increased by not quite one-half. This, which completely overthrows Mr. Hill's statements, seems even to justify an opposite conclusion, namely, that the post-office revenue may occasionally appear stationary, or even retrograde, by happening at periods of peculiar excitement to have outrun the natural average of its duties.

But, in addition to this positive refutation of Mr. Hill's tables, we have some general considerations to urge why, independently of the rates of duties, the post-office revenue has not arisen to a greater amount. First, the gratuitous conveyance of forty-four millions of newspapers, the estimated number now conveyed, of which the letters are made to pay the expense; and moreover, who can compute how many *letters* of news, of announcements of births, deaths, and marriages, or of mere business, may not have been retrenched by this enormous circulation of *printed* intelligence. Again; it seems natural that, as population thickens, the average distance, and of course the average produce of correspondence, will diminish. Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, &c., are become so many minor Londons, which communicate with their own vicinities, at the lower rates of postage, and instead of one heavy letter to London costing a shilling or one shilling and sixpence, two or three fourpenny letters will be written to the provincial metropolis—thus increasing the number of letters two or three fold, while it tends to diminish the revenue.

Nor will an increase of population produce for some time a proportionate increase of correspondence—a population which should, by natural increase, double itself in twenty years, would not within the twenty years have doubled the number of letter-writers; and finally, Mr. Hill's own statement of the enormous increase of stage-coach passengers militates, *pro tanto*, though the *tanto* be not great, against an increase of correspondence. *Ipse venit*—the man who comes in person has no need to write, and

and one journey to town may save a country shopkeeper twenty letters. We say, then, that we have, in the first place, overthrown Mr. Hill's statistical tables, and in the next have suggested some not unimportant reasons why, even if the increase of the post-office revenue did not keep exact pace with the increase of population, it would not be a satisfactory proof that the high rate of duty was the *sole* cause of such a stagnation.

But Mr. Hill supports his theory on this head by the examples of the post-offices of America and France, which he says have progressed rapidly, while ours has been at a stand-still. It is very likely that America and France may have gone on increasing their postages for reasons which do not apply to England. England grows rapidly in population and wealth; but America grows still more rapidly in wealth, population, and, above all, *space*—and space is the peculiar aliment of post-offices. Ten thousand inhabitants added to New York would have little effect on the inland postage, but the ten thousand men pushing themselves in long lines down into the West must needs become customers to the post-offices; and when we read how great commercial cities spring up in the interior, where there was a few years before an uninhabited wilderness, we see sufficient reason why the increase of postage in America should be no measure for England.

In the case of France, Mr. Hill is more particular, and produces figures to show that the *gross* receipts of her post-office have increased from 24,000,000 frs. (960,000*l.*) in 1821 to 37,000,000 frs. (1,480,000*l.*) in 1831. Is it not strange that Mr. Hill, when instituting this comparison between England and France, should have chosen to exhibit the English income in *net*, and the French in *gross*, a difference which, in such a revenue as the post-office, renders all comparison impossible? Why did he not take the trouble to exhibit the English *gross* or the French *net*?—but instead of doing so, he says that it is '*highly probable*' that the French net produce would afford a still more rapid increase, and corroborates his inference that the effective loss to the English post-office is 'even more than *two millions per annum*.'—p. 5.

This style of argument from one country to another so dissimilar—from *gross* to *net*—and finally on a '*probability*,' where the actual figures might and ought to have been produced, would authorize us in throwing the whole deduction aside; but we think it worth while to examine it a little further, to show what sort of foundations Mr. Hill builds upon. Between the two terms 1821 and 1835—which Mr. Hill thus compares, to show the *natural* increase of post-office circulation, arising from the gradual progress of population and business—there happened

in France, as we find from M. Piron, three gigantic improvements, sufficient to account for a much larger increase than he quotes:

1st, Up to 1821, through a great part, and particularly the west and south of France, there were posts but *three times a-week*—in that year those posts were made *daily:* this alone produced an increased circulation of five millions of letters in the very first year. (*Piron*, p. 6.)

2nd. Since the year 1821, the conveyance of the French mails has been accelerated by means of *malles postes*, and other rapid conveyances, in the ratio (as exemplified by the correspondence of Paris with Marseilles) of 156 hours, where before 254 hours were consumed—a saving of 2-5ths.

3rd. In 1829, there were established in France a system of rural posts, answering to the bye and penny posts in England, which in the first year produced an increase of, according to M. Piron's calculation, about four millions and a half of letters. These improvements (like every other that we know of in the French post-office) were borrowed from our system, in which they existed *long before* the period quoted by Mr. Hill;—and of course the sudden *increase* which *they* produced in France could have no corresponding item in the English period—though such an *increase* might be found in the former periods, when these several improvements were introduced in England.

Mr. Hill tells us that there is a *high probability* that the *net* French produces would show a still greater increase. If they did so, under the influence of these improvements—recent in France, but old with us—it would prove nothing but that our old system was a tolerably good one; but we find in the last French budget a remarkable fact, still more creditable to our system, though somewhat at variance with Mr. Hill's conjecture, and which we cannot help suspecting may have been the reason why Mr. Hill did not give us the French net produce in *figures* rather than by *guess*. It is there stated that the whole produce of the French post-office for the current year was estimated at 44,350,000 frs. (1,774,000*l.*), and that the charge of management was no less than 24,110,000 frs. (965,400*l.*), or about 55 per cent.—while the English revenue is collected at a charge of 26 or 27 per cent.

But to apply these statements to his purpose, Mr. Hill finds it necessary to attribute the more flourishing condition of the French revenue (which, as we see, he is far from having proved) to another assumption, which seems equally gratuitous. It arises, he says, from the French postages being '*less exorbitant* than with us.' Certainly the French postages are nominally lower than ours, the highest charge on a single letter being in England 14*d.*, and

and in France 12*d.*, and so in proportion; but M. Piron, in making a similar complaint against the *exorbitancy* of French postages, says, 'A workman from the Arriège is almost interdicted from a communication with his family: for a *postage of* 10*d. is the day's wages of his father or his brother.*'—p. 17.

Now we need not take much trouble to prove that the daily wages of the worst paid workmen in England bear a proportion to the French wages of 10*d.** much higher than the ratio of the postages of 14*d.* to 12*d.*: both may be exorbitant; but the whole gist of Mr. Hill's argument is, that the French are *less so,* which is clearly not the fact.

We have quoted this passage of M. Piron's book to show that the English postages are not so much *more exorbitant* than those of France as to justify Mr. Hill's argument; but it opens another consideration. The Committee states,—

'Of the inability of the working classes to pay the expense of even a single letter, as now taxed, out of their earnings, little proof is necessary. "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*l.* a-year, or 3*l.* 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?" '—*Report*, p. 21.

This M. Piron—whose book is little more than an echo and illustration of the English publications, adapted (not always with due acknowledgment) to the meridian of Paris—enforces by asking what a man of 10,000 frs. a-year would say if you were to charge him a day's income, 274 frs. (about 11*l.* sterling), or even half a day's income, 137 frs. (5*l.* 10*s.*) for a letter. Here M. Piron, by an error of his pen or of the press, magnifies the grievance *tenfold* in favour of his and the Committee's argument: for the sums he states are the day's and the half day's portion of an income of 100,000 frs. a-year, whereas 10,000 frs. would give only 27 frs. 4 sous, and 13 frs. 7 sous, or about 1*l.* 2*s.*, and 11*s.* sterling. We conclude this blunder was unintentional; but it is repeated *three* times over, and makes—as such a result might be expected to do—a striking figure in the arguments. But whether applied to a case of 1000*l.* or 10,000*l.* a-year, the principle is, we admit, the same, and begging pardon of Mr. Brewin and M. Piron, a more short-sighted sophism we have seldom met. These wiseacres wholly forget that a man of 1000*l.* a-year would probably receive

* M. Piron states in another place the wages of a workman at 20*d.* This difference from the first statement is not explained, but it may mean that the average of wages is 10*d.* in the rural districts, and 20*d.* in *Paris*; but, even then, we may assert that the wages of workmen in *London* bear a greater ratio to 20*d.* than 14 to 12, and every article of expense bears in England a more than proportionable ratio over the price in France.

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?* Why not apply it to matters which really and deeply affect every hour of every day of his existence? Why not 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*l.* a-year say if you were to charge him 1*l.* 10*s.* 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 fifty thousand a-year.

But even in the insulated case of the postage, it would not remedy the theoretical grievance; for one penny would still be the eighteenth part of the poor man's daily income, while it would be but the seven hundred and twentieth part of that of the gentleman of 1000*l.* a-year. In principle, and in fact, the comparative hardship would remain the same.

But we must not forget that there are also other circumstances which alleviate the burden of postage to the poor. Their letters are not encumbered with envelopes or inclosures, and the circle of their intercourse is narrow. 'The short and simple annals of the poor' are written at the lowest rates. One great and interesting class of such correspondence—that of soldiers and sailors with their families and friends—is already at a penny postage, and the very limited use that is made of this privilege shows that it is not the high rates of postage alone which restrict the correspondence of parties in that rank. The Duke of Wellington—always remarkable for the sound practical good sense with which he treats every subject—stated that, although no account was kept nor could be rendered of the exact extent to which this privilege was employed, it had lately been proved by the incident of a judicial inquiry, that in a *Scotch* regiment—and the Scotch are remarkable, above all our population, for education and for attachment to home—this privilege produced in six or seven months but sixty-three or sixty-four letters from about 700 men.* This fact,

* There is an account of the number of soldiers and sailors' letters which passed through

fact, and, we believe, the experience of every man who watches the details of such matters, will be a sufficient answer to the vague and problematical evidence of some witnesses who deposed before the Committee as to the yearnings of Irish and other migratory labourers and servants for a correspondence with their native homes. That these respectable witnesses had seen many such instances we readily believe; but their error, we think, lies in arguing *à particulari ad universale*, and of applying these occasional incidents to help out their own pre-adopted theory for a penny post.

These arguments, therefore, as to the *peculiar* hardship on the *poor* of the present system, on which the Committee lays such stress, appear to us to be a mere *ad captandum* exaggeration. But connected with it is a more important consideration, which we may as well take this opportunity of examining—namely, the effect of the high rates of postage on the *moral* condition of the people. Mr. Hill says,—

'The loss to the revenue is, however, far from being the most serious of the injuries inflicted on society by the high rates of postage. When it is considered how much the *religious*, *moral*, and *intellectual* progress of the people would be accelerated by the unobstructed circulation of letters and of the *many cheap and excellent non-political publications* of the present day, the post-office assumes the new and important character of a powerful engine of civilization, capable of performing a distinguished part in the great work of national education, but rendered feeble and inefficient by erroneous financial arrangements.'—p. 8.

The Committee asserts that—

'The present high rates of postage are extremely injurious to all classes, both in their individual and social capacity, interfering as they do with their progress in *moral* and *intellectual* improvement, and, in some degree, with their physical welfare. . . . . They either act as a grievous tax on the poor, causing them to sacrifice their little earnings to the pleasure or advantage of corresponding with their distant friends, or compel them to forego such intercourse altogether: thus subtracting from the small amount of their enjoyments, and obstructing the growth and maintenance of their best affections.'—p. 6.

And M. Piron is still more particular and pathetic:—

'Those who have had occasion to consider the moral progress of the youth of the inferior classes who go into service know that when the son begins to neglect his correspondence with his family; when the daughter ceases to write regularly to her mother; when her letters become short and few, the demoralization of the absent child is, *if not already accom-*

through the London office in one week of February, 1838; but, as there is no kind of intimation as to the numbers of men which produced the number of letters, it is of no use to our inquiry.

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plished, close at hand. Society, says an English author, that prepares tread-mills for clerks that rob their employers, and infamy for the girl who commits a *faux pas*, owes it surely to justice, not to dissever, but, on the contrary, to draw as close as possible the salutary ties of family affection, the best guarantees of morality.'—*Piron*, p. 18.

Now, God forbid that we should not feel as strong a desire as Mr. Hill or M. Piron, or even the Committee, can do, to improve the education, and to promote the domestic morals of the people; but we believe that they all exaggerate the importance in these respects of the rates of postage.

Mr. Hill assumes it as an axiom that 'the religious, moral, and intellectual progress of the people would be accelerated by the unobstructed circulation of letters and *non-political* publications;' and we should agree with him, if he could prove his other assumption, that the matters so circulated should be all *excellent* of their kind; but is that the fact? Is there no danger that, instead of '*excellent non-political publications*,' which only, Mr. Hill assumes, are to be thus circulated, there might be no inconsiderable proportion of political publications, and of political publications of no excellent character; and of *non*-political publications whose moral tendencies might not be 'excellent;' nay, which might be deleterious? Is Mr. Hill aware of the predominant character of the unstamped periodical papers that now swarm in our towns? Does he suppose that good order or good morals would be promoted by their almost gratuitous circulation into every remote corner of the empire? And is it the fact that the public appetite, freed from all restraint, will accept only the wholesome and nutritious, and steadily reject the pungent, the luscious, the exciting?—Need we urge this point farther?

But observe his practical inconsistency. It is admitted that already *forty-four millions* of newspapers are gratuitously (so far as the post-office is concerned) circulated, and that *any* periodical print which will subject itself to a penny stamp may be conveyed to any part of the empire at the very rate which he contends for, of a penny. So that the only difference that would be made as to the power of transmitting these prints would be the relieving them from the slight but, as far as it goes, salutary control of the Stamp-Office. But this is not the worst of his inconsistencies. In support of another class of his arguments, he instances the distribution of the 'Penny Magazine':—

'The magazine is sent to every part of the kingdom, and in considerable towns is delivered at the houses of the subscribers; but the penny charged for the magazine includes not only the cost of distribution, but the cost of eight large pages of letter-press and wood-cuts; and yet it is well known that the undertaking is a profitable one.'—p. 41.

This—

This—which is stated to show that the cost of the conveyance of a letter may be less than a penny—overthrows the supposed necessity of opening the post-office to such publications: for the 'Penny Magazine' makes its extensive distribution independently of the post-office. If, after the reduction of the postage, the 'Penny Magazine' shall be distributed as it now is, it is a proof that it does not need the assistance of the post-office: if, on the other hand, it should employ the reformed post-office, the price of 'that powerful engine of civilization' would be doubled—that is, in fact, the distinctive character of that 'excellent' enterprise would be entirely destroyed.

The Committee, in a tone which seems to us rather hypocritical, lament that the present postages

'tends greatly to circumscribe the operations of different Societies instituted for the spread of *religion*, the advancement of *morality*, and the promotion of *charitable* objects.'—*Report*, p. 6.

To which we reply—first, why should it be so?—They do not circumscribe the circulation of the 'Penny Magazine,' nor even of the 'Times;' but secondly, we ask of the Committee, as we did of Mr. Hill, are there no societies in this country which have *other* than *religious, moral,* and *charitable* objects—are there no societies which might wish to spread disaffection, irreligion, or faction? or is it improbable that such societies might be formed?—Was the Committee ignorant—we think not—that the radicals in politics, and the sectarians in religion, have been the warmest advocates—and indeed (except the mercantile body we have alluded to) the only very zealous advocates for this penny post? The reason is obvious; because at present such parties cannot circulate their venom without some kind of machinery and agency, which, though it might perhaps cost no more than the penny postage, would attract observation and create a degree of responsibility, and which, besides, can only operate where there has been some preliminary demand from parties desirous of receiving such papers. The printers are responsible—the publishers are responsible—the agents are responsible—the whole proceeding must be public, and liable therefore to the interference of the authorities: whereas, through the safe and sacred medium of the post-office, an illegal society may not only affiliate itself, without possibility of interruption or detection, with similar societies in different quarters, but may *force* their incendiary publications upon parties who had never before heard or thought of such mischief: nor is the power that would be conferred of organizing with celerity and security the simultaneous *movements* of the population in distant districts to be wholly disregarded; and on the whole we feel that, so far from the *exclusive* benefits to '*order, morals,* and *religion,*' which Mr. Hill

Hill and the Committee put forward, there is, at least, as great a chance of the contrary mischief, and that the proposed penny post might perhaps be more justly characterised as '*Sedition made easy.*' And, finally, let it not be forgotten that checks on useful productions may be removed by a little address and activity (witness the 'Penny Magazine'), and at worst can amount only to an inconvenience: whereas the facility given to mischievous publications is a positive evil, dangerous to the very existence of society.

M. Piron enters into smaller details, and tells us that children out in service are in great danger of demoralization when they cease to write home—but in the same sentence he admits the obvious truth that the demoralization is the *cause* rather than the *consequence* of the interrupted correspondence. Dr. Moore, as good a judge of human motives as M. Piron, exhibits his Zeluco, not as falling into vice because he gave over writing to his mother, but as not writing because that filial duty had grown irksome to a depraved mind; and M. Piron overlooks the fact that the case, *as he states it*, proves unluckily the very reverse of what he intends: for, under the present system, the child has nothing whatsoever to pay on posting the letter to the parent—whereas, under the *new plan*, he or she would have to buy the stamp; which, trifling as both the cost and trouble may appear to *us*, will we apprehend be of some importance to the poor, whose time lost in looking after a stamp would be often more valuable than the old postage.

After all, no one can doubt that the low postage will considerably increase the amount of general correspondence, and nowhere, we believe, so much as in letters of friendship amongst the middle and lower classes—a great advantage—a great increase to individual happiness, and in some cases, perhaps, a preservative from evil by maintaining the family tie; but even this advantage will not be unmixed. Will clerks write only to their fathers, and girls to their mothers? Will not letters of romance or love, intrigue or mischief, increase in at least equal proportions? Does any rational mind doubt that there will be, on this point of the question, a balance of good and evil? And even admitting—what it would be hard to prove—that there should be a preponderance of good, can it be shown that the preponderance will be so great as to compensate the other, as we think, inevitable disadvantages?

But these moral considerations, though so prominently urged by the Reformers, and therefore requiring the foregoing observations on our part, are mainly, as we have said, *ad captum vulgi*. We now approach the more solid motives which have operated with the most

most influential of Mr. Hill's supporters, which has prompted all the evidence, produced all the petitions, and finally seduced or intimidated the Government—the *mercantile* convenience and advantage.

No one can feel more strongly than we do—and from the very first days of our publication have always done—the vast importance of the mercantile interests of this great commercial empire. We admit it to the largest extent that either Mr. Hill or the Committee can desire. We admit, also, as a general thesis, that the removal of every species of restriction on free commercial intercourse must be *pro tanto* desirable, and that the reduction, and still more the total abolition, of the post-office duties, would have a direct, a general, and, as to the extent and facility of mercantile transactions, a beneficial effect. But, on the other hand, we are prepared to contend, that as long as it is necessary to collect a revenue—as long as it is necessary to maintain that system of public credit, which has created, supported, and developed to their present importance those very mercantile interests—as long as *any* species of taxes or duties are to be levied, there is none more legitimate in principle, or more fair and equitable in practice, than the post-office revenue; nay, none—no, not one in our whole financial system—so much so! This, we think, we shall be able to prove; but much more easy would be our task if the post-office reformers, or the Government, had condescended to intimate from what *other* less objectionable source they would propose to raise an annual net revenue of £1,600,000!

Mr. Hill, indeed, professes that his plan will eventually rather increase than diminish the revenue; and he felt so strongly the danger, and, when he opened his scheme; the unpopularity with all thinking men, of giving up the post-office as a source of revenue, that, although some of his arguments and most of his propositions tend that way, he never openly avowed it: but the Committee—though especially instructed by the House to 'consider of such a reduction as may be made *without injury to the revenue*,' and though they recommended a *two-penny* rather than a *penny* rate as necessary to cover the actual cost—appears to us to have had little solicitude about the revenue, and in the principles which they advance to have thrown it over altogether.

They begin by perverting, as we have already hinted, the axiom, for which they quote Lord Lowther and other respectable authorities—that the public convenience was, and ought to be, the first object of the Post-Office, and that *revenue* is but a secondary consideration, or rather, as their whole argument inculcates, of no consideration at all; and this they support by the authority of the preamble of the act of the 12th Charles II. establishing the post-office—that 'its object was the advantage of trade and commerce'

merce' (Report, p. 10), without any allusion to or consideration of *revenue*, and 'such,' they conclude, 'ought to be the objects with a view to which the Post-Office should be now managed.'

Now this proposition is, we assert, as an historical fact, totally untrue:—the public convenience, no doubt, was, and is, and ought to be, in one sense, 'the *primary consideration*,' the most important, the most essential, because it is the basis on which alone the revenue can be raised; but it never was the *primary consideration* in the sense of having been the first creative motive. On the contrary, in every country we believe, but assuredly in England, the post-office was originally an enterprise of individuals—sanctioned no doubt by the royal authority, without which they would not have acted at all—for private profit; and was so conducted till the growing income induced the State to take it altogether into its own hands as a branch of revenue. We find in Rymer (xix. 650) a curious proclamation of Charles I. authorising one Thomas Withering, a private grantee, to establish a post to Scotland, to Ireland, and to the West of England, at the following rates: Under 80 miles, 2*d.* for the single letter; between 80 and 140 miles, 4*d.*; above 140 miles, 6*d.*; and to Scotland, 8*d.*; and if more than one letter in a packet, then to pay according to the number and bulk of the inclosures; and the postmasters (that is, the persons who kept horses for riding post) were to furnish Withering with horses at $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ per mile each horse. So that the present rates are not more than double what they were at that early time, even in nominal amount; but, in fact, greatly diminished by the altered value of money. The Long Parliament took this business into their own hands, as a source of revenue, and afterwards farmed it, and it was not till the Restoration that it took its present form. The same was the case with the penny-post both in France and England—invented in Paris in the reign of Louis XIV. by a M. de Velayer, and conducted for his own profit—in England also, and about the same time, a Mr. Dockwra set up a similar establishment as a private speculation:—so that the pretence so ostentatiously and artfully put forward by the Committee to lead the public mind to this extravagant innovation is a downright misstatement. The House of Commons may, if it pleases, give up the revenue, but it must find some better reason than the silly *pun* on the word *primary*. As well might it be said, that, because shops and markets are established for public convenience, the public has therefore a moral right to have all the articles sold in shops and markets at *prime cost*.

But, after all, this point is of no practical importance, and we notice it only to set right an historical fact, and to afford a specimen of the spirit of delusion in which Mr. Hill's project has been advocated. No one can doubt that it is equally the duty and

and the interest of the Post-Office to afford to the public every possible convenience and accommodation, subject only, as far as we at present see, to two limitations,—1. that the convenience should be of the nature for which post-offices are designed—for example, the post-office should not become common carriers ; and 2. that the revenue should not be essentially impaired, and, above all, not to the advantage of any individual class of interests. Now we believe we can show that the main grievances put forward in the Reports of the Committee arise from the just and proper, as we think, attention of the post-office to these two conditions; that many of the new accommodations required are not fit objects of post-office service—and, if granted, would essentially impair the revenue, to the chief advantage of individual interests.

A very, indeed the most, prominent grievance is the practice of charging as *double*, letters containing any inclosure. It may at first sight be thought hard that the sending a line of advertisement cut out of a newspaper, or an inch of lace to be matched, neither weighing more than a grain, should involve a double charge. Now that hardship might be remedied, without any other change in our system, by charging by *weight* of quarter or half ounce as in France, instead of by single and double letters as with us—a change which we shall consider on its own merits by and by—but this would not meet the object of the agitators, nor the principles of the Committee. One person contemplates the sending parcels of patent medicines (5657); another a box of pills (7791): one ingenious witness exhibited to the Committee a parcel of two pills and two plasters, which, under Mr. Hill's plan, might be transmitted through the post-office. This clever person forgot that, unless the penny envelope could be made large enough to transmit a *doctor* also to judge whether the medicines were proper for the case, it would be more prudent in the patient to send to his own country apothecary; but instead of sending either pill, plaster, or doctor, why not send the *prescription*, by which a single letter would suffice to physic a parish? Another desires to send samples of agricultural seeds (7928), and, for example, 'clover' (7879), which would greatly, he says, benefit agriculture; but, of course, if 'clover' is so indulgently treated, wheat, beans, and, the most valuable of all, *potatoes* could not be rejected. Mr. Warburton, a member of the Committee, and an eminent timber-merchant, suggests that 'grafts of *trees* might be sent.' 'No doubt,' replies the witness, and 'here are 2400 seeds of larch-fir made up in a half-ounce packet' (7980). Every manufacturer agrees in the advantage of sending patterns of *his own* particular ware. One *very prominent* and important witness, whose name the Committee discreetly veils under the random initials of E. F., and whose abode

abode and trade are left in blank, is very desirous of being able to send from fifteen to fifty patterns of goods. We know not what he may deal in—we hope not in ironware or woollen: for we presume the Committee had not yet arrived to such a pitch of post-office reform as to contemplate sending samples of nails or blankets by the post; and yet, why, in strict and equal justice, should the manufacturers of hardware or broadcloth; why even glass or china makers; or the importers of wine or fruits; or Mr. Warburton himself, the timber-merchant, be excluded from an advantage—so great an advantage we are told—as is to be given to other traders? If the principle be once admitted, where are we to draw the line? Weight alone will not do it, for at 1*d.* per half ounce the conveyance would be still so cheap for long distances that many bulky articles might be intruded on the Post-Office.

If our object were merely to amuse our readers, we could fill pages with examples of the trivial, the ludicrous, the extravagant, and discordant propositions which the Committee gravely received, and, as it seems, countenanced, in this portion of their inquiry, which really reads more like the questions and answers in a commission of lunacy than as a discussion between intelligent traders and sober legislators. One circumstance, however, is worthy of notice, as a proof of how impossible it would be to satisfy expectations of this class and character. In the first year of her Majesty's reign, her ministers, under, we have no doubt, the pressure of the same influence that has governed their subsequent proceedings, were induced so far to relax the strict principle of post-office taxation as to pass an act (1 Victoria, c. 34, § 28), 'That packets or covers containing *patterns* or *samples*, not exceeding *one ounce*, without any writing but the name of the sender, his place of abode, and the price of the inclosed article, should pass for the postage of a single letter;' but mark the result. That act is declared by the only two witnesses who were examined on the subject to be 'inoperative' (6674), and 'of very little value' (6897), because of the restriction of the quantity of *written* information. So here is an instance of the reduction of a *triple* to a *single* postage, which has proved to be 'inoperative,' and 'of very little value.' We are satisfied that a calm consideration, not merely of the *rationale* of the subject, but even of the evidence itself, will establish the impolicy, and eventually the mischief, of endeavouring to make the post-office a carrier of parcels, or of any species of merchandise, or of diverting it from its natural and generally understood duties.

This brings us back to the question of rates, and whether they are really so high as to impede, in any such degree as is pretended, the *legitimate* correspondence of the country.

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'The present rates,' say the Committee, 'by restricting the transmission of letters of advice, invoices, orders, &c., produce a most serious injury to commerce, and consequently to national prosperity' (*Report*, p. 6); and this assertion is supported by a vast body of evidence, unquestionable in its details, but exceedingly deficient when tried by general principles, and by a large and impartial view of the essential spirit of mercantile enterprise, and the relation between the commercial and the other general interests of the state. Does any one doubt that Custom-house regulations and duties fetter foreign commerce? that the Excise restricts internal consumption? that tolls on roads and canals impede the transport of goods? that light-house duties enhance freights? that the window-tax presses on shops? the coal-tax on comfort? the soap-tax on cleanliness? and even the income-tax, when it existed, on industry and the employment of capital? What branch of our revenue is innocent of that restrictive influence on all the businesses of mankind which is at this moment so prominently objected to the post-office? on which is it that we could not accumulate as great a body of accusatory details as against the post-office? Let rival petitions against the *malt-tax*, and against *postage*, canvass all England for signatures—can it be doubted that the complaint against the malt duties would meet most general countenance?

We do not forget that no species of taxation ought to be *prohibitory* or even *exorbitant;* and if it can be shown, and as far as it can be proved, that the postages are, *in comparison with other public burdens*, excessive, we decidedly agree that they should be reduced: but is there any such proof? There is not even any such allegation. We must here repeat that most important fact, that it is under the present system of post-office revenue—less increased, since its origin, two centuries ago, than any other scale of duties—that all the great commercial interests of the empire have grown to their present unexampled and incalculable prosperity: but, again, we say, if the rates be irregular or exorbitant, let them be revised and reduced: they need not, on that account, be totally repealed.

The Committee complain that letters inclosing 'invoices' and other mercantile documents cannot be sent but under a heavier rate of postage than a common letter: on what possible principle should they? They are actually heavier, they are of greater value: why should weighty and valuable parcels be conveyed as cheaply as a few idle lines of news or the like? Mr. Hill and his co-operators enter into many minute (and, as we shall see presently, very erroneous) details to show that the cost of conveying a letter is *comparatively* nothing: now what is the *comparative* charge on an invoice? We will take the highest possible case:

a letter

a letter on any sized sheet,* with any quantity of writing which it can hold, may be sent from London to Glasgow for 14*d.*; but if, in addition to all the information such a letter may convey, a *separate* invoice or any other inclosure be added, it will cost 14*d.* more. Now we suppose few invoices are sent to such a distance for goods of less value than 20*l.*: in such a case the rate on the invoice would be $\frac{1}{4}\frac{4}{0}\frac{}{0}$ of the value, and if the value were, what we suppose would be a fairer average, 100*l.*, $\frac{1}{2}\frac{4}{4}\frac{}{0}\frac{}{0}$. And, after all, who pays this comparatively insignificant sum?—not those who make these complaints, but the same consumers—the same public which repay, and generally with usury, the tolls, the duties, the freight, the insurance, and all the other charges which the merchant has advanced on the goods. Why should the smallest, the most insignificant charge, be that against which he should the most loudly remonstrate? Some of the witnesses complain that they are forced, by the exorbitancy of the post-office rates, to forbid their travellers and agents sending them letters of advice:—then the letters of advice are *not worth* 6*d.*, which is the average of the rates assumed by the witnesses and the Committee; and we think the post-office should rather be thought a friend to business—to the most important ingredient in all business, a merchant's *time*—if it protects him from an influx of letters *not worth sixpence*.

The Committee also complain most pathetically, that postage 'operates to the prejudice of the public health by preventing the transmission of *medical* advice, and interferes, to a serious extent, with *legal* professional correspondence' (*Report*, p. 6): but what proportion does 6*d.* bear to the doctor's or the lawyer's fee, or the apothecary's bill, or, more awful still, to the attorney's bill of costs—to say nothing of the value of the health or the property which may be the subject of the advice?

That we may not be suspected of being tender to our own craft, we must notice the equally unreasonable complaints of authors, editors, and publishers, who produce a mass of evidence to show that it would be a vast convenience to them to be able to transmit their manuscripts and *proofs* backwards and forwards at a penny postage. No doubt—but, even as the case stands, we think they manage the matter pretty well. Look at all the 'Libraries of Useful Knowledge,' 'the Penny Magazine,' 'the Saturday Magazine,' 'Chambers's Journal,' 'the Penny Cyclopædia,' and so forth. Within all country towns they could be *now*, if the editors found it worth while, sent at 1*d.*—in London for 2*d.*—

* A couple of years since some post-office reformer, to prove the absurdity of the *single* and *double* system, circulated letters on single sheets as large as table-cloths—at least we received such a one. He was clearly one of those who would have wished to send the same weight in samples of goods.

and

and all through the country they may be sent by coach parcels,—a mode of conveyance so cheap and so rapid, that Mr. Hill and the Committee rely mainly on it as a proof of how cheaply the post-office might do its work: where, then, is the need or advantage of a change for *them?*

In the 11,654 questions and answers which the Committee put and received on these subjects, we find two or three which are a conclusive refutation of some thousands which refer to these complaints against mercantile postages, and these are elicited from the most anxious advocates of the new system. Mr. Dillon, a partner in the great haberdashery house of Morrison and Co., says—'We charge the postage on orders below a certain amount.' (3539.) The Committee, it seems, did not think it worth while to ask the 'certain amount;' but the next witness, Mr. Whittaker, the respectable publisher, states (3693), that 'unless the order extends from 2*l.* to 3*l.* they charge their correspondent with *postage* and *commission*.' Now here is irrefragable proof that postages are, in fact, so insignificant compared with general transactions, that, except for *very small* orders, they are covered by the dealer's profit, and that even when the order is so low as 3*l.*, there is still profit enough to cover both 'postage *and* commission;' and this elucidates with equal force why the very witnesses that give such evidence are amongst the most anxious to get rid of a charge so small as not to be worth making to individual purchasers of 3*l.* worth of goods:—it is simply this, that, charging their goods at the wholesale price, they make a profit which silently covers the postage, even when, as in the cases of the two houses just mentioned, their annual postage should be above 1000*l.* Now if the postages were abolished, the amount would be too insignificant to make any alteration in the price of the article to individual customers, and Messrs. Dillon and Whittaker would each put 1000*l.* a-year of the present post-office revenue into their own private pockets, and we, the public, must be called upon to make good the 1000*l.* thus comfortably realised by Messrs. Whittaker and Dillon. We are no longer surprised at the zeal and subscriptions of the great city houses in this cause, seeing that they expect to pocket a new and net profit—each according to their scale of business—of from 500*l.* to 11,000*l.* a-year, with no other risk, cost, or trouble, than their share in getting up this agitation; but we are surprised that the honourable and intelligent Committee did not see that these two admissions were very complete answers to a great majority of the 11,654 questions which they so diligently put. We confess that we admire their industry more than their sagacity or candour.

In short, we see no evidence and no reason to induce a belief that

that the amount of postages can trammel in any serious degree the great mercantile movements of this country. It is a disagreeable thing to merchants to have to pay in hard cash and on the instant, one, two, or three pounds sterling a-day, when the return must be so distant, and so merged in the general profits, that the postage feels as if it is an immediate and actual loss; but it is quite clear that it falls at last on the consumer, and is, beyond doubt, the lightest of all the fiscal burdens with which any article of general consumption is charged.

The persons on whom postage falls really heaviest are a class that Mr. Hill and the Committee hardly notice—the smaller gentry, who are immediately below the influence of the franking privilege, and who correspond for pleasure, for courtesy, or the petty businesses of life. They, unlike the trader, have no customer on whom eventually to lay the burthen, and we confess that the favourable impression which we originally felt towards the penny-rate was chiefly influenced by a consideration for this class; which, however, being somewhat of a higher order, attracts no sympathy whatsoever from post-office reformers. But, on the other hand, letters are, with this class, a kind of luxury for which they can afford to pay, and which they may, in a considerable degree, if not altogether, regulate at their own option, and according to their circumstances.

We have no means of estimating what the amount of this class of correspondence may be in this country, and the Committee, so minute on other very minor points, give, and perhaps could give, no data upon this; but we were surprised to learn from M. Piron that the number of private letters—that is, not upon mere business—is in France so inconsiderable that he throws it altogether out of consideration. In England, no doubt, a great portion of such correspondence passes under franks; but a very considerable quantity must, we should think, be taxed, and it is for that portion (including the domestic letters of the lower orders) that we should be most anxious for *some* reduction of the rates. The *men of business*, we are well assured, can look after their own interests, and recover, as we have said, with usury, the advances which they are obliged to make.

We have thus touched—slightly and imperfectly, we are aware, but as far as the limits of such a paper as this allow—the general arguments in favour of a reduction of postage, on the score of justice, morality, or commerce; and we think we have indicated (and we pretend to do no more) considerations which tend to show that these arguments are in some instances wholly unfounded, in all the rest very much exaggerated, and certainly not sufficient, on our present information, to warrant so serious an experiment as is about to be made.

We

We now proceed to an examination of the peculiar characterestics of Mr. Hill's plan:

1. The justice of a uniform rate, and the sufficiency of that rate's being only a penny.

2. The economy and convenience of the uniform penny rate.

3. The prospect of an equal amount of revenue derived from economy of management and increase of correspondence.

Though, for the sake of clearness, we divide Mr. Hill's plan into its three great features, it will be seen that in detail they all hang together, and that the reasoning for or against them cannot be kept entirely separate. We shall, however, endeavour to follow each head with as much distinctness as we can.

There is something startling to the common sense of mankind in the proposition that a letter ought to be conveyed 500 miles for the same charge as for five miles; but really Mr. Hill makes out a most ingenious, and, if his premises were sound, a very forcible case. His argument lies in a nutshell.

Taking the Edinburgh mail, which he selects as one of the longest and most important, he finds that the cost of conveying the mail of any one night is, by contract, without any reference to its weight, 5*l.*;* that the average weight of letters and newspapers is 6 cwt., and of the bags 2 cwt., which, deducting the weight of the bags, gives for the cost of conveying a newspaper—at an average weight of 1½ oz.—1-6th of a penny; and of a single letter—at the average of ¼ oz.—1-36th of a penny. Then 1-36th of a penny being the full cost of a letter from the longest distance, and such a fraction not practically admitting of any proportionable division for smaller distances, he assumes, fairly enough, that no substantial injustice can be done to any party in rating the *conveyance* of all distances at the uniform rate of 1-36th of a penny. Then, as every letter, whatever be the distance it has travelled, will have been put in at one post-office and delivered at another, the expenses of the two offices are common to all letters, and may, therefore, whatever the amount is, be added to all; and the result will be that the total expense of conveyance and delivery is, for every practical purpose and with reference to any possible denomination of coin, the same all over the empire; and so his case is proved with all the accuracy of arithmetic.

Common sense is astounded at such a result, and refuses to believe it—though it cannot at first sight discover where the fallacies lie; but a little examination will show that, as usual, common sense is right even against the assumed accuracy of arithmetic.

* There is, we think, some subsequent evidence that it is still less, but it is simpler to adopt Mr. Hill's original calculation.

The first fallacy is that, though the cost of the Edinburgh mail be truly stated at 5*l.*, that sum, small as it seems, is not a fair average of the expense of the mails in general in reference to the number of letters conveyed.

The charge being made for the *trip* without reference to weight or number, the heavy-laden mails convey individual letters cheaper than the light. If the mail carried but five letters, each letter would cost 1*l.*, while 1200 would cost but a penny each: Mr. Hill, therefore, in the apparent fairness of selecting the Edinburgh mail as being the *longest*, really took an unfair instance, as it is also one of the *heaviest*—that is, one in which the individual cost of a letter is *lightest*. The Louth (Lincolnshire) mail, for instance, which is one of the light mails, costs *above* 1¼*d.* per letter for 148 miles: on a new contract which had just come into operation, at the time of the evidence of Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster-General, the expense of that mail would be increased by about 1-6th;—and the average of the kingdom cannot be taken, according to the evidence of the Postmaster-General (2786), at less than 1*d.*, instead of 1-36th, as Mr. Hill states. So vanishes his whole fabric at one blow; for the naked cost of conveyance, without any other charges of management, equals the whole of his proposed postage. Another great source of Mr. Hill's error is, that he reckons, as we have seen, the *newspapers* as bearing their proportionable share of the burden at the rate of 1½ oz. weight, and 1-6th of a penny charge, and he has further deducted the weight of the bags; but, instead of *deducting* the sums equivalent to these respective weights, he should, in fact, have *added* them, for newspapers go free, as do a large number of franked letters: the *paying* letters—which to Edinburgh average about 1500 only in number—must pay for both newspapers and franks, as well as for the weight of the bags;—and the result, as stated in the very clear and clever evidence of Lord Lichfield, is, that the average Edinburgh letter, instead of being, as Mr. Hill assumes, 1-36th, is, in truth, above 3-4ths of a penny.

But this is not all. The mail-coaches are exempted from *tolls*, a privilege which Mr. Hill says that his brother reformer, Sir Henry Parnell, estimates as of itself a sufficient public remuneration for the conveyance of the mail *—an opinion in which he seems to concur. Nor yet is this all:—

The superior certainty and security which the superintendence of the government gives to the mails, the protection of the government guards, and other similar advantages, enable the mail-coach

* Mr. Hill indeed says that the stage-coach duty may be set off against the tolls; but this is absurd, as the stage-coach duties fall on all coaches alike, and would be paid, together with the *tolls*, by these coaches, even if they carried no mails at all.

owners

owners to charge higher rates for passengers (5285) and parcels (6887) than ordinary coaches. We have taken the trouble of inquiring what this advantage may be in the Edinburgh mail, and we find that a passenger by the best stage-coach is charged 6*l.* 10*s.* only, whereas by the mail he pays 7*l.* 7*s.*, or about 12 per cent. in favour of the mail; and a parcel under 12lbs. costs by the mail 6*s.* 2*d.*, and by the ordinary coach 5*s.* 2*d.*, being near 20 per cent. in favour of the mail; and so well understood is all this, that a mail-coach contractor who has a bad bargain still offers to do the work if the post-office will allow him to take another passenger. It is clear that all these advantages to the mail-coaches come eventually out of the public pocket, and tend additionally, if any addition were necessary, to the discomfiture of Mr. Hill's calculation of the abstract expense of the conveyance of a letter. But a very remarkable circumstance, strongly elucidatory of this part of the subject, and which alone ought to have suspended the Government's confidence in Mr. Hill's argument, has lately occurred. Stage-coaches plying for the conveyance of passengers between place and place were always anxious, for the sake of the advantages we have alluded to, and to secure so constant and important a customer as the post-office, to assume the character of *mails*, and to convey the bags at very moderate rates indeed—rates which bore but an imperfect proportion to the actual benefit derived by the public. But lo! *railroads* came into the market—*they* were susceptible of no subsidiary advantages from the post-office, and would only carry their mails at what they considered the real value of the accommodation;—and that value was so *excessively* beyond what the post-office was in the habit of paying the coaches, that the government were obliged to pass an *ex post facto* law to oblige the railroads to convey the mails at a rate to be settled by arbitration. This was a violent remedy; but even under it we understand that the post-office is obliged to pay to the railroads *six times* the sum it used to pay to the coaches. After this fact, what becomes of Mr. Hill's ingenious calculation that this cost of the conveyance of a letter is a sum too minute to be perceived? Need we say a word more on this part of the subject? Of all the witnesses that approved of the system of a uniform penny rate, there are but two (whom we shall notice presently) who do not rest their approbation on Mr. Hill's proof that 'the conveyance *costs next to nothing*,' and is, therefore, the same for all distances. Lord Ashburton—by far the weightiest authority in its favour, and indeed the only one of all the favouring witnesses who treats the subject with perfect candour and common sense—repeatedly says that he speaks only on the 'calculations' and '*ex parte* statements of Mr. Hill, showing that distance made, *in*

fact, no perceptible difference in the expense.' (8167, &c.) Mr. Browne (7021) '*assumes* that Mr. Hill's calculations are correct,' (6625), 'and takes them for granted.' Mr. Brewin says, 'I follow Hill; I have no means of testing his calculations.' (7972.) Dr. Birkbeck 'takes Mr. Hill's estimate, that the conveyance of a letter to Edinburgh costs but 1-36th of a penny.' (8040.) Mr. E. F. 'knows nothing of the expenses of conveying letters other than as is given in Mr. Hill's pamphlet, and has no means of knowing whether it is correct.' (4280.) Mr. Murray 'takes the statements of Mr. Hill's pamphlet for granted,' (5822) 'and has himself made no calculation as to the cost'—(5851); and so on.

We have shown, however, that these calculations are substantially and importantly erroneous; and so fall to the ground all the evidence, the reasonings, and the opinions thus avowedly founded on them, and on them alone. Our readers will observe that we are not now inquiring whether a uniform rate of *twopence* or *threepence* might not cover the expenses—that is another question: our *present* business is with Mr. Hill's specific calculations; and these, we say, have in this particular entirely broken down. Of any modification of his plan we are not now giving an opinion; but THE *specific plan* has, we assert again, failed in another of its main foundations.

But there are two witnesses who are advocates for a uniformity of rate on abstract principles, without troubling themselves with Mr. Hill's calculation of the identity of cost in all cases; and—as we have no doubt that *now* that the *fact* has broken down under Mr. Hill's paradox, he and his supporters will fall back on the abstract justice of a uniform rate of postage, even though the rate of conveyance should vary—we think it worth while to notice these, otherwise only ridiculous, evidences. Mr. John Dillon says,—

'So far from thinking that it is reasonable that the tax upon letters should be in proportion to the distance, it has occurred to me that the *contrary* might, with advantage, take place, and that the tax on letters should be *inversely* and not directly in proportion to the distance. Persons living near the metropolis have already sufficient advantages and facilities of intercourse; and I believe the tax on postage is the only tax which a man at Edinburgh pays at a higher rate than a man living in the neighbourhood of London.' (3574.)

This gentleman, who must, we think, be a countryman of Sir Boyle Roache's, is obviously of opinion that it is farther from London to Edinburgh than it is from Edinburgh to London; and that a man in Edinburgh pays more for a London letter than a man in London for an Edinburgh letter. Yet the Committee listened with all respect to this Hibernian stuff, and asked this

this clear-headed witness no less than 170 questions, without thinking it necessary to remind him that a man in Edinburgh receives letters from all Scotland—the natural sphere of his business—and from the north of England, and from the north of Ireland, and, by way of Glasgow, ship-letters from America and the West Indies, and directly from Holland and the north of Europe, at rates considerably lower than the inhabitant of London. The other witness, a Scotch metaphysician, surpasses the last witness in absurdity. Mr. Dillon only confounds distance; Mr. Simpson first confounds, and then annihilates it. Dr. Lardner, who had been previously examined, had, though a zealous friend to the penny rate, too much good sense to maintain the abstract justice of a *uniform* rate. He had stated—

'that he thought a uniform rate, when viewed as *a matter of convenience*, was desirable; but *per se* it is unjust: it is wholly disproportionate to the *value* of the thing you get, and has nothing to recommend it but its simplicity. (5553.)

'*Q.* You do not think that, looking at it on the ground of justice, an uniform rate is required?—*A.* Certainly not; quite the reverse: it makes the short distances pay for the long. To a person who has large correspondence with different parts of the country, it is of no consequence, for he gains as much by the long as he loses by the short; but there are many persons, all whose letters are short, and they manifestly pay the postage of those whose letters are long.' (5554.)

In order to rebut this plain and common-sense state of the case, Mr. Simpson, who describes himself as 'a Scotch barrister, author of the *Philosophy of Education*, and a *Lecturer* on that subject,' is produced, and when he is asked whether it would be better to have a uniform rate, *or* a rate proportionate to the expense of conveyance, the philosophical author and lecturer replies,—

'It appears to me that there is a fallacy at the bottom of *that* proposition.'

Two opposite propositions had been, we see, propounded, to which he replies as '*that proposition*,' without specifying which of the two he means; but we guess from the context that he considers the fallacy as lying '*at the bottom*' of the proposition for fixing the rate in proportion to the *distance*. After this little stumble at the threshold, the philosopher proceeds:—

'I conceive *distance* and *nearness*, as to this question, is the *same all over the country*—that a locality is near one place and distant from another, and *vice versâ*.'

Pro-di-gi-ous!—Dominie Sampson would have exclaimed, had he lived to witness the wonderful discoveries of Dominie Simpson; who proceeds to state,—

'that

'that in a correspondence, which implies that an answer is to come back, the advantage is thrown into *each hand alternately*.'

This, we see, is a luculent version of Mr. Dillon's problem, that if a letter goes a *long* distance, the answer can have only a *short* one to come back; and that the *same* correspondence is thus *alternately long* and *short*, and compensates itself; whereas we should rather have thought that a *correspondence* which 'implies,' as Mr. Simpson accurately and ably observes, 'that an answer is to come back,' also implies that the letter and its answer will travel the same distance. There may, indeed, be some doubts whether, by 'each hand alternately,' Mr. Simpson means—as at first sight he seems to do—the hands of *one* individual, and is not rather speaking of 'each hand' as the hand of two different and unconnected persons; for he proceeds :—

'If one (hand) has the advantage of being near Edinburgh, another has the advantage of being near London; but the one near London is distant from Edinburgh; and as correspondence means a circle—[in what language, Dominie?]—it means letters and answers; the thing [what *thing?*] is brought to an equality.'

This, we think, settles the question, that 'each *hand*' belongs to a different *body;* for there is no man alive, we suppose, except the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose hands are long enough to be in London and Edinburgh at the same time; but if this be so, what becomes of the promised '*alternate compensation?*'—for the lecturer will hardly convince Dr. Lardner that a man who lives twenty miles from town, and pays dear for a short correspondence, will be adequately *compensated* because another man, who lives 200 miles off, and whom he never saw nor heard of, pays cheap for a long correspondence. But all this is rational and intelligible compared with the proposition with which the lecturer winds up and concludes his brilliant argumentation :—

'I do not see, therefore, that there is any difficulty in the way of making those who are *near* pay for those who are *distant*, because—[what, for a ducat?]—because there is *no nearness and distance absolutely*, but only relatively; and those who are near to one place are distant from another place, and *vice versâ*.' (9820.)

It may be from the imperfection of our *education*, never having had the advantage of Mr. Simpson's instruction; but we fairly confess that we have not the slightest conception of what—in any view, either of individual justice or general principle—this profound—to us unfathomably profound—philosopher can possibly mean; and there we must leave it.

But let us try the question of distance by a practical example. The carriage of a small parcel from London to Barnet may be 1*s.*; to Edinburgh, 6*s.* 2*d.* It makes not the slightest practical difference,

difference, in point of outlay, to the coach-owner whether that individual parcel goes to Edinburgh or Barnet; its weight is not perceptible: it must be received and delivered, whether at Barnet or Edinburgh; and its relative share of the expenses of the whole coach establishment (instead of being 1-36th of a penny, as in the case of a letter) is probably not 1-360th; and to use the words which Mr. Hill applies to the case of letters,—

'It is not a matter of inference, but a matter of fact, that the expense to the post-office (or *coach-owner*) is practically the same whether a letter (*or parcel*) is going from London to Barnet, or from London to Edinburgh: the difference is not expressible in the smallest coin we have.'—*Evid.* 114.

But is there any man so insane as to say that it is consistent with justice or common sense that the parcel should be delivered at Edinburgh for the same rate as at Barnet? The proposition is really too absurd to be reasoned upon. Those who can believe in it must also believe that a man has a right to have his *person* conveyed from place to place, be they Paddington or John o' Groat's House, at the same uniform rate as his parcels and letters. We, on the contrary, so far from discarding all consideration of distance, assert that *distance* is the chief ingredient—indeed, we might say, the very *sine quâ non* and essence—of any and every system of post-office charge. It is the *constant*, as it is called, of every proposition on the subject. If it were not for *distance*, there would be no post-offices at all. The *intrinsic value* of the conveyance of a letter is a very different thing from its *cost*, and, as Dr. Lardner suggests, the *value* is exactly equal to the time, trouble, and expense which is saved to the correspondent—of which the best, if not the only measure is *distance*; and as the difficulty of private conveyance increases (even to impossibility) with increasing distances, so must increase, in gradations proportional to the distances, the *value* of the conveyance. The gods must annihilate both time and space before a uniform rate of postage can be reasonable or just.

That there would be a certain degree of convenience to the public and to the post-office (though even that is overrated) in a uniform tax, we shall not contest; but there never can be, even under Mr. Hill's own views, a strict uniformity. All letters of above half-ounce weight, and of as many classes as half-ounces, all foreign letters, all ship letters, and all the letters delivered in local districts from central offices, which Mr. Hill calls a 'secondary distribution,' all these are, even on his own view, exceptions to the uniform rate; and the moment that *any* exception to the principle of absolute uniformity is admitted, it follows that the several post-offices cannot be reduced to that condition of mere *machines* for receipt and distribution, on

on which so much of the simplicity and economy of the whole plan depends. The post-offices must be all maintained just as at present; the charge on all those exceptional classes of letters must be, as now, collected by pre-payment, or by the letter-carriers from door to door, and must be accounted for to, and afterwards by, the several postmasters; and though the sums-total will be greatly reduced, no particle of the system of account and control can be abandoned, even in the poorest village office. So that all the expense will remain, with not a tithe of the profit.

We cannot give a stronger instance of the impossibility of carrying the principle of uniformity into practice, than to state the clumsy and absurd shift by which in one very important class of cases Mr. Hill endeavoured to overcome the difficulty. His principle being that all letters should be *pre-payed* at the rate of 1*d.*, and distributed mechanically without further demand or delay, it was asked how foreign letters, arriving in England and already charged with heavy postages, were to be dealt with? This was a puzzler; and will it be believed how Mr. Hill proposed to surmount the difficulty?—why, by abandoning the foreign postage altogether! the letter to be delivered *free*, and the postage to be paid to the *foreign state*, out of the *public purse*. No wonder the great houses engaged in foreign trade should approve a plan by which the British community were to pay their postages, and pay them, too, into the treasuries of France or Belgium. Monstrous! 'O but,' said Mr. Hill, 'I can so arrange it that the British community shall suffer no loss, for though I must needs deliver the *incoming* letter free, I will charge all *outgoing* letters double.' Admirable *uniformity!* One batch of letters is to be charged double in order that another batch of letters shall go free. But if there could be any semblance of rationality in such a plan, the British community would have to pay both ways, for why should any individual sending a letter abroad be called upon to pay the postage of those which some other persons may perchance receive? Mr. Hill seems to imagine that the foreign correspondents shall pay both ways, but he does not tell us how he can obtain it from the foreign correspondent.

And, after all, this clever device is only the old story of the world, the elephant, and the tortoise: for, though it gets rid of the difficulty of keeping up the post-offices on the existing system for *delivering* incoming letters, it does necessitate their maintenance for *receiving* the postages on the *outgoing* letters—and so here again we come back to the difficulty which we made these monstrous and ridiculous shifts to avoid.

Thus vanish all hopes of economy from the total abolition of the cash and accountant departments of the post-office.

But another supposed source of economy was the reduced number

number of hands that would be sufficient to manipulate a uniform and *pre-payed* system. Letters would require no examination, no taxation, no check—a mere blind *counting* of the *number* would suffice for all purposes; and indeed we know not for what useful purpose even the counting could be necessary:—of course, then, all the examining, taxing, checking clerks may be dismissed at once. Not so fast! In the first place, Mr. Hill computes that there will be five or six times more letters to deal with—some witnesses say ten or twelve times more—this would require five or ten times the quantity of manual labour, which would more than counterbalance any possible reduction of the other class; but, moreover, we have seen that it is impossible to effect an absolutely uniformity of rate—the uniformity will exist only for a single class of letters, those under half an ounce weight: all exceeding that weight, all included in what Mr. Hill called the 'secondary distribution,' all foreign letters outwards—these will be all liable to varying rates;—and therefore every individual letter must be examined as at present, to detect those that may be liable to the additional charge; and these must be further, not merely counted, but weighed, taxed, computed, and carried to account exactly as at present, and with more haste and confusion: because, as all the delivery must be made at the same hours—for it is not, we presume, intended that those who pay most are to be served last—and as the course of the penny letters through the office is assumed to be so rapid, the excepted class must be managed with accelerated velocity to get them ready for delivery at the same time. There was some talk in the Committee about a *tell-tale* machine for counting and weighing, and Mr. Hill, and we think some other witness, mentioned that such a machine was, or was to be, attempted. We readily admit that such a machine might be made to give either *weight* or *numbers*, but we can hardly imagine how it could give *both*, which is what would be required; nor do we see how such a machine, if constructed, could be beneficially employed—and we believe that the general opinion even in the Committee ultimately was that no considerable saving of either time or labour could be produced in that way: and finally, we think there was not one practical man who conceived that any reduction in the personal establishment of the post-offices would be effected, while it is certain either that the Stamp-office is now very exorbitantly over-manned, *or* the additional duty of supplying and accounting for *four or five hundred millions* of stamps must require *some* additional hands.

Mr. Hill also supposes that a 'considerable diminution should be made in the number of letter-carriers, whose salaries, small individually, are considerable by their numbers.' Now the increased

creased facility of the delivery is the single point (we think) of Mr. Hill's whole plan to which we can agree without difficulty or reserve, and yet we cannot arrive at the same conclusion as to the diminution of the number of letter-carriers. It will certainly be a most convenient saving of time if it can be managed that the letter-carriers have only to deliver, with mechanical rapidity, the letters at the several doors, instead of waiting for payment, which involves an indefinite delay; but, as the exempted classes of letters must equally be delivered, and if the number of all sorts of letters is to increase four or five fold, we do not see how it can be expected that the number of letter-carriers should be reduced.

As to any diminution of the salaries of the post-masters or letter-carriers, we have no expectation that it could be realized. We think, on the contrary, they must necessarily be increased in *number* by the additional spread of correspondence, and probably not reduced in *amount* of salary to any noticeable degree—for we think their responsibility, and the necessity of having persons of character in that trust, will be very much increased: since (besides that they will still have money accounts on all letters of the excepted classes) there will be more liability and temptation to negligence or fraud, in dealing with an undistinguishable mass of penny letters, than at present. At present, all letters, being charged, must be accounted for, and the charge itself is a kind of *ear-mark* by which a letter may be traced, so that there is now a *financial check* and a *material check*, in addition to the *moral* check—whereas with the pre-payed penny letters there will be neither financial nor material check: therefore the moral check will require to be enforced rather than relaxed;—the characters of the post-masters and letter-carriers will become of more importance than ever; and, of course, the remuneration to a superior class of persons cannot be calculated at an inferior rate. Thus, we think, vanish any reasonable expectations of financial reduction in the establishment of the post-offices; and, indeed, Mr. Hill, in his later views, seems to admit that there will be a great increase on the charges of management.

But the other part of this subject—the mode of establishing any adequate check on the letter-carriers—is still more important, and appears to us the most difficult problem of the whole series. What security can there be for the delivery of letters for which the carrier is to bring back no return? 'But,' said Mr. Warburton, 'newspapers now go free, yet are never lost.' The fact we believe is not so; but if it were, Sir Robert Peel's answer to Mr. Warburton is conclusive—a man expects his newspaper, and will inquire after it if missing—not so with letters—their loss can only be detected in cases where answers are expected; and even then,

then, who could prove where or how the letter or the answer was lost?—but, moreover, the newspaper is not worth abstracting, and accompanying, as it now does, paying letters, there is no temptation and no opportunity for its abstraction. The case of letters is altogether different—there will be great temptation, unbounded opportunity, and no check. Mr. Warburton said something about a registration. What! a registration at every letter-box and a receipt at every door?—Nonsense! Ten times the number of hands and ten times the quantity of time now employed would not suffice for such a system. We confess we see no good answer to this difficulty.

We now arrive at the most plausible and most important consideration of the 'public convenience.' We beg leave to set aside in this part of the subject all idea of the *pecuniary* convenience, of which we have already treated: we are *here* to consider the mere convenience as to practical operations. The first great principle on this head, namely, *pre-payment* by means of a stamp or stamped cover, is universally admitted to be quite the reverse of convenient, foreign to the habits of the people, and likely, however slight the pre-payment may be, to excite some dissatisfaction in the poorer classes, and occasional difficulties to all:—but it would, we believe, be readily accepted as the price of the many other promised advantages. We will raise no objection about the practical details, however embarrassing they may appear. We take for granted that either by stamped *wafers*, by stamped *writing-paper*, or by stamped *covers*, the problem may be practically solved. We shall lay no stress on the danger of forgery, nor on any general difficulty in obtaining the stamps. We concede, for argument's sake, all that Mr. Hill requires on this head; but, though we raise no argumentative objections on this point, we think it right to offer some suggestions on the advantages and disadvantages of each of the proposed modes of employing the stamp.

The most simple and perhaps convenient of all would be the *stamped wafer*, which should at once *seal* and *frank* the letter; but there is, we fear, an insuperable objection to this plan, namely, that there would be no security for the contents of the letter, as the wafer stamp could be easily removed and replaced by another, at the expense, to the *inquisitor* or *depredator*, of only a penny.

Wafer stamps—not to be used as seals, but affixed to the face of the letter—would also be convenient, and might be made of different colours to carry different weights; or by affixing two or more you might reach the extra weight of a more than half-ounce letter: to these there is no other objection, that we are aware of, than their liability to be rubbed off, if *carelessly* affixed; and no one who has not seen the interior of a post-office can imagine the amount

amount of carelessness and blunder which the public commit even now in the details of making up their letters.

To stamped *writing-paper* there are several practical objections. First, it will force one to keep a supply of the various classes of stamped paper at hand—a pecuniary advance which may be sometimes inconvenient—or else to send out to buy, on the sudden, the kind of paper you may want, which will be often troublesome, and sometimes, in the country, very difficult: secondly, all mankind must be *forced* to fold their letters in the same form, so that the stamp shall always come to the surface: thirdly, the length of your letter and the weight of any enclosure it is to contain must be *predetermined* before you begin to write, lest you should employ an inadequate stamp: fourthly, if, *inter scribendum*, you should make any error that should induce you to re-write the letter, the stamp may be lost, for it would never be worth while to trouble the Stamp-office to refund a penny for the damaged stamp.

The stamped *cover* seems the most popular of all these devices; but, while we allow to the principle the merit of great ingenuity and many plausible advantages, we must confess that we think it is also liable to considerable abatement.

M. Piron tells us that the idea of a post-paid envelope originated early in the reign of Louis XIV. with M. de Velayer, who, in 1653, established (with royal approbation) a private penny-post, placing boxes at the corners of the streets for the reception of letters wrapped up in envelopes, which were to be bought at offices established for that purpose. M. de Velayer had also caused to be printed certain *forms* of *billets* or notes, applicable to the ordinary business among the inhabitants of great towns, with blanks, which were to be filled up by the pen with such special matter as might complete the writer's object. One of these *billets* has been preserved to our times by a pleasant misapplication of it. Pélisson, Mde. de Sevigné's friend, and the object of the *bon mot*, that 'he abused the privilege which men have of being ugly,' was amused at this kind of skeleton correspondence, and, under the affected name of *Pisandre*, (according to the pedantic fashion of the day,) he filled up and addressed one of these forms to the celebrated Mademoiselle de Scuderi, in her *pseudonyme* of *Sappho*. This strange *billet-doux* has happened, from the celebrity of the parties, to be preserved, and it is still extant, one of the oldest, we presume, of penny-post letters, and a curious example of a *pre*-paying envelope,—a new proof of the adage that 'there is nothing new under the sun.' We venture to give, as a gleam of amusement in this tedious discussion, a fac-simile of this curious note: our readers will readily distinguish the words added with the pen in the original.

But

M *ademoiselle,*

Mandez-moy si vous ne sçavez point quelque *bon remède contre l'amour ou contre l'absence,* et si vous n'en connoisez point, faites-moy le plaisir de vous en enquérir, et, au cas que vous en trouverez, de l'envoyer à

Votre très humble *et très-obéissant Serviteur,*

Pisandre.

Outre le billet de port payé que l'on mettra sur cette lettre pour la faire partir, celuy qui escrira aura soing, s'il veut avoir reponse, d'envoyer un autre billet de port payé enfermé dans sa lettre.

Pour M*ademoiselle*
Sappho
demeurant en la rue *au Pays des Nouveaux Sansomales*
A Paris.
Par billet de port payé.

But this device had been long forgotten even in France; and we have no doubt that when Mr. Charles Knight, an extensive publisher, as well as an intelligent literary man, proposed, some years since, a stamped cover for the circulation of newspapers, he was under no obligation for the idea to Monsieur de Velayer. Mr. Hill, adopting Mr. Knight's suggestion, has applied it to the general purposes of the post-office with an ingenuity and address which make it his own.

This part of the proposition is very popular, particularly with the higher and middle classes, because it is the fashion, and a mark of *bon ton*, to enclose one's letter in an envelope, even *though*, or perhaps *because*, it subjects it to double postage. A scheme, therefore, that enables all to indulge in this little aristocratic convenience is pretty generally acceptable: an envelope is, besides, more easily sealed, and more secure when *properly** sealed. But it also has its practical objections. The vast majority of letters (in the proportion of 700 to 52, 2nd Rep., App. 7) are letters written on single sheets of writing-paper, which sheets are little more than equal to two covers—so that the weight and expense of the paper of every single letter will be increased one-third; and as it will not, we presume, be possible to write on the inside of the envelope, one-fifth of the quantity of writing-space afforded by equal weights of paper will be lost. This increase of weight and diminution of space, though next to nothing in an individual letter, may be of some consideration when we come to deal with *hundreds of millions*.

The stationers and paper-makers are in considerable alarm about the adoption of covers, which they fear may throw the whole supply into the hands of parties who have now a patent for a paper which defies forgery; but this alarm we think groundless—there can be no serious danger from forgery, and none at all that the government will give a monopoly to any set of men. It will probably find itself obliged to adopt *all* of the three proposed modes, stamped *wafers*, stamped *covers*, and stamped *letter-paper*—which may occasion some slight difficulties in the post-office, and some accidental expense to individuals by the loss on stamps spoiled, misapplied, or applied twice over to the same letter—but neither, we think, to a degree worth consideration.

The convenience of the *cover*, however, would be equally given

* We say *properly*—because, if the cover be not so formed that the seal *shall attach itself to each of the four folds* which form the back of the cover—in other words, so that the *four* points *exactly meet*—nothing can be so easy as to detach one of the folds, extract the letter, and replace it without any possibility of detection. The covers now in use are generally very unsafe in this point.

to

to the public, without the stamp or any alteration in the post-office system, by adopting the mode of charging letters by *weight*, as is universal on the continent, instead of by *single* or *double*, as hitherto practised in England.

This change would be convenient in many respects, and remove many petty vexations, but we fear it might give rise to more than it would remove, and particularly with the lower classes. Every one knows what a *single sheet* of paper is, and that if he confines himself to a *single* sheet, whatever be its size or weight, he will be charged only for a single letter: this is a vast practical convenience and security against mistakes and squabbles with the post-office; but weights are liable to doubt and error, particularly weights so minute as to turn a half-ounce scale: a damp sheet of paper will turn it, when a dry one of the same size and quality would not. The addition of the seal, or the difference between a seal and a wafer, will often have the same effect, and even though every man were to carry scales in his pocket, mistakes would be frequent, and disputes and complaints about overcharges infinitely increased. And, after the best consideration we can give the subject, we rather incline to think that it will be found in practice that the *single and double* mode of charging is the least liable to error on the part of the letter-writers. So that here, again, we think the balance of convenience is rather against Mr. Hill's plan, with, however, we are bound to add, one important alleviation, namely, that any mistake which may happen, instead of costing sixpence as now, will cost but an additional penny. This, however, belongs rather to the money part of the question, to which we now proceed.

None of the witnesses, certainly none of any weight, pretend that Mr. Hill's plan could be adopted without a great present defalcation of revenue. Lord Ashburton, infinitely the most judicious of all, thinks that the reduction to a penny would wholly destroy the revenue: Lord Lowther himself, if we may judge by his votes in the Committee, is of the same opinion, and thinks twopence the smallest rate that would cover the expenses; and the Committee itself, after a long struggle, negatived both a *penny* and a *three-halfpenny* rate as inadequate, and finally recommended the adoption of *twopence*. But Mr. Hill and the great body of witnesses, many of them of great respectability and intelligence, think that the vast increase of correspondence would, in a few years, fully compensate, and finally increase the revenue. We, however, are, on the contrary, obliged to declare our concurrence on this point with Lords Ashburton and Lowther, the Committee, and the minority of the witnesses; and we do so the rather, because the witnesses who speculate on such prodigious increases

increases are, with one or two exceptions, persons who have such an immediate and direct interest in carrying the new project, as cannot but influence their opinions.

The first circumstance we shall notice is the very remarkable suspicion which Mr. Hill himself showed of his calculations in this respect. There is a large and very interesting class of letters which are now distributed by *local* posts, and for which one penny each in addition to the general postage is charged—this Mr. Hill called 'the secondary distribution;' and in this he originally proposed that there should be no alteration—but that all those districts should continue to pay the additional penny. Here was *justice and uniformity* with a vengeance!—a small town or village in the neighbourhood of London, or any other post town, would have to pay for a letter which might not have travelled ten miles, *twice as much* as the postage of a letter from London to Edinburgh! and the extent to which this monstrous anomaly (which has nothing like a parallel in all the real or fancied grievances alleged against the present system) would affect the country, may be judged by the fact that the post-offices of *primary* distribution which are to pay only one penny are, in England and Wales, 356: while the post-offices of *secondary* distribution, on which the double rate of twopence was to be inflicted, are no less than 1475 (2nd Rept. App. No. 28)—above *four times* the former number!!! The only imaginable motive for this otherwise unaccountable departure from all *justice and uniformity* is the conviction of the projector that the penny was totally inadequate even to meet the expenses, and that therefore it was convenient to eke it out by a double postage on the 1475 villages and their respective districts—which being small and scattered, and having been habituated to pay an additional postage, might not, it was probably hoped, have the spirit or the union necessary to defeat the imposition. And this was an item in the very same plan which proposed to relieve the *central post towns* from the penny which they now pay for internal distribution!—and yet all this was argued by Mr. Hill with at least as much force and plausibility and pertinacity as any other part of his scheme (pp. 55—59, and Evid. *passim*); but when he found that so scandalous an infraction of his own principles could not be tolerated, he thought it most prudent to slip quietly out of this proposition, and—after having been examined before the Committee four several days, and having persisted, in spite of a sensible cross-examination by Lord Seymour, in his scheme of the secondary charge—he at length addressed a letter to the chairman, 'withdrawing the distinction between primary and secondary distribution,' and of course all the calculations of expense which were founded on it. But mark

the effect of this manœuvre on the general question. Mr. Hill assumed that he had only to provide for the expense of the establishments and the *primary* distribution, which he estimates at 426,517*l.*, and if his plan should only *double* the present number of chargeable letters, the produce would, at the penny rate, be 738,400*l.*, which would pay all expenses and leave a net profit to the revenue of 276,000*l.*; but, now, the secondary distribution is abandoned, and its amount must therefore be added to the *expense* side of the account, and being 270,000*l.* will absorb (within a few thousand pounds) all the calculated surplus, and leave the Exchequer minus the whole of the present revenue of 1,600,000*l.*

We do intreat the attention of the public to these extraordinary circumstances, which cast, we think, a very considerable doubt over—if not Mr. Hill's candour—at least the whole of his calculations, or perhaps we should better call them speculations: this incident increases very much our apprehensions that he is very far from being a safe guide.

The gross receipts of the post-office for the year 1837, were	£ 2,462,269
Deduct repayments	122,532
Real gross receipts	£ 2,339,737
Total charges of management	698,632
Net produce to the Exchequer	£ 1,641,105

We must here pause to observe, that, from the variety of views and forms in which the accounts are presented, and, perhaps, (as the Committee hint) from some official laxity, it is very difficult—all through Mr. Hill's pamphlet and the Committee's reports—to bring the results to a precise arithmetical agreement. We shall, whenever we can, adopt the figures of the Committee in their final report; but even there we meet with embarrassing variations: for instance, in this all-important article of the *net* produce of 1837, it is stated, at the foot of page 10 of the Report, at 1,641,105*l.*, as we have given it above, but at the top of the very next page, 11, it is stated at 1,658,479*l.*, being a difference of 17,000*l.*; which, though it may seem no great matter in the general amounts, becomes rather important when we recollect that it is equivalent to the postage, on the plan under consideration, of *four millions of letters.* We have adopted the smaller sum, that we may err, if we do err, on the sure side, and also because *some* of the net profit must be attributed to colonial and packet postages—how much we cannot discover—but if we may judge by the extraordinary bargain lately made for the West Indian

Indian and North American packets, that class of profits is not likely to be a very considerable amount.

The annual number of chargeable letters, including penny and twopenny posts, but exclusive of foreign letters, and 'reckoning double and triple letters as single,' on which the gross produce of 2,339,738*l.* arises, is a matter in dispute between Mr. Hill, the post-office authorities, and the Committee:—he first rated it at 88,000,000, but subsequently reduced it to 80,000,000—the second estimated it at 58,000,000, but afterwards raised it to 70,000,000—the Committee adopt 77,500,000. As the second post-office estimate of 70,000,000 was the result of the actual reckoning of three several weeks, *we* should have chosen it; but as a general rule, we abide by the estimates of the Committee—77,500,000, which gives the present average charge on each letter that passes through the post-office at 6¼*d.**

To produce the same gross revenue as at present—2,339,738*l.*, say 2,400,000*l.*—would require, at a penny rate, 576 millions of letters—*576 millions!*

Now let us consider the probabilities of any such increase, or of anything approaching to it, from a uniform penny rate, as stated by Mr. Hill and the principal witnesses. The first item mentioned by the Committee is the only one of which we can have any certain measure, and it is that also which we receive with the greatest satisfaction—the abolition of parliamentary franks. The franking privilege, though it has been twice limited and curtailed, is still unreasonably large, and is, to nearly half its amount, a kind of legitimated abuse. The privilege ought properly to cease with the session; but by the doctrine that extends personal privileges to forty days before and after prorogation, and by the care that is always taken that the prorogation shall never be for more than forty days, that which was meant for a temporary privilege is converted into a privilege all the year round. In these days of professed reform, we should wonder that this abuse, and the concomitant and greater one which stands on the same ground,

* The Committee make a great parade of accuracy, but we confess that they sometimes seem to us to state their accounts in a very obscure and bungling way: for instance, in computing the number of letters, they say, '*reckoning double and triple letters as single*;' which may mean either that they 'reckoned *double* and *triple* letters' as *units*, or that they reduced the *double* and *triple* letters into their *equivalent*, in single letters. If, as we presume, they meant the former, they need have said nothing about '*double*,' or '*triple*,' or '*single*,' for in counting *numbers* (without any regard to value) a *letter must be a letter*, whether charged *double* or *single*. Nor do they state on which of two or three views which they take of the *gross revenue* this calculation is made. But, after all, it is no more than justice to say that the general arrangement of the report—its methodical prolegomena, and its index *raisonné*, are executed with great industry and a praiseworthy degree of fairness and intelligence. It would be difficult, we think, to treat so complicated a mass of matter with more clearness and fewer mistakes.

exemption from arrest, had not been questioned, but that we know how apt those who are the most severe against any undue advantage to other men are the most tenacious of their own. We confess that this single advantage of Mr. Hill's plan would compensate in our eyes for many imperfections; nay, we anticipate that whatever becomes of Mr. Hill's plan, franking must be still further curtailed in extent, and limited to its proper time, the session of parliament; and we trust that the still more crying abuse of *exemption from arrest* will be similarly limited.

The total number of franks, parliamentary and official, is stated at 7,000,000, of which the parliamentary franks are calculated (p. 57) at 4,800,000. As the exercise of the whole extent of the privilege of peers and members would reach 10,000,000, Colonel Maberly thinks this comparatively small number 'a startling fact against the anticipated increase of correspondence.' We are not of that opinion: for, though franks are sometimes asked for with great indelicacy and impudence, yet, generally speaking, the station and habits of peers and members of parliament prevent ordinary persons from endeavouring to profit by their privilege; and in the next place it is for letters *sent* that strangers are most apt to use the franks of members—the franks *received* are, from the nature of things, generally confined to the use of the member himself or his near connexions; but—as the limit of franks to be *sent* is only 10, and the limit of franks to be *received* is 15—of the total privilege—estimated by Colonel Maberly at 10,000,000—the franks that could possibly be sent would be but two-fifths,=4,000,000: so that it may be possible, nay, it is most probable, that a majority of the members do exhaust their full number of *outgoing* franks—which is a sufficient explanation of that fact that 'startled' Colonel Maberly.

The postage now lost by parliamentary franking may be estimated at about 320,000*l.*, which it is clear that the public at large pays in its general postage: this, with about 50,000*l.*, which the same number of letters is expected to bring into the Exchequer at the one penny rate, will make an eventual difference to the *public* of 370,000*l.* by the abolition of parliamentary franking.

With regard to official franks, which amount to above 2,000,000, we anticipate little or no saving: there is no doubt some occasional abuse, or rather laxity, in applying these franks to other than strictly official purposes, but not, we are satisfied, to any considerable extent; and if the number of ordinary letters be increased, we presume that official letters will increase at least equally to any saving made by the suppression of abuse; and as these postages are to be merely nominal—passing free through the post-office, but

but paid for by the other departments, we do not conceive that this head of the public service will have much effect on Mr. Hill's plan either way.

As to the general correspondence of the country, there can be no question that the increase will be very considerable—but nothing at all equal to the visionary expectations of many of the witnesses, or even the more mitigated, yet, still we fear, exorbitant calculations of Mr. Hill.

Mr. Hill, indeed, does not distinctly say what increase he expects; but he gave in his pamphlet a gradation of calculations, which carried it up from *twofold* to *sevenfold* on his own original estimate of the present number at 88,000,000—that is, to above 600 millions; but in most of his calculations he seems to content himself with a *fivefold* increase, or about 440,000,000—giving a gross revenue of 1,846,000*l.*; which would leave a net revenue of 1,198,752*l.*:—for which we, and we dare say the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be very willing to compound all the loftier promises of the witnesses who talk of twentyfold and fiftyfold; nay, one is bold enough to promise one hundredfold—but, to be sure, he is—*an auctioneer!*

In his later evidence before the Committee Mr. Hill varies these calculations in some very remarkable points. First he lowers, as we have already said, his estimate of the present numbers from *eighty-eight* to *eighty* millions; but, what is more important, he 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 classes 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. But even these prudential variations from the original scheme do not very much mend the matter to our understanding. To produce a net revenue of 1,200,000*l.* would still require a fivefold increase on eighty millions of letters = four hundred millions: 1,540,000*l.* would require a sixfold increase, or four hundred and eighty millions of letters, and so on to sevenfold; and if we are to credit the witnesses, to twentyfold—fiftyfold!

These enormous speculations—*six hundred millions* of letters, *two thousand millions* of letters, *four thousand millions* of letters—advanced seriously and *as statistical evidence* by rational and respectable men, (we say nothing of the auctioneer's *eight thousand millions*,) bewilder the understanding. Our feeble mind has not capacity to follow them; but let us endeavour to comprehend a

more

more moderate application of the principle to the single city of London. In order to maintain the present rate of revenue collected in London, Mr. Smith, superintendent of the Twopenny Post-office, shows that his department must be increased by *sixteen* millions of letters; and Sir Edward Lees, one of the secretaries of the Post-office, and an officer in whose experience the committee confides, calculates that, in order to equal the present revenue, the General Post must bring in 168,000,000 annually, and, of course, must send out an equal number—in all 336,000,000; adding to which the 16,000,000 of the twopenny post, we have a total for London alone of 352,000,000: so that every single person of the million of souls above mere infancy, which is about the population of London, would have to receive or send 352 letters a year, if Mr. Hill's plan is to make good the present post-office revenue. There would be of course, though Sir Edward Lees does not notice it, some deduction to be made, because foreign letters swell the amount of London postage beyond the inland average:—with every allowance that can be made, the number seems to us incomprehensibly enormous; but the committee make neither objection nor criticism on Sir Edward Lees's calculation, though they examined him two several times upon the point.

Now let us consider the other grounds on which *any* increase (whatever be the amount) is anticipated.

First, every man's own common sense and experience will satisfy him that the reduction of the tax to a penny must produce a large increase; but we think every one (except mere men of *business*, whose case we shall have to consider presently) will, on self-reflection, be inclined to doubt whether the increase will, *in his own case*, be so very considerable. The reluctance of almost every one to write when he can avoid it is proverbial; and indolence, and '*really having nothing to say*,' are, we are satisfied, much more effective restrictions on letter-writing than a generous consideration of the tax which your friend will have to pay, or even the more remote terror of the cost of the answer. Does any one believe that it will triple his own private correspondence? Which of ourselves, in common life, who write, let us suppose, seven letters a week, can contemplate without dismay the idea of writing *one and twenty?* But formidable as that may appear, it is really nothing to the task to which the great magician Rowland dooms us—'*slaves of the letter-box!*' Let us see our own week's work. One of our letters, being to a lady, must have an envelope, and pay 1*s.* 10*d.* as double; four single letters to various distances, at 7*d.*, 8*d.*, 9*d.*, 10*d.*; one to Liverpool, 11*d.*, and one to a friend at Edinburgh to inquire whether there really is, *in rerum naturâ*, such a philosopher as Dominie Simpson,

Simpson, 1*s.* 2*d.*—sum total *seventy-nine pence.* So that in our own individual instance, to make the scheme succeed, we must write seventy-nine letters a week. We humbly beg to be specially excepted from all benefit of the new act. We have not only neither time nor patience to write seventy-nine letters in a week, but we have not seventy-nine possible subjects for such letters, and we doubt whether we know seventy-nine different persons on the face of the earth to whom a letter from us would be welcome once a year, much less once every week in the year. And then the stationers' bills increased *tenfold.* England would become a real *Laputa,* where no man would have any other possible employment than pen and ink. So that the witnesses who so confidently promise that even *domestic* correspondence is to increase *ten* and *twelve* fold, are either utterly mistaken, or they would inflict on the country a worse than Egyptian plague. We are aware that it will be said that the great increase will be not merely of the letters which a person will write, but of the persons who will write letters; but there seems, as Dominie Simpson would say, 'a fallacy at the bottom of that proposition,' for no more persons can write than know how to write, and of each person who knows how to write how many are there that do not occasionally exercise that faculty? And of those who do now exercise it, how many, we ask again, can be expected to triple their correspondence, nay, even to double it?

Mr. Hill supports his views of the increase by the reduction of the tax by the following examples:—

'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.

'If we might safely infer a general rule from these facts, it would appear that, to say the least, the increase in consumption is inversely as the squares of the prices. And a calculation founded on this rule would lead us to expect that, if the proposed average reduction in postage, viz. from 6*d.* to 1*d.* per letter, were effected, the number of letters would increase thirty-six fold.'—*Post-office Reform,* p. 85.

But admitting, as we have done all along, that a reduction of tax must produce an increase of consumption, we ask how any sensible man can think that anything like the same rules of increase can apply to articles of personal comfort, gratification,

tion, or luxury, like soap, tea, coffee, or silk, and to a matter in itself troublesome, if not distasteful, like letter-writing. By taking off the duties on gin and brandy, the consumption might be enormously increased; but if all the drugs in the Pharmacopœia were to be duty free, would any one swallow any more physic than he could not help? When the halfpenny stamps were first put upon periodical papers, Dean Swift said, 'Methinks the picture is worth the money;' and we have no doubt that at the first burst of the penny covers, wafer-stamps, and all the rest of the novelty, there will be a very considerable increase: but when the correspondence shall have subsided into its natural channel, and be regulated by the wants or wishes of mankind, we doubt—from the view of the subject which our own, perhaps narrow, circle affords—we doubt whether social and domestic correspondence will be more than doubled, and we are satisfied that this class would be nearly, if not altogether, as much increased by a twopenny as by a penny rate, while the chance of maintaining a revenue would be doubled, and the risk of *actual loss* altogether avoided.

We do not remember to have seen in the evidence any calculation of the proportion between the *social*, as we may call them, and the *mercantile* letters: the impression seems to be that the former is comparatively small; but we are somewhat surprised, as we have already said, to find M. Piron stating that, in France, they are so insignificant a part of the general correspondence, that he throws them altogether out of his calculation. We are satisfied that this cannot be true to anything like the same degree in England. We believe, on the contrary, that the class of social letters is a very considerable element in our post-office communication, and that, with regard to it, Mr. Hill's anticipations will be signally disappointed.

His great *cheval de bataille*, however, is the mercantile correspondence, and here no reasonable doubt can be entertained that there will be a great and beneficial increase under both the heads into which the subject naturally divides itself;—first, the creating new correspondence; secondly, the bringing into the post-office a large correspondence which now passes through other—some of them illegal—channels.

On the first head, however, we again doubt whether the increase will be any thing like what is expected. Business is business, and even at the present rates of postage is, and must be done, whatever it may cost—the cost eventually falling on the consumer; but it is, as we have already shown, an item hardly perceptible, when mixed up in the immense value of commodities and the vast amounts of mercantile profits. We therefore do not believe that

that postage impedes, or can impede, *business*, so much as one part of the evidence endeavours to prove—for business, like steam, has an expansive power that overcomes all obstacles. That a penny rate should bring into the post-office a vast correspondence which now evades it, is another matter, to which we shall come presently: at this moment we are only considering whether any great spring will be given to business, and this again we venture to doubt. But the great increase promised by the evidence is not so much of *letters* as of what may be strictly called *parcels* and *advertisements*, things now sent in bulk into the country by coaches and carriers, for local distribution, but which, under a penny rate, will be sent direct to individuals. We have already said that this is not the legitimate duty of a post-office, and we think that great inconveniences and abuses will arise from the practice without any sufficient compensatory advantages. Of the witnesses who have spoken specifically of the items that are to contribute to the enormous increase predicted, the great majority contemplate the distribution of printed papers which are essentially advertisements; manufacturers, house-agents, publishers, venders of quack medicines, secretaries to insurance companies, and so forth, all profess that their missives will increase from five to fifty fold. In order to give this important point the fairest consideration, we shall at the risk, or we fear the certainty, of being thought tedious by some readers, examine in detail one of the practical examples produced by the committee of what may be expected; and for this purpose we shall select the evidence of Mr. Charles Knight, as one of the most favourable to the views of the penny-post advocates—himself, we may say, one of the projectors of the scheme—of course a zealous friend to it, but an intelligent and candid witness. He is an extensive publisher of cheap works, and is the publisher of the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.' Mr. Knight's house receives about '7000 letters a-year, of which 'about 4000 are commercial, and 3000 are literary—meaning (by '*literary*) a supply of matter for the works he publishes; and he 'sends out about 4000, of which 1000 are commercial and 3000 'literary: so that in the course of a year he receives and sends 'annually *through the post-office* 6000 letters connected with the 'literary conduct of his business. Of these works the most im-'portant, and involving the greatest correspondence, is the *Penny* '*Cyclopædia*. The matter, wholly original, is supplied by from 'eighty to one hundred authors, of whom 4-5ths live within the 'twopenny post, and the other fifth in the Universities, Ireland, 'Scotland, &c. They invariably use the twopenny post for con-'ducting this operation, avoiding the use of the general post, as 'the

'the transmission of a sheet or two of paper would be too expensive. The parcels are sent to the distant author by coach or other private conveyance, which prevents Mr. Knight sending to these authors *proofs* and *revises* [the printed sheets for the author's corrections] as often as he ought: all these, in case of a reduction of the rates to a penny, or even to twopence, would go by the post. If the reduction takes place, he expects to receive and send annually 7000 commercial letters, and 5000 literary ones.' (3223.)

On the 11,000 letters he receives and sends, Mr. Knight calculates (2234) his present postage at 297*l.* 18*s.*: the postage on the 12,000 letters he expects to send would be 50*l.*; so here would be an increase of 1000 in number, and a loss to the revenue of 247*l.* 18*s.*, or about one-sixth: this upon *letters* (including authors' proofs, &c.) But Mr. Knight adds, that 'if there were a penny rate, he would send *circulars* (that is, circular *advertisements*) to a large amount: for example, he has a list of 1860 respectable country booksellers, with whom he does not now communicate, *as they are supplied by the wholesale houses:* he would send them monthly circulars, say, 20,000. Then he has published the *Pictorial Bible.** He thinks there would be no difficulty in *getting a list* of all the clergymen in England, and no great difficulty in obtaining a very complete one of all the dissenting ministers. To all those he would send a circular announcing the completion of the *Pictorial Bible.* That, on a rough calculation, alone would dispose of 20,000 circulars; and seeing that 100,000 circulars might be sent annually for about 400*l.*, he conceives that would be *by far the most efficient mode of advertisement.* So that, on the whole, he expects to receive and send, under a penny rate, 127,000, instead of 11,000, and, of course, to pay in postage 529*l.* 3*s.* instead of 297*l.* 18*s.*, nearly double.' (3234.) We wish Mr. Knight had also stated, on the other hand, how much of the *advertisement* duty would be lost.

This profusion of circulars, no doubt, Mr. Knight would send, at least *at first;* but as every other wholesale, and, perhaps, retail, house, would do the same, is it certain that in the general scramble Mr. Knight would do more profitable business than he now does? Is there not danger that the public should soon become disgusted at being overwhelmed with such masses of circulars, on all sides, from all quarters, and on all subjects? Would not the circulars fall into disrepute? and should we not

* He is also the publisher, and, we understand, the editor of the 'Pictorial Shakspere,' a work which does credit not only to his taste in the arts, but to his judgment as a critic, and his talents as a writer.

treat

treat them as we already do those (comparatively few) which are now thrust under our doors or into our hands, that is, throw them unread into the fire or the kennel? And if such should be the result, how long, after the first burst of the novelty, would Mr. Knight think it worth while to spend 500*l.* a-year in forcing his circulars into people's hands? Will not respectable publishers, and traders of all sorts, revert to the old channels of advertisement, the 'Times' and the 'Standard,' the 'Courier' and the 'Herald,' where the very expense is a guarantee that the advertisement shall be worth something; and what, then, will have become of the post-office revenue?

We conclude, therefore, on this head, by repeating our doubts, whether, supposing the scheme to be in any great degree successful, the legitimate, social, and commercial correspondence should be exposed to the risks inevitable from such a deluge of *extraneous* matter—and whether this extraneous matter is, even on the showing of the projectors themselves, of sufficient *value* to justify so large an innovation, both on the principle and the practice of a post-office? We have abundant evidence that the parties contrive to do their business pretty successfully through their present channels; and we see no public reason why both the post-office and advertisement duties should be given up, or even risked by an experiment, of which the most immediate and certain profit would go directly into the private pockets of a limited number of wholesale traders, who would not, we are satisfied, and perhaps could not, make any adequate reduction on their prices, and which reductions, even if they should be made, would be too small to be felt by the ultimate purchaser.

We now arrive at the last, and, we believe, the most powerful argument in favour of the plan; one which probably has been, like the others, exaggerated, but which must, even after all deductions, be very important—we mean, the bringing into the post-office an immense quantity of correspondence which now passes through evasive or illegal channels.

Mr. Hill, and some of the witnesses (but the latter very sparingly), indicate some ingenious modes of evasion, which seem to us rather good stories than good arguments, *e. g.*:—

'Some years ago, when it was the practice to write the name of a member of parliament for the purpose of franking a newspaper, a friend of mine, previous to starting on a tour into Scotland, arranged with his family a plan for informing them of his progress and *state of health*, without putting them to the expense of postage. It was managed thus: He carried with him a number of old newspapers, one of which he put into the post-office daily. The post mark, with the date, showed his progress; and the *state of his health* was evinced by the selection of the name,

name, from a list previously agreed upon, with which the newspaper was franked. "Sir Francis Burdett," I recollect, denoted vigorous health.' —*P. O. R.*, p. 91.

Now, as Mr. Hill seems to tell this story as from his own knowledge, we must not question the fact; but Mr. Hill's friend must have been a great fool, or the post-office authorities less sharp than we have usually found them. Think of a man, wealthy enough to indulge himself in 'a *tour* in Scotland,' encumbering himself with such a number of old newspapers as could supply a *daily* communication with his family; think of his making such a tour in such a precarious state of *health* that a *daily* bulletin should be necessary; for in the supposed case nothing was told but his whereabout and his health; and think of the agony of his family and friends, if, when the writer had intended to announce *vigorous health*, Sir Francis Burdett had happened —*Teste* the Morning Post—to have a fit of the gout, or a fall from his horse. We can imagine the afflicted family posting down to Scotland in all speed at 2*s.* 6*d.* a mile, and double fees to the post-boys, naturally expecting to find their friend prostrate under an infliction similar to that with which his *Sosia*, Sir Francis, might have been visited. It would be rather an expensive parsimony, and at best a most clumsy and, for any real purpose, insufficient device: but it seems as if Mr. Hill had forgotten that in those days members' names were not *usable without their permission;* and if the post-office authorities had found him employing one day the name of Sir Francis, and the next that of Mr. Pitt, and the next that of Mr. Fox, and so on, they would have seen that all was not right, and Mr. Hill's friend might have found himself in a scrape, not only by his family's paying postage for the newspaper, but for his breach of privilege. There are other stories of the same kind, and even more absurd; but this instance may suffice. It is certain, however, that there is a great deal of this sort of fraud attempted, and more frequently—what is not fraud, though, if observed, it subjects the paper to postage—the making a mark to point attention to a particular paragraph; but the possibility of the fraudulent use of newspapers would be almost annihilated by a simple remedy suggested by the postmaster of Exeter, and which *on other grounds* also ought to be adopted: that is, limiting the posting of newspapers to a few days after their publication, and prohibiting their being reposted; for it is with 'stale newspapers alone that these frauds are *practised*.'

But the three great classes of evasion are, 1. by coach parcels; 2. by carriers; 3. by bags or boxes conveying ship-letters.

These

These are practised, according to the evidence, to a vast extent, and, as well as several minor modes of evasion (not worth specifying), might be cut up, without the aid of Mr. Hill's plan, to a degree that would, we are disposed to think, double the quantity of legitimate correspondence sent through the post-office. The witnesses rate the probable increase much higher; but we think there is evidence that they are over-sanguine as to their idea of the complete extinction of a large class of these frauds by the penny rate—for letters can be sent in parcels at *ten* for a *penny*, which will still afford, on large quantities, a sufficient profit to tempt evasion. Colonel Maberly says,

'If I wished to send a parcel of letters weighing 16 lbs., containing 1000 letters, the number taken by Mr. Hill in his calculation by coach, I can send them, not for 2*s.* 6*d.*, as he says, but for 7*s.* 10*d.*: 1000 letters put into the post-office, at a postage of 1*d.* each, would come to nearly the sum of four guineas, so that there would be 1000 letters sent in a parcel weighing 16 lbs. by coach for 7*s.* 10*d.*, and I find, at the rate of 1*d.* each to the post-office, they would amount to nearly four guineas.'—(2895.)

As to the conveyance by carriers,—that prevails chiefly in the neighbourhood of the great manufacturing towns, and consists for the most part in what can hardly be called a fraud—the transmission, not of *letters*, but of little notes between the outlying workmen who happen to live along the high roads travelled by the carriers, and their employers, relative to the works in hand: but here again it is doubted whether the carriers will not do for a *halfpenny* a service which costs them nothing, and at all events, whatever good is to be done in this way might and ought forthwith to be done by the establishment of local penny-posts in all those districts—which the post-office is always ready to do where there is any prospect of repayment, or even of only a moderate loss; and where these posts are not established, we rather suspect it is because the numbers conveyed by the carriers are in fact inconsiderable: but be this as it may, one fact is undeniable, that local penny posts, to which there can be no possible objection, would do all that can be done to suppress this practice, without having recourse to the extreme and unnecessary expedient of a universal penny post. This is a *most important consideration*, because it is *solely* with reference to these *penny* conveyances in the manufacturing districts that the government seems to have adopted a *penny* as the universal rate, contrary to the report of the Committee itself, which recommended *twopence*. Nothing, say the witnesses on whom the government appears to rely most, can extirpate the penny fraud, but a penny rate: be it so;—then why not try in the first instance the penny remedy

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in the districts where the penny fraud exists? We do not see what good answer can be made.

The third and last head of this class is also a very important one, not so much in the number as in the amount of postages lost to the revenue—we mean the letters collected at several counting and coffee houses, and conveyed to private ships, and by them to foreign parts, chiefly to America. This, again, is hardly a fraud; doubts are even entertained to what extent it is illegal; and there is evidence as well as reason to believe that the houses where it is chiefly practised, and which are some of the most respectable in England, would not countenance nor permit it, if they were satisfied of its illegality—let the law then be made clear and notorious and the greater part of this abuse will vanish. The house of Baring, Brothers, and Co., who, as Mr. Bates, their chief acting partner, states, send about 10,000 letters in boxes from London to be shipped in the Liverpool *liners*, would assuredly not continue this practice; and we are equally convinced that the great companies, whose steam-boats will now engross all the traffic in letters, would not lend themselves to a fraud. This matter, therefore, could be, we have no doubt, satisfactorily arranged without the necessity of a uniform inland penny post. We may add also that the number of ship letters is, compared with the general operations of the post-office, exceedingly small, as there seems reason to believe that these do not exceed 200,000 (the post-office witnesses think 120,000), of which about 90,000 pass through the post-office.

We have thus, to the best of our ability, stated the chief points of the case, and the arguments *pro* and *con*, with, as we hope and intend, substantial impartiality. We are conscious that we have omitted a vast number of minor considerations on both sides—and in such a vast and complicated subject, with such volumes of evidence, such masses of documents, and such a variety of witnesses, we cannot flatter ourselves that we may not have made some errors of detail; but we have at least, we hope, opened a more distinct as well as comprehensive view of the leading principles applicable to the case, than are to be found in any of the publications we have seen, which are almost wholly *ex parte* and in favour of the uniform penny rate. This latter circumstance has obliged us to exhibit the considerations on the other side, and may have given to our views an air of hostility to the plan which we really did not originally feel, and which, to the degree it may now exist in our minds, has been produced by the examination of the subject, and by the reasons which we have submitted to our readers. Our first and greatest apprehension is for the revenue; our next is for the safety of the legitimate correspondence

spondence of the country; and another and very important, though not easily measured one, is the possible political effect to which the post-office may be perverted.

But we cannot conceal our wonder at the conduct of the Ministers—at their long and pertinacious delay to make the most necessary and most indisputably advantageous improvements of the existing system, and then, on the sudden, running into the other extreme, and throwing away, like madmen, the whole revenue of which they before refused to surrender even an imperceptible fraction. Why have they not remedied various small and several more serious grievances, inconveniences, and *delays*, which have been reported against by their own Commissioners and officers? Why did they not, on the appearance of the first report of the Committee on Mr. Hill's plan, in April, 1838—or even earlier, on the report of Lord Duncannon's Commission—immediately get rid of the two greatest sources of fraud, by settling the question of ship-letters on some moderate scale, and by extending to the manufacturing districts, in which the carriers do so much alleged injury, the recognised and unobjectionable system of local penny posts? Why, above all, did they not take advantage of the proposition to which Mr. Hill was at one time favourable, and which the Government Commission had almost arranged with him (see Report, July, 1837!) of trying the experiment on the threepenny * post circle round London—that great and most important district, almost a kingdom in itself, where the experiment might have been made without any disarrangement of system, any innovation of principle, any alteration of popular habits, or much eventual loss in case of failure? Why did they refuse in July, 1837, the smallest, most reasonable concession, and in August, 1839, surrender the whole, bodily, as if under the influence of a panic?—And, finally, why, even after they had resolved on a small and uniform rate, did they not adhere to a *twopenny rate*, which *they themselves* had persuaded the Committee to recommend, as the lowest that would cover the expense?

In a panic, indeed, they might well have been—the prospect of the harvest, the defalcation of the revenue, and the state of the country, might alarm stouter hearts than theirs;—but their panic took the opposite direction from that which might be expected, and, as will sometimes happen to weak minds utterly bewildered, they

* To which, even, they might soon, if the experiment were successful, have given a new and important extension, by establishing a kind of local post-office at *every Station* of the various railroads, which would in a manner extend the London penny, or, as it rather should be, the *twopenny post*, along the whole line, and letters and answers be interchanged *in a morning* between London and Birmingham as now between Piccadilly and Aldgate.

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rushed towards the very dangers that disturbed them: unless, indeed—which we on the whole rather believe—they acted under no other motive than an anxiety to propitiate a few radical votes by plunging the country into another perilous innovation, which, be the event what it may, stands, at present, on no sufficient grounds either of fact or reasoning. We fear the matter is now gone too far to allow us to indulge a hope that the experiment may yet be limited to the London district, and we have therefore only to wish that the result of this extraordinary affair may not prove a gigantic exemplification of the old proverb—*Penny wise and pound foolish!*

The ministers, indeed, to guard against this result, procured from the House of Commons a resolution that it would, in the event of failure, make good the defalcation of revenue. We put little confidence in such resolutions. The House that passed it will probably not be in existence when the time comes for the redemption of the pledge, and, in any case, we cannot imagine that any other source of revenue will be discovered which shall unite in a higher degree than postage all the recommendations which a tax can have. It is one of the oldest and, till the present agitation was got up, the only popular source of public revenue. Blackstone, in his Commentaries, after having observed on the Customs, Excise, and Salt duties, says, 'Another very considerable branch of the revenue is levied with greater cheerfulness, as, instead of being a burden, it is a manifest advantage to the public: I mean the post-office, or duty for the carriage of letters.' (*Com.* b. i. c. 8, § 4.) And so little did this great constitutional lawyer imagine that it was not to be considered a legitimate source of revenue, or could be liable to such a revolution as now threatens it, that he ranks it under the head of '*Perpetual Taxes.*' It is, indeed, the lightest and fairest of all public contributions: it is in a great measure optional, and always bears a proportion to the use one makes of it, and the value one receives from it. It is, in fact, a *small, equitable, and nicely-graduated* INCOME TAX, with none of its harsh or inquisitorial circumstances; and we are quite certain that no substitute will ever be found so just in its principle, and so easy and popular in its collection.

We therefore consider as of very little value the pledge of the House of Commons to find out a substitute; but we are in some degree reconciled to the proposed change, or rather, we should say, our alarm is moderated, by a consideration—very obvious we think, but which we do not remember to have seen mentioned in any discussion on the subject—it is, that if the ministers shall take care in their experiment not to disorganise the post-office itself, there will be at hand a palliative at least of the fiscal mischief.

mischief. If the *penny* rate should, on a fair trial, be found to fail, we hope and believe that no House of Commons would object to trying the *twopenny* rate—or even, as a last resort, the *three-penny*—we say as a *last resort*, because threepence is the very extreme at which it would be possible to maintain the principle of *uniformity*—and indeed even to that rate the persons residing at short distances would hardly be brought to submit; but to the *twopenny rate* there could be no serious objection—except that of making *short* distances pay for *long*, which is inseparable from *uniformity*—and it seems certain that *it* would save the public from any present loss, and it might reasonably be calculated upon as affording—not certainly anything like the present surplus of *sixteen hundred thousand pounds*, but one which might tend (in comparison with our present prospects) to give some degree of consolation, if not confidence, to those whose greatest objections to the plan arise from its probable effect—particularly at such a critical and inauspicious moment—on that vast and vital class of interests which are involved in the comprehensive words—PUBLIC CREDIT.

Here we should have concluded, but there has occurred, while we are writing, an incident that crowns in the most appropriate manner all the preceding conduct of our Ministers, and forces itself on our notice: amidst all these serious errors and deplorable blunders, it was necessary to their consistency that they should make themselves—even in this domestic matter—contemptible and ridiculous in the face of Europe; and they have done it. *After* the collective wisdom of the Cabinet had adopted, and *after* they had induced the imperial legislature to sanction, the scheme of Mr. Rowland Hill, they bethought themselves that it might be expedient to provide some practical means of carrying it into effect; and accordingly the Lords Commissioners of her Majesty's Treasure assembled at a solemn board on the 23rd of August, 1839, issued a verbose and pompous proclamation, inviting '*artists, men of science,* and the *public in general,*' to devise the best means for bringing—its main feature—the pre-paying stamp into use; and, not satisfied with thus inviting 'the artists and men of science and public in general' of the British dominions to co-operate on this important, though rather tardy investigation, they solicit the good offices of all mankind, and desire Lord Viscount Palmerston to spread, wherever the voice of the Foreign-office can be heard, the glad tidings that the British Nation will give two prizes for the best and second-best solution of this interesting problem—the first prize of no less a sum than 200*l.*, and the second of 100*l.* sterling money! Truly, whatever

the world may think of our wisdom in this affair, they at least cannot but admire our national taste, dignity, and munificence!*

* 'Treasury Minute, dated 23rd August, 1839:—

'My Lords read the Act for the further regulation of the Duties of Postage, which received the royal assent on Saturday the 17th instant.

'By this Act my Lords are invested with a power of carrying into effect the reduced and uniform rate of postage contemplated by Parliament, either according to the present mode of collecting the postage, or by pre-payment, collected by means of stamps, compulsory or optional.

'Before my Lords can decide upon *the adoption of any course*, either by stamp or otherwise, they feel it will be *useful* that artists, men of science, and the public in general, may have an opportunity of offering any suggestions or proposals as to the manner in which the stamp may best be brought into use. With this view, my Lords will be prepared to receive and consider any proposal which may be sent in to them on or before the 15th day of October, 1839.

'All persons desirous of communicating with my Lords on the subject are requested to direct to the Lords of the Treasury, Whitehall, marked "Post-office Stamp."

'My Lords will be prepared to award a premium of 200*l.* to such proposal as they may consider the most deserving of attention, and 100*l.* to the next best proposal.

'My Lords will be prepared to receive and consider proposals from foreign countries; and they desire that a copy of this Minute be transmitted to Lord Palmerston, and that his Lordship should be requested to take such measures as he may deem most advisable, through Her Majesty's Ministers abroad, for the purpose of making known the intentions of this Board,' &c. &c. &c.