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POST OFFICE REFORM;

ITS

IMPORTANCE

AND

PRACTICABILITY.

BY ROWLAND HILL.

"The facility of frequent, punctual, and quick communication, which the institution of the Post Office was calculated to secure, may be justly classed among the elements of profitable commerce. It is essential to the purposes of government, and subservient to all the ends of national policy."—*Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, 1829.*

"The principle of the Post Office at its establishment, as is distinctly laid down in the 12th Charles II., was to afford advantage to trade and commerce. The direct revenue to be derived from the Post Office was not the primary consideration."—*Report on the Post Office, by Lord Lowther.*

"We have sufficiently informed ourselves on this subject to be satisfied that an alteration in the present system is absolutely necessary."—*Fourth Report on the Post Office, by the present Commissioners of Inquiry.*

THIRD EDITION.

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P R E F A C E

TO

THE THIRD EDITION.

IN preparing my little work for a Third Edition I naturally look round to see how far that general criticism, which I invited, has strengthened or weakened my positions. I have the gratification to find, that so far as the plan has attracted public attention, the public voice has been, almost without exception, in its favour. That innovations, so numerous and extensive as I recommend, should meet with some opposition was inevitable, and I have only to express my surprise and pleasure that they have encountered so little. As is natural, the principal objectors are to be found amongst those who from long habit have become attached to the plans in use, and in whom every change consequently breaks an association, and demands the trouble of acquiring new habits and learning new modes of procedure. Men so situated are the natural guards against reckless innovation; but it is almost proverbial that they find it difficult to believe that any change can be for the better, and are, above all, suspicious of reform from the hand of a stranger. To examine with care proposals so tendered is an excellent rule; to reject them without examination most erroneous. Nor is it much wiser to demand, as a *sine qua non*, that they should square with present practice;

since that is in effect to forbid all such modifications, however advantageous. It should be remembered, that in few departments have important reforms been effected by those trained up in practical familiarity with their details. The men to detect blemishes and defects are among those who have not, by long familiarity, been made insensible to them. We need not look abroad for instances of this, for the very department of which we are treating furnishes a most striking example. Mr. Palmer, who unquestionably made by far the greatest improvement ever effected in letter-carrying, had not, at the time of devising his plan, any connexion whatever with the Post Office ; on the contrary, his avocations were such as would be generally considered of a nature to unfit him for any share in its management,—he was manager of the Bath and Bristol theatres.

To enable the general reader to estimate the value of that which Mr. Palmer effected, it may be necessary to remind him that, previous to the adoption of Mr. Palmer's plan, in 1784, there was the greatest irregularity in the departure of mails and in the delivery of letters ; that the robbing of the post was a thing of ordinary occurrence ; and that, in the conveyance of the mail, the usual rate of progress was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles per hour ; lastly, that the net revenue for the twenty years preceding had been pretty uniformly about £150,000 per annum :—that the effect of Mr. Palmer's improvements was greatly to increase the regularity both of departure and delivery, to put a complete stop to robbery wherever mail coaches were introduced, and to double the rate of progress ; lastly, that the annual net revenue increased so rapidly, that at the end of the first ten years after the adoption of his plan, it was nearly £400,000 ; at the end of the second ten years upwards of £700,000 ; and, at the end of the third ten years, it had reached a million and a half, or ten times its former amount ; from which time to the present it has remained almost stationary.

It may be supposed, however, by those who have not examined into the circumstances under which Mr. Palmer's improvements were effected, that, for his particular plan, no knowledge of Post Office details could be deemed necessary; that the substitution of mail-coaches for carts and saddle-horses, speed for slowness, punctuality for irregularity, security for hazard, was so obviously an improvement that the idea needed only to be started to be hailed with delight; and that the only astonishment would be, as is generally the case with the most valuable inventions, that a scheme so admirable and so simple had never been hit upon before. It may be imagined that those familiar with Post Office details, and who from their familiarity were best acquainted with the annoyances incidental to the old plan, must have occupied a vantage ground from which they could most easily, most rapidly, and most fully discern the benefits to arise from the new arrangements. Surely, when the plan was laid before them, their opinion was unanimous in its favour. Doubtless, they were eager to tender their assistance in its introduction, and evinced no impatience, save at the delay necessarily attending so radical and extensive a change.

If any one has these impressions, let him turn to the parliamentary records of the period; he will there find "the oldest and ablest officers in the service representing Mr. Palmer's plan not only to be impracticable but dangerous to commerce and the revenue:"* he will find one officer (Mr. Allen) giving in his written opinion, that "the more Mr. Palmer's plan was considered the greater number of difficulties and objections started to its ever being carried completely into execution,"† and labouring to shelter himself and

* Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the state of the Public Offices—1788.

† Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer's agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 115.

his brother functionaries from the responsibility of this hazardous experiment by averring that they had, "to the best of their judgment and experience, given their separate opinions against the utility and practicability of the scheme *in toto*."*

Mr. Draper objects to coaches as travelling too *fast*; the progress of the mail, which, at the present day, is associated with all that is possible in rapidity, was, in his mind, indissolubly linked with the extreme of slowness. For his purposes the carrier-pigeon would be beaten hollow by the tortoise. He declares, that "the post cannot travel with the same expedition that chaises and diligences do, on account of the business necessary to be done at the office in each town through which it passes, and without which correspondence would be thrown into the utmost confusion."†

He finds another insurmountable difficulty in the utter unsuitableness, for Post Office purposes, of stage-coach hours; maintaining that the time for the post to leave London "is, unavoidably, from one to three in the morning:"‡ in which he is backed by Mr. Hodgson, who declares "that the shutting up of the Office at seven or eight o'clock in the evening is impracticable,"§ and that an alteration of Post Office hours "would throw the whole correspondence throughout England through London, as well as the bye and cross roads, into the utmost confusion."|| Mr. Draper adds, that the time allowed by Mr. Palmer for the guard to transact the necessary business at the various post-towns, viz., a quarter of an hour (an allowance, by the bye, the bare mention of which, except for a very few large towns, would bring a peal of laughter from a guard of the present day, who flings down one set of bags and takes up another while the coach scarcely slackens its speed), that this quarter of an hour is not enough, except at some small

* Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer's agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 115.

† Page 116.

‡ Page 117.

§ Page 131.

|| Page 130.

offices, and that "half an hour is hardly sufficient for the proper circulation of the country letters, as is well known by every body conversant in Post Office business."*

With obstacles so hopelessly insurmountable before his eyes, it is no wonder that Mr. Hodgson should consider the new plan as requiring an impossible punctuality. He maintains, that "as the mails neither do nor can leave the general office, at the same hour every morning, mail diligences would be less regular than others; and as to the guard, he might be waited for at every ale-house he should pass by."†

To Mr. Hodgson's "humble apprehension, it pretty clearly appears, that Mr. Palmer's plan would neither accelerate the mails in their conveyance, insure their safety, nor save expense, but very much the contrary."‡

The first of these points, however, he does not deem a matter of great importance, as he elsewhere states that he "does not see why the Post *should* be the swiftest conveyance in England."§ With respect to the second, lest the force of the observation should be lost in its generality, he condescends to the specific, observing that he "cannot think that a guard to each mail would add to its safety." This apparent paradox, however, he explains elsewhere, by representing safety as unattainable by any means—at least, any means in the command of the Post Office. He urges the cutting of bills of exchange and bank notes in two and so forth; and with that appears to think all human care must end, adding that "there are no other means of preventing robberies with effect, as it has been proved that the strongest carts that could be made, lined and bound with iron, *was* soon *broke* open by a robber, against whom it would therefore be in vain to attempt such kind of defence."¶

Mr. Draper is so deeply convinced that a robbery now and

* Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer's agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 117.

† Page 126.

‡ Page 127.

§ Page 120.

|| Page 126.

¶ Page 112.

then is inevitable, as wisely to recommend that we should not run upon a greater evil by flying from a less, observing that “when desperate fellows had once determined upon a mail robbery, the consequence would be murder in case of resistance.”* Like Dogberry, Mr. Draper is “a merciful man.”

From all these disheartening and alarming circumstances, a hasty observer might infer that in those days the affairs of the Post Office were in a lamentable condition, happily he is set right by Mr. Hodgson, who informs us “that the constant eye that has been long kept towards their improvement in all situations and under all circumstances, has made them now almost as perfect as can be, without exhausting the revenue arising therefrom.”†

The acme of perfection being thus attained, it would have been inexcusable in the Post Office functionaries not to entertain a lively apprehension of schemes which one scouts as “chimerical,”‡ another denounces as likely to “open a door for fraud,”§ while a third predicts that “they will fling the whole commercial correspondence of the country into the utmost confusion, and will justly raise such a clamour as the Post-master will not be able to appease.”||

With this well grounded dread of innovation, it is no wonder that they raise their voices in salutary warning to the theorist; that to his chimera, which to their capacious minds swelled far beyond that which imperiled Bellerophon, they opposed the buckler of their practical knowledge. Alas that the warning was in vain;—that innovation was attempted;—that the sober cart and quiet pad were exchanged for the headlong mail-coach;—that the convenient range of from one to three in the morning was exchanged for the unseasonable hour of eight in the evening, with a stern limitation to the minute;—alas for

* Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer’s agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 116.

† Page 128. ‡ Page 116. § Page 127. || Page 133.

the heedless hurry ;—alas for the useless guard, — the vain resistance to robbers ;—the universal confusion that has prevailed, —the deplorable injury to the revenue,—and the wanton overthrow of a perfect system. Let us, then, taught by dire experience, shun the perverse folly of those who have gone before us, and prostrate our minds in implicit reliance on the well proved infallibility of Post Office wisdom.

Of Mr. Palmer's wilful obstinacy in urging his chimerical project, all must be convinced who read the following admonition: "It is a pity," says Mr. Hodgson, "that the author of the plan should not first have been informed of the nature of the business in question, to make him understand how very differently the Post and Post Offices are conducted to what he apprehends."*

Mr. Hodgson subsequently "ventures to say, that the Post as now managed, is admirably connected in all its parts, well regulated, carefully attended to, and not to be improved by any person unacquainted with the whole."†

Mr. Draper recommends a thorough examination for the purpose of ascertaining, whether the scheme is "as feasible in practice as it is specious in theory."‡ In reply to an inconsiderate recommendation of Mr. Palmer's, that the suggestions of commercial men, as to the management of the Post in their respective neighbourhoods, should be received and considered, Mr. Hodgson checks the impertinence by maintaining that, "it is not probable, that any set of gentlemen, merchants, or out-riders, can instruct officers brought up in the business of the Post Office, and it is particularly to be hoped, if not presumed, that the surveyors need no such information."§

But the *coup de grace* is given by the same gentleman in another paragraph, by a *reductio ad absurdum*, the folly of the

* Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer's agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 128.

† Page 131.

‡ Page 120.

§ Page 131.

whole project being triumphantly exposed in a piece of argumentation which commences by his "supposing an impossibility; namely, that the Bath mail could be brought to London in 16 or 18 hours."*

In conclusion, we have a remonstrance addressed to the Lords of the Treasury, by the Post-masters General, eighteen months after the partial adoption of the plan, in which, after enlarging on the innumerable inconveniences which the change had occasioned; they proceed to declare that, "from a comparison of the gross produce of inland postage for four months, and from every other comparison they have been able to make, they were perfectly satisfied that this revenue has been very considerably decreased by the plan of mail coaches."†

Heavy must be the responsibility resting on those who thus persisted in folly and mischief; and wonderful is it that Mr. Palmer should have been able to beguile the government and the legislature into sanctioning his mad career. Who was the statesman, unworthy of the name, that thus gave the rein to audacity; that thus became in his besotted ignorance the tool of presumption? Who stood godfather to the vile abortion, and insisted on the admission of the hideous and deformed monster into the sacred precincts of Lombard-street, the seat of perfection? His name,—alas! that the lynx should be guided by the mole! that Samson should be seduced by Delilah! Palinurus lured by a dream!—his name was WILLIAM PITT.

2, *Burton Crescent*,
Nov. 15th, 1837.

* Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1797, on Mr. Palmer's agreement for the Reform and Improvement of the Post Office and its Revenue, p. 125.

† Page 135.

POST OFFICE REFORM.

THE last quarterly accounts 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.

In the reductions which have heretofore been made, the gain to the public and the loss to the revenue have varied greatly in relation to each other. Thus in the repeal of the house duty, the gain to the public and the loss to the revenue were practically equal; while the remission of one half of the duties on soap and leather eventually diminished the productiveness of each tax by about one-third only; a reduction of about 28 per cent. in the malt tax has lessened the produce of that tax by only two or three per cent.; and in the instance of coffee, a reduction in the duty of 50 per cent. has actually been accompanied by an increase of more than 50 per cent. in its produce.

These facts show that when a reduction of taxation is about to take place, it is exceedingly important that great care and judgment should be exercised in the selection of the tax to be reduced, in order that the maximum of relief may be afforded to the public, with the minimum of injury to the Revenue.

The best test to apply to the several existing taxes for the discovery of the one which may be reduced most extensively, with the least proportionate loss to the revenue, is probably this: excluding from the examination those taxes, the produce of which is greatly affected by changes in the habits of the people, as the taxes on spirits, tobacco, and hair-powder, let each be examined as to whether its productiveness has kept pace with

* Written near the close of 1836.—The subsequent depression of the revenue is, there can be little doubt, temporary.

the increasing numbers and prosperity of the nation. And that tax which proves most defective under this test is, in all probability, the one we are in quest of.

If this test be applied to the principal branches of the revenue, it will be found that the tax on the transmission of letters is the most remarkable for its non-increasing productiveness. A mere glance at the following table must satisfy every one that there is something extremely wrong in this tax as it now stands.

TABLE showing the Net Revenue actually obtained from the Post Office, for every fifth Year, from 1815 to 1835 inclusive; also the Revenue which would have been obtained, had the Receipts kept pace with the Increase of Population, (the Rate of which increase, since 1831, is assumed to be the same as from 1821 to 1831.)

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

It appears, then, that, during the last twenty years, the absolute revenue derived from the Post Office has slightly diminished; whereas, if it had kept pace with the growth of population, there would have been an increase of £507,700 per annum. As compared with the population, then, the Post Office revenue has fallen off to the extent of more than half a million per annum; but if the extension of education, and the increasing trade and prosperity of the country, during this period, be taken into account, there can be no doubt that the real deficit is even much greater.

The extent of this loss will probably be best estimated by comparing the Post Office revenue with that actually derived

from some tax which, while less exorbitant, is in other respects liable to nearly as possible the same influences. The tax upon stage-coaches obviously falls under these conditions.

Allowing the great increase in steam-navigation* as a set-off against the slight diminution in the duty on post-horses, which might be considered as impairing the correctness of this comparison, let us proceed to the consideration of the following table, which shows the net produce of the stage-coach duty for every fifth year, from 1815 to 1835 inclusive; together with the net revenue actually derived from the Post Office during the same time; as also the amount which would have been obtained had the receipts increased at the same rate as the produce of the stage-coach duty.

STAGE-COACH DUTIES.			POST OFFICE REVENUE.		
Year.	Net Revenue produced by the Stage-coach Duty.	Rate per cent. of the increase as compared with the year 1815.	Net Revenue actually obtained from the Post Office.	Revenue which would have been obtained had the receipts of the Post Office increased at the same rate as the produce of the Stage-coach Duty.	Comparative loss.
	£		£	£	£
1815	217,671	....	1,557,291	1,557,291	.....
1820	273,477	25	1,479,547	1,946,000	466,453
1825	362,631	66	1,670,219	2,585,000	914,781
1830	418,598	92	1,517,952	2,990,000	1,472,048
1835	498,497	128	1,540,300	3,550,000	2,009,700

If it be granted, then, that the demand for the conveyance of letters has increased during the last twenty years, in the same ratio as that for the conveyance of persons and parcels, which can scarcely be doubted, it follows inevitably that, for some

* In the evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the Blackwall Railroad, it is shown that the number of persons who, in the year 1835, traversed the whole distance between London and Blackwall by means of Steam-boats was upwards of one million. Had the limit been placed as high as Greenwich, the multitudes constantly passing between that place and London would have vastly augmented the number.

cause or other, there is, in effect, a loss in the Post Office revenue of £2,000,000 per annum.

In support of this view of the case it may be stated, that, in France, where the rates of postage are less exorbitant than with us, the gross receipts are said to have increased from nearly 24,000,000 francs (£960,000) in 1821, to 37,000,000 francs (£1,480,000) in 1835, or fifty-four per cent. in fourteen years. The increase of the net receipts of our own Post Office, which it is assumed above ought to have taken place within the same period, is seventy-one per cent. ; but this difference is more than justified by the superior increase in population and commerce in this country, as compared with France. Besides, the high probability is, that the *net* revenue in France would be found to have increased more rapidly than the *gross* revenue. These considerations would lead us to infer, that the effective loss to the Post Office revenue, resulting from some cause or other, is even more than two millions per annum.

The unsatisfactory state of our Post Office revenue is thus referred to by Sir Henry Parnell : " The revenue of the Post Office has been stationary, at about £1,400,000 a year, since 1818. This can be accounted for only by the great duty charged on letters ; for with a lower duty the correspondence of the country through the Post Office would have increased in proportion to the increase of population and national wealth."*

On this subject Mr. M'Culloch says : " We believe, however, that these (the additions made to the rates of postage) have been completely overdone, and considering the vast importance of a cheap and safe conveyance of letters to commerce, it will immediately be seen that this is a subject deserving of grave consideration. In point of fact the Post Office revenue has been about stationary since 1814, though, from the increase of population and commerce in the intervening period, it is pretty obvious that had the rates of postage not been so high as to force recourse to other channels, the revenue must have

* Financial Reform, fourth ed. p. 41.

been decidedly greater now than at the end of the war. Were the rates moderate, the greater dispatch and security of the Post Office conveyance would hinder any considerable number of letters from being sent through other channels. But in the estimation of very many persons, the present duties more than countervail these advantages, and the number of coaches that now pass between all parts of the country, and the facility with which the law may be evaded by transmitting letters in parcels conveyed by them, renders the imposition of oppressive rates of postage quite as injurious to the revenue as to individuals.”*

There cannot, I conceive, be a doubt that the main cause of the remarkable state of the Post Office revenue, is that which Sir Henry Parnell and Mr. M'Culloch point out. Consequently, that even supposing the tax on the transmission of letters to be regulated with a total disregard to the convenience of the public, but merely with a view of rendering it as productive in immediate revenue as possible, it is at present decidedly too high.

The net revenue derived from the Post Office is rather more than twice the whole cost of management; from which it may appear that the tax is about 200 per cent. on the natural or untaxed cost of postage. Such a tax, enormous as it would be, is however far below that really levied,—for it must be borne in mind that the cost of management includes the cost of collecting the tax, and that of conveying the newspapers and franked letters. Hereafter an attempt will be made to ascertain the natural cost of postage with some degree of precision. In the mean time it may be remarked, that even if the whole expense of the Post Office be considered as the natural cost of conveying the letters and newspapers, and a due proportion (say one-third) of that expense be placed to the account of newspapers and franked letters, the tax on the transmission of letters would be, on an average, upwards of 300 per cent. on

* M'Culloch's Commercial Dictionary, p. 935.

the natural cost of such transmission, a rate of taxation which all experience shows to be highly impolitic.

It is not necessary to follow out the subject in all its ramifications, otherwise there would be no difficulty in showing that any obstacle to the free circulation of letters, prospectuses, prices current, &c., must operate injuriously upon many other branches of the revenue.

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.

Connected with this view of the subject is a consideration too important to be overlooked. There cannot be a doubt that if the law did not interpose its prohibition, the transmission of letters would be gladly undertaken by capitalists, and conducted on the ordinary commercial principles, with all that economy, attention to the wants of their customers, and skilful adaptation of means to the desired end, which are usually practised by those whose interests are involved in their success. But the law constitutes the Post Office a monopoly. Its conductors are, therefore, uninfluenced by the ordinary motives to enterprize and good management; and however injudiciously the institution may be conducted, however inadequate it may be to the growing wants of the nation, the people must submit to the inconvenience; they cannot set up a Post Office for themselves. The legislature, therefore, is clearly responsible for all the mischief which may result from the present arrangement. With reference to this point, the Commissioners of

Revenue Inquiry, in their able Report on the Post Office, remark, that "the restrictions which, for the maintenance of the revenue, the law has imposed concerning the untaxed conveyance of letters, raise an obligation on the part of the Crown to make adequate provision for the public exigencies in this respect; and, in effecting this object, it falls within the province and the duty of His Majesty's Post-master General to create, as well as to guard and to collect a revenue."*

It would be very easy to multiply arguments against the present condition of this tax. I might speak of the gross inequality of its pressure, of the impossibility of preventing evasion, now notoriously practised by all classes, notwithstanding the inquisitorial means resorted to for the detection of offenders, and the severity of the penalties inflicted. But surely enough has been said to demonstrate the mischievous tendency of this tax, and the urgent necessity for its extensive modification.

If it be conceded that the tax on the transmission of letters is the one most in need of reduction, the next consideration is, What is the greatest extent, under the present circumstances of the revenue of the country, to which reduction may be safely carried?

It has, I conceive, been satisfactorily shown that reduction in postage to a considerable extent, would produce an increase of revenue. A second reduction would therefore be required to bring back the revenue to its present amount; and still a third reduction to bring it within the proposed limits.

It would be useless to attempt to ascertain the measure of each of these steps in the reduction of the rates of postage, which, indeed, are only stated with the view of showing that a very extensive reduction in the whole will be required to effect any important diminution in the amount of revenue.

In order to ascertain, with as much accuracy as the circumstances of the case admit, the extent to which the rates of post-

* 18th Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 4.

age may be reduced, under the condition of a given reduction in the revenue, the best course appears to be, first to determine as nearly as possible the natural cost of conveying a letter under the varying circumstances of distance, &c.; that is to say, the cost which would be incurred if the Post Office were conducted on the ordinary commercial principles, and postage relieved entirely from taxation; and then to add to the natural cost such amount of duty as may be necessary for producing the required revenue.

As a step towards determining the natural cost, let the present actual cost be first ascertained.

Without desiring to interfere with the franking privilege, or to relieve the Post Office of the cost of transmitting newspapers, we must, in order to obtain an accurate result, consider (for the present) a due share of the expenses of the Post Office, as charged to the account of franked letters and newspapers.

The number of letters chargeable with postage which pass through all the post-offices of the United Kingdom per annum is about*	88,600,000
The number of franked letters*	7,400,000
The number of newspapers*	30,000,000
Total number of letters and newspapers per ann.	126,000,000
The annual expenses of all kinds at present are †	£696,569

Consequently, the average cost of conveying a letter or newspaper, including the cost of collecting the tax, is, under the present arrangements, about $1\frac{1}{4}d$.

* The total number of letters, &c., transmitted through the Post is a statistical fact altogether unknown: the statement here given is the result of an estimate, which, however, may be relied upon as sufficiently accurate for the present purpose. (Vide Appendix, pp. 62—65.)

† Finance Accounts for the year 1835, pp. 55—57. The great increase in the number of newspapers since the reduction of the duty (already about one-fourth) must be expected in some degree to increase the expenses of the Post Office; the increase cannot, however, be such as materially to affect this calculation.

In the total of expenses here given some are, however, included which ought not to enter into the calculation;—certain expenses, as the cost of the packet service, for instance, are undoubtedly capable of great reduction: others, as the cost of expresses, and of many by-posts, are met by special charges.

For the sake of simplicity, it will be well to confine the attention to the *apparent* cost under the existing arrangements of what may be called the *Primary distribution of letters, &c.*, (meaning by that term, the transmission of letters, &c., from post-town to post-town throughout the United Kingdom, and the delivery within the post-towns,) and to leave out of consideration, for the present, the cost of *Secondary distribution*, or that distribution which proceeds from each post-town, as a centre, to places of inferior importance. At the same time, in estimating the cost of primary distribution, it will be convenient to make any reductions which are obviously practicable, and which do not require a deviation in principle from the existing arrangements.

The following table exhibits the apparent cost of primary distribution, cleared of certain extraneous charges, and divided under two heads; the first showing the expenses of transit, or those which are dependent on the distance over which the letters have to be conveyed; the second showing the expenses of the receipt and delivery of letters, or those which are independent of distance: the cost of collecting the tax is of course included under the latter head.

It will be observed that the Post Office is burthened with a charge of £30,000 per ann. for superannuation allowances, allowances for offices and fees abolished, &c. This heavy charge of course greatly increases the apparent cost of management. The first part of this table, as far as column B, inclusive, is taken from the Finance Accounts for 1835, pp. 55—57, the remainder is the result of estimate.

	PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION.				F £
	B	C	D	E	
	£	£	£	£	£
<i>Actual Cost of managing the Post Office of the United Kingdom for the Year 1835, as stated in the Finance Accounts for that Year, pp. 55—57.</i>					
<i>Salaries and Allowances.</i>					
Salaries to the Post-master General, Officers, and Clerks, in the London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Offices, and wages and allowances to Letter-Carriers, Messengers, &c.	89,253	. . . .	89,253	. . . .	89,253
Salaries and Allowances to Deputy Post-masters and Agents in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies	114,576	20,000 ^a	94,576	. . . .	94,576
Salaries and Wages to Officers and Letter-Carriers in the Twopenny Post Office	40,681	2,000 ^b	38,681	. . . .	38,681
Allowance for Special Services and Travelling Charges	— 244,510	— 22,000	— 222,510	. . . .	— 222,510
Conveyance of Mails, Transit Charges, and Payments for Ship Letters	9,039	1,000 ^c	8,039	. . . .	8,039
Riding Work, and Expresses by the Deputy Post-masters in Great Britain and Ireland	96,341	80,000 ^d	16,341	16,341	
Mileage to Mail Coaches, Wages to Mail Guards, and other Mail Coach expenses	101,503	11,720 ^e	89,783	89,783	
Tolls paid on Mail Coaches	28,076	. . . .	28,076	28,076	
Riding Work, and Conveyance of Mails in Canada, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica, &c.	12,672	12,672			
Twopenny Post Office	4,219	2,500 ^f	1,719	1,719	
	9,160	9,160			

PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION—COST OF.

Packet Service, Expenses of, including Port Dues	260,539	124,620	135,919	135,919
Tradesmen's Bills, Building, and Repairs, Building and Repairs	109,987	105,000 ^g	Between Great Brit- tain and Ireland } 4,987 }	4,987
Coals, Candles, Oil, Gas, and Soap	404			
Other Bills	4,827			
	4,743			
Rents of Offices, Tithes, and Taxes ...	9,974		9,974	9,974
Law Charges	4,085		4,085	4,085
	6,913	1,000 ^e	5,913	4,913
Stationery, Printing, and Postage.	2,748			
Postage	791			
Superannuation Allowances, for offices and fees, abolished, &c.	3,539		3,539	2,539
	30,248		30,248	30,248
<i>Parliamentary Grants.</i>				
To His Grace the Duke of Marlborough	4,125			
To His Grace the Duke of Grafton	3,407			
To the heirs of His Grace the Duke of Schomberg	2,900	10,432 ^h		
Money paid into the Exchequer on account of the Commissioners for repairing roads between London and Holyhead				
By Act 59 Geo. III. c. 48; Menai bridge	6,420			
By Act 1 and 2 Geo. IV. c. 35; Conway bridge	883			
	7,303	6,090 ^h Toll ^e say	1,303	1,303
	£696,569	£270,052	£426,517	£144,209
				£282,308

^e Saving effected by the new contract for mail-coaches, which as yet does not extend to Ireland. (Parl. Return, 1836, No. 49.)
^f Saved by employing the stage-coaches.
^g The present receipts for passage money, &c., amount to £52,000. £53,000 is the estimated cost of the foreign and colonial packets, and the saving which would result from the abolition of the packet service.
^h This, it would appear, should be charged on the general revenue of the country.

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Taking the number of letters and newspapers to be 126,000,000, (see p. 8,) the average apparent cost of the primary distribution of newspapers, letters, &c., within the United Kingdom, is for each, 84 hundredths of a penny.

Of which the expense of transit is one-third, or 28 hundredths of a penny.

And the cost of receipt, delivery, &c., two-thirds, or 56 hundredths of a penny.

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But it must be recollected that the cost of transit for a given distance will, under ordinary circumstances, be in tolerably direct proportion to the weight carried; and as a newspaper or franked letter weighs on an average as much as several ordinary letters, the average expense of transit for a letter chargeable with postage, is probably about one-third of the amount above stated, or nine hundredths of a penny.* 11th part

The smallness of the expense of transit, as here stated, will probably excite some surprise; the following calculation, however, which is founded on more exact data, and is therefore more trustworthy, shows that the expense of transit upon the great mass of letters, small as it appears to be, is probably loaded with charges not strictly appertaining to it, or is greatly enhanced by the carriage of the mail to places which are not of sufficient importance to repay the expense. Whatever may be the cause of the discrepancy between the two calculations, the account of the Post Office expenditure is not published in sufficient detail to enable me to assign it with certainty.

Estimate of the Cost of conveying a Letter from London to Edinburgh, a distance of 400 miles.

MILEAGE ON THE WHOLE MAIL.†	£	s.	d.
From London to York, 196 miles, at 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per mile, ($\frac{1}{2}$ d. to horse contractor and 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. to coach contractor)	1	5	6 $\frac{1}{2}$

* The chargeable letters do not weigh more than about one-fourth of the whole mail.

† Seventh Report of Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, p. 50.

	£.	s.	d.
Brought forward	1	5	6½
From York to Edinburgh, 204 miles, at 1½d. per mile (½d. to horse contractor, and 1d. to coach contractor)	1	5	0
	<hr/>		
	2	10	6½
GUARDS' WAGES.—Say six Guards, one day each, at 10s. 6d. per week*	0	10	6
Allow for Tolls, (which are paid in Scotland,) and all other expenses†	1	18	11½
	<hr/>		
Total cost of conveying the mail once from London to Edinburgh, including the Mails of all interme- diate places	5	0	0
Average weight of the mail conveyed by the London and Edinburgh mail coach, say about		8	cwt.
Deduct for the weight of the bags, say		2	
		<hr/>	
Average weight of letters, newspapers, &c.		6	
		<hr/>	
The cost of conveyance is therefore per cwt.		16s.	8d.
Per ounce and a half, the average weight of a newspaper, about one-sixth of a penny.			
Per quarter of an ounce, the average weight of a single letter, about one thirty-sixth of a penny.			

| 6 p.
36 for

* Parliamentary Return, 1835, No. 442.

† In strict fairness the English tolls ought perhaps to be included, as the exemption may be considered part of the price paid by the public for the conveyance of the mail. On the other hand, at least part of the coach duty, which for the mails is twopence for every mile travelled, should be deducted from the estimate. Sir Henry Parnell is of opinion that exemption from this duty would, under good management, be a compensation in full to the coach proprietors for the conveyance of the mail. He says: "Without going into particulars, and attempting to prove what is the right course that ought to be taken, I should say generally, that there would be no difficulty, with a proper plan of management, to have the mail coaches horsed by allowing the stamp duty only—without an exemption from paying tolls—that is 4d. a [double] mile—provided that the proprietors were allowed to carry an additional outside passenger, which would be equal to 3d., and that coaches of the best possible construction were used."—7th Report of Com. of Post Office Inquiry, p. 98.

If any doubt is entertained of the accuracy of this result it may be tested thus:—Suppose one thousand letters to be made up into a parcel and dispatched from London to Edinburgh by coach: at the estimate above given, the weight of the parcel would be about 16lbs., and the charge for its carriage about 2s. 4½d.; a rate of charge which, upon a contract for nearly half a ton per day, would, I imagine, furnish an adequate remuneration to the coach-master.

It appears, then, that the cost of mere transit incurred upon a letter sent from London to Edinburgh, a distance of 400 miles, is not more than *one thirty-sixth part of a penny*. If, therefore, the proper charge (exclusive of tax) upon a letter received and delivered in London itself were twopence, then the proper charge (exclusive of tax) upon a letter received in London, but delivered in Edinburgh, would be twopence *plus* one thirty-sixth part of a penny. Now, as the letters taken from London to Edinburgh are undoubtedly carried much more than an average distance, it follows, that when the charge for the receipt and delivery of the letter is determined, an additional charge of one thirty-sixth part of a penny would amply repay the expense of transit. *If, therefore, the charge for postage be made proportionate to the whole expense incurred in the receipt, transit, and delivery of the letter, and in the collection of its postage, it must be made UNIFORMLY the same from every post-town to every other post-town in the United Kingdom, unless it can be shown how we are to collect so small a sum as the thirty-sixth part of a penny.*

Again, the expenses of receipt and delivery are not much affected by the weight of each letter, within moderate limits; and, as it would take a nine-fold weight to make the expense of transit amount to one farthing, it follows *that, taxation apart, the charge ought to be precisely the same for every packet of moderate weight, without reference to the number of its enclosures.*

Having ascertained that the actual expense of conveying the

letters from post-town to post-town forms so small a fraction of the whole apparent cost of primary distribution, it will be well to examine the other items of expenditure more minutely, with the view of discovering how far they are to be considered as the natural and necessary cost of distributing the correspondence of the country, and how far they result from the Post Office being made an instrument of taxation.

The items of expenditure now to be brought under consideration are those which are classed at p. 10, in column F, as attendant on the receipt and delivery of letters. A reference to the table shows that they consist almost entirely of salaries to the officers and servants of the Post Office.

These persons, with a few exceptions, may be arranged in three classes; namely Superintendents, (including Post-masters and Keepers of receiving houses,) Clerks, (including Messengers,) and Letter Carriers. In a Parliamentary Return (1835, No. 442) is a detailed statement of the salaries paid in the London, Dublin, and Edinburgh post offices, which amount to more than one-half of such salaries for the whole of the British Isles. Assuming that the remaining part is divided among the three classes in the same relative proportions as in these places, the account will stand thus :

	Actual cost in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, per annum.	Estimated cost for the United Kingdom per annum.	Per centage on the whole cost of primary distribution, as deduced at p. 10, viz. £426,517.
Superintendents, including Post-masters and Keepers of Receiving-houses	£ 22,400	£ 38,300	9
Clerks, including Messengers	61,500	105,400	25
Letter Carriers	46,000	78,800	18
Total	129,900	222,500	52

1. *Superintendents.*—The expense of superintendence in

every establishment depends chiefly on the variety and complexity of the operations to be performed. If by any arrangement the operations of the Post Office could be extensively simplified, there can be no doubt that the same amount of superintendence would suffice for a greatly increased amount of business. The causes of the present complexity, and the practicability of extensive simplification, will be considered more conveniently in connexion with the duties of the clerks.

2. *Clerks.*—The duties of the Clerks in the London Office will be taken as a specimen of those of the body generally; they are principally as follows. On the arrival of the Mails in the morning, to examine all the letters, in order to see that the charge upon each letter for postage has been correctly made, and that each Deputy Post-master has debited himself with the correct amount of postage for paid letters; to stamp the letters; to assort them for delivery; (in this the Letter Carriers assist;) to ascertain the amount of postage to be collected by each Letter Carrier, and to charge him therewith.

Previously to the departure of the Mails in the evening, the duties of the Clerks are principally to adjust the accounts for the post-paid letters brought from the Receiving-houses; to “tax” the unpaid letters; that is to say, to write on each the charge for postage; to stamp all; to assort them for dispatch to the different post-towns; to ascertain the amount of postage to be collected by each Deputy Post-master, and to charge him therewith.

It must be borne in mind that the public convenience requires that the delivery of letters should follow as closely as possible the arrival of the Mails; and that the receipt of letters should be continued as close as possible up to the departure of the Mails. It follows, therefore, that all these multifarious duties have to be performed in the shortest possible space of time, though some, from their difficulty and complexity, involve an enormous amount of labour, while their accurate performance demands a degree of vigilance rarely to be met with.

Take, for instance, the financial proceedings in the evening. First there are the accounts to be settled with the Receivers (71 in number) for the post-paid letters; then there is to tax the letters, which, without counting the franks, are frequently as many as 40,000, and every one of which, it is said, is to be examined with a candle to see whether it is single or double;* then the proper postage is to be determined, not only with reference to such inspection, but also with reference to the distance of the post-town to which it is addressed, and to be marked on the letter with pen and ink; and lastly, nearly 700† accounts of postage are to be made out against as many Deputy Post-masters.

When the hurried manner in which these complex operations have to be performed is considered, it is manifest that errors must frequently arise. There is also an obvious danger of extensive frauds on the Revenue from collusion between some of the Deputy Post-masters and those whose duty it is to charge them with the postage. The examination of each letter by a candle, too, by revealing the contents, creates temptations to theft, which have too often been irresistible. In the Appendix (p. 55) will be found some proofs that the dangers here contemplated exist in practice.

This liability to error and fraud renders it highly important that some sufficient check on the operations under consideration should be practised. The fact is, however, that no such check exists, the only security being in the conscientiousness of the Deputy Post-masters, whose duty it is, on receipt of their bags, to examine the charges placed to their accounts, and to correct any error which they may discover.

Mr. D. W. Stow, an officer of the Post Office, when asked by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, "What is the longest operation in preparing the letters for delivery, the stamping, sorting, or taking the accounts?" replies, "Taking

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry. p. 63.

† Parl. Return, 1835, No. 512, p. 6.

the accounts, because it leads to a difference very often which might retard the operation: the stamping is a mere mechanical thing, as well as the examination.”*

There can be no doubt that the chief sources of all this trouble, and error, and fraud, exist in the complexity of the operations; a complexity arising out of the varying charges for postage, and the intermixture of paid and unpaid letters. The remedy must, therefore, be looked for in the means of simplification. If the postage of all letters were collected *after* their passage through the Central Office, something would be accomplished in simplifying the operations, but how much more would be effected if any means could be devised by which the postage of all letters should be collected *before* their passage through the Central Office!

For the purpose of estimating the advantages which would result from such an arrangement, suppose for a moment that all letters were post-paid, that the rates of postage were uniform, without regard to distance, (say a certain small sum per ounce,) and that the amount collected were transmitted to the Central Office, from the London Receiving-houses, and from the several post-towns, with the letters, or at least accounted for at the time of their transmission; the correct amount being ascertained and checked at the Central Office by weighing, and perhaps counting, the *mass* of letters received from each officer.

A little consideration will show the enormous effect which this arrangement would have in simplifying and accelerating the proceedings of the Post Office throughout the kingdom, and in rendering them less liable to error and fraud. Take as a specimen its effect in the Central Metropolitan Office. There would be no letters to be taxed; no examination of those taxed by others; no accounts to be made out against the Deputy-Post-masters for letters transmitted to them, nor against the

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 474.

Letter Carriers. There would be no want of checks; no necessity to submit to frauds and numberless errors for want of means to prevent or correct them.* In short, the whole of the financial proceedings would be reduced to a simple, accurate, and satisfactory account, consisting of a single item per day, with each Receiver and each Deputy Post-master.

Can there be a doubt that under such simple arrangements, especially if the operation of assorting the letters could be materially facilitated, (of which more hereafter,) the present staff of clerks would amply suffice for at least a four-fold amount of business? Still, however desirable such a simplification may be, its practicability has yet to be ascertained. But, before proceeding to this question, it will be convenient to consider whether the time of the remaining class of Post Office servants (the Letter Carriers) is capable of being economized.

3. *Letter Carriers.*—This is by far the most numerous class in the service of the Post Office; so much so, that although their individual salaries are comparatively low, the aggregate, as shown at p. 15, forms a very important item in the account; any abridgment of the labours of this class of servants must therefore be of great economical importance. The evidence given before the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry appears to indicate the means of attaining this desirable object.

At the time of the investigation (1828) there existed in London what was called the "early delivery" of letters; that is to say, any person for a small annual fee was privileged to receive his letters before the usual hour of delivery. The privilege, I believe, still exists, but to a much less extent.

The early delivery was effected thus: the letters in question were separated from the others and distributed by persons, (generally the Letter Carriers of remote quarters, while on

* The Post-master General is of opinion that the present complexity of the accounts is such as to render any certain check impracticable. Par. Pro. 1835. No. 443, pp. 5 and 6.

the way to their own proper districts,) who delivered the letters at the respective houses, leaving the postage to be collected by the proper Letter Carrier of the district, who, for that purpose, made a second round after completing his ordinary delivery.

Mr. Benjamin Critchett, Inspector of the Inland Letter Carriers, was examined, among other matters, as to the time required for the early and late deliveries respectively; the following is an extract from his evidence thereon:*

“ If a postman were to deliver the whole of his letters as he went along, not taking the money for any of them, and returned through his walk, and then collected the money, would they not all be delivered much earlier than they are now?—Certainly.

“ And would it require more hands to do it than are now employed?—No.

“ The man going back to receive the postage of the early letters must pass by the doors where he has delivered letters and received the postage?—Yes: I will describe the operation in two or three districts this morning: I will take Lombard-street, where the number of letters that were delivered this morning was 637.

“ In Lombard-street?—Yes. The amount of postage £25 14s. 3d.

“ You are confining yourself now to Lombard-street?—The Lombard-street district: Lombard-street, Clement’s-lane, Nicholas-lane, and various courts.

“ Are you speaking of the general delivery?—I am speaking of the total number of letters sorted for that district—the Lombard-street district.

“ And that were carried out by Letter Carriers?—That

* Since this evidence was given, the employment of Omnibuses for the conveyance of the Letter Carriers to the remote districts, and other arrangements, have caused the ordinary delivery of letters to commence much earlier.

were carried out by Letter Carriers this morning; there were 637 letters, the amount of postage £25 14s. 3d. Of this number of letters, 570 were delivered early.

“ Could you state the time within which they were delivered?—All in half an hour.

“ What o'clock would that be?—That would be about half-past nine.

“ They were delivered in half an hour from the time they were dispatched?—From the time they were dispatched: 570 were delivered early, the postage £22 19s. 4d.; and 67 delivered in the ordinary way, postage £2 14s. 11d.

“ What time were they delivered?—Why, they would occupy the Letter Carrier about an hour and a half; then he commenced collecting the postage of the early delivery.

“ What! would he be an hour and a half in delivering 67 letters?—Yes, he would thereabouts.

“ Considering the extent of the district?—Yes, the time he would wait to get the money for a letter would be about two minutes to a house.

“ Have you made any calculation?—Yes, I have one at the office.

“ What do you estimate as the time for delivering a letter when the postage is received?—That will occupy him nearly two minutes.

“ Two minutes at every house?—Yes; indeed some houses detain him at the door three, or four, or five minutes, in giving change, and various circumstances arise in the delivery of letters that detain the Letter Carriers.”*

* * * *

“ To deliver all the letters in the ordinary way in two hours and fifteen minutes will require from 70 to 80 additional Letter Carriers, and this would not give so much accommodation to the public as the early delivery does, as nearly half the total

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, pp. 621, 622.

number of letters are delivered early, in half an hour after they are dispatched from the Post Office.”*

The above evidence clearly shows that the ordinary delivery of letters is an exceedingly tedious, inconvenient, and consequently expensive process; and that the cause of these evils is the hinderance to the delivery which arises from its being embarrassed with the collection of the postage. In the Lombard-street district it appears that while half an hour was sufficient for the delivery of 570 letters, when the postage was collected afterwards, it required an hour and a half for the delivery of only 67 letters, when the postage was collected at the same time, consequently that one delivery was about 25 times as quick as the other. This result probably represents the hinderance in an exaggerated form, as there is little doubt that those entitled to the early delivery were in the habit of receiving more letters each than those not so entitled; but, after making every necessary allowance, there can be no doubt that the loss of time must be very considerable indeed.

It appears, then, that with reference to the abridgment of the labours of the Letter Carriers, as well as of the Clerks, the great desideratum is, that the postage of all letters should be paid in advance. If such an arrangement could by any means be effected, it would undoubtedly economize the time of the Letter Carriers even more than that of the Clerks. There would not only be no stopping to collect the postage, but probably it would soon be unnecessary even to await the opening of the door, as every house might be provided with a box † into which the Letter Carrier would drop the letters, and, having knocked, he would pass on as fast as he could walk. By this means a man would go through a district of moderate extent in half an hour, and

* 18th Report of Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 632.

† A very trifling inducement would suffice to effect such a change. It would be obviously fair to instruct the Letter Carrier to pass any door not so provided, and to deliver the letter on a second round, charging a small sum, say a halfpenny, for his trouble.

deliver within it almost any number of letters ; for it must be borne in mind, that in a town (and at present we are only considering the arrangements for towns) a Letter Carrier's walk would scarcely be lengthened by an increase, however great, in the number of letters to be delivered ; and that even the number of houses at which he would have to call would be increased but in a low ratio.

As we have seen that the above arrangements, if carried into practice, would secure a vast public benefit, we are naturally led to the consideration of the means for their adoption.

To so extensive a change there are, of course, many obstacles ; some sacrifices are necessarily required ; any plan, therefore, which holds out a fair prospect of surmounting the difficulty must justly be considered, even if not free from objection, as entitled to a careful and candid examination.

The essential elements of such a plan are, first, a very low rate of postage, to neutralize the objections on the part of the public to its being demanded in advance ; and, secondly, a uniform rate of postage, to simplify the mode of accounting for its receipt. With respect to the latter element, it has already been shown (p. 14) that in fairness the rates of postage for primary distribution ought to be uniform ; the cost of transit along the mail-roads, even for the greatest distances, being so trifling, as not to be expressible by the smallest coin. This part of the plan, therefore, appears to present no difficulty, and the only question is, whether it is possible to reduce the postage sufficiently low.

In order to ascertain the greatest extent to which this reduction may be carried, it will be necessary to calculate the cost of primary distribution under the economical arrangements proposed above. It has already been shown that, under such arrangements, the present establishment of the Post Office, with, perhaps, some slight addition to the salaries, under the head "Superintendents," would suffice, even if the amount of business to be transacted should increase four or five-fold.

An addition to the mileage would of course be required, as on some roads it certainly would be necessary to employ additional mail-coaches. Assuming for the present that owing partly to the reduction in postage, and partly to increased facilities of communication, the total number of letters, &c. passed through the Post Office would increase to four-fold the present amount, the calculation will be as follows :

Heads of Charges. (See p. 10).	Present cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom. (See page 10, column D.)	Estimated future cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom.
	£	£
Salaries and allowances.....	222,510	250,000
Special services and travelling charges	8,039	12,000
Conveyance of Mails, &c.	135,919	310,000*
Packet service and port dues	4,987	10,000
Tradesmen's bills, building, and repairs	9,974	15,000
Rents of offices, tithes, and taxes	4,085	6,000
Law charges	5,913	9,000
Stationery, printing, and postage	3,539	6,000
Superannuation allowances, &c.	30,248	30,248
Menai and Conway bridges (tolls) ...	1,303	3,000
	426,517	651,248

By the above estimate it appears that, if the correspondence of the country increase four-fold, i. e. amount to about 500,000,000 of letters, newspapers, &c., (see page 8,) then upon the proposed arrangements the cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom will amount to £651,248 per annum, producing an average cost per letter or newspaper of 32 hundredths of a penny, or one farthing and three-tenths of a farthing.

When it is considered that the mere transit of a letter by the mail-coaches costs practically nothing, and that the penny posts of large towns† are very profitable, even though these

* This allowance is really much too large. See pp. 51—53.

† 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p 585.

pence have to be collected from house to house, there is nothing very surprising in this result. The following facts may be stated in corroboration of its accuracy.

The average cost of managing the twopenny-post of London, notwithstanding the large allowance of weight, and the expensive manner in which the establishment is conducted, is only 34 per cent. on the receipts,* or about two-thirds of a penny per letter.

The distribution of the Penny Magazine is exactly parallel with the proposed primary distribution of letters. 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 woodcuts; and yet it is well known that the undertaking is a profitable one.

The carriers who ply between Birmingham and the neighbouring towns, to a distance of 12 or 13 miles, are in the constant habit of conveying letters, which they deliver at one penny each. It is very improbable that the carriers have any well-organized system of distribution, and of course they must be paid something for their risk in breaking the law; although, from the open manner in which they proceed, it may be inferred that the chance of penalty is not very great. I have been informed by a highly respectable merchant and manufacturer of Birmingham, that the number of letters distributed by these means very greatly exceeds, in his opinion, the number distributed within the same district by the Post Office.

It appears then that the cost of primary distribution can be reduced from 84 hundredths of a penny (p. 12) to 32 hundredths of a penny (p. 24) per letter, if the charge for postage can be reduced so low as to neutralize the objection on the part

* 21st Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 4.

of the public to its being paid in advance; and if the assumed increase in the number of letters can be brought about. But the required increase in the number of letters must depend mainly on the extent to which the postage is reduced. An extensive reduction of postage appears therefore to be the one thing needful. The postage must be brought sufficiently low to secure the advantages at which we aim, remaining only sufficiently high to afford the required revenue.

The cost of primary distribution under the new arrangements being only about one-third of a penny per letter, a profit or tax of 200 per cent. on such cost might be added, without raising the postage above one penny. A uniform rate of one penny would, I conceive, be sufficiently low to neutralize all *pecuniary* objection to its being invariably paid in advance; (other objections will be considered hereafter;) especially if the public were made to understand that its being thus paid were a necessary condition of so great a boon.* It can scarcely be doubted that so extensive a reduction in postage, together with the concurrent increased facilities of communication, would produce even more than the assumed increase in the number of letters.† But if it only produced an increase to the extent assumed, and if the preceding calculations are not greatly wrong, a uniform postage of one penny would, *after defraying the expense of conveying franks and newspapers*, produce a net revenue to the Exchequer of about £1,278,000 per annum,‡ or only about

* For a more extensive examination of this part of the subject, see Appendix, p. 81.

† The number of newspapers and franked letters would, of course, not be affected by the change. An increase in the number of chargeable letters, in the ratio of $5\frac{1}{2}$ to one, would therefore be required, in order to increase the total number of letters and newspapers four-fold. The probable extent of the increase in the number of chargeable letters will be brought under consideration shortly.

‡ See Appendix, p. 65. for calculation of the probable revenue.

£280,000 less than the present amount. This rate of postage, then, appears to conform with all the conditions laid down: I therefore propose,—

That the charge for primary distribution, that is to say, the postage on all letters received in a post-town, and delivered in the same, or any other post-town in the British Isles, shall be at the uniform rate of one penny per half ounce;—all letters and other papers, whether single or multiple, forming one packet, and not weighing more than half an ounce, being charged one penny; and heavier packets, to any convenient limit, (say a quarter of a pound,) being charged an additional penny for each additional half ounce. The charge for weights exceeding half an ounce should not, perhaps, in strict fairness, increase at so great a rate; but strict fairness may be advantageously sacrificed to simplicity; and it is perhaps not desirable that the Post Office should be encumbered with heavy parcels.

As, however, to adopt this scale for the present twopenny and penny posts would in certain instances considerably advance the postage in these departments, it might be well to allow greater weight here, as for instance, two ounces for a penny, four for twopence, &c., and the maximum might be placed as high as a pound. If this difference of weight existed, it would be necessary to keep the local distribution separate from the general one, to a slight extent. No inconvenience would, however, arise from employing the same receiving-houses for both.

Having shown the practicability and even fairness of a uniform and low rate of postage, (the primary conditions of the simplicity of arrangements, and of the extension in the number of letters which we have contemplated,) our next step is to show the means by which such postage might be conveniently collected in advance.

In former editions two modes of collection were submitted for consideration; but the public having evinced a decided pre-

ference for one, the other is here, for the sake of brevity, omitted.

The following is a sketch of the mode of collection which I propose. It is drawn out with reference to the metropolis, but a few very slight and obvious modifications would adapt it to any other town.

A few years ago, when the expediency of entirely abolishing the newspaper stamp, and allowing newspapers to pass through the Post Office for one penny each, was under consideration, it was suggested by Mr. Charles Knight, that the postage on newspapers might be collected by selling stamped wrappers at one penny each. Availing myself of this excellent suggestion, I propose the following arrangement :

Let stamped covers and sheets of paper be supplied to the public from the Stamp Office or Post Office, or both, as may be most convenient, and sold at such a price as to include the postage. Letters so stamped would be treated in all respects as franks.

Covers at various prices would be required for packets of various weights; and each should have the weight it is entitled to carry legibly printed with the stamp. The Keeper of the Receiving-house should take the packets from time to time from the box, examine them to see that the allowance of weight was not exceeded, and assort them as hereafter described. If any packet exceeded the proper weight, it should be sent to the dead-letter office, opened, and returned to the writer: the delay thus occasioned, and the loss of the frank-stamp, being the penalty for carelessness. As a check on the Receiver, a few packets taken at random should be examined at the Central Office, and a fine levied for negligence.

Economy and the public convenience would require that sheets of letter paper of every description should be stamped in the part used for the address; that wrappers, such as are used for newspapers, as well as covers made of cheap paper, should also be stamped; and that every Deputy Postmaster

and Letter Receiver, all over the kingdom, should be required to keep them on sale; a discount, such as is now given on stamps, would render it their interest to do so. Stationers also would be induced to keep them.

The stamp of the receiving-house should be struck upon the frank-stamp, to prevent the latter being used a second time.

For the forgery of these stamps their low price would leave but little temptation; and the account of their issue, compared with the account of the number of letters passed through the Post Office, (kept as hereafter described,) would lead to the detection of any extensive fraud.

Should experience warrant the Government in making the use of stamped covers universal, most important advantages would be secured; advantages, indeed, of such magnitude, that before any exception whatever is admitted, the policy of such exception should be very fully considered.

1. The Post Office would be relieved altogether from the collection of the Revenue, and from all accounts relating to that collection. Distribution would be its only function.

2. The receipt of letters would be much more simple than it now is; as the present trouble of receiving money for the post-paid letters would be avoided.

3. Any necessary exception to the uniform rate of postage (1*d.* per half-ounce) would, under this arrangement, be productive of comparatively little inconvenience. For instance, the greater weights proposed to be allowed in the local posts would be readily managed. Penny covers, and sheets for local posts, might be marked thus, when stamped,

“ For Local Distribution.—The weight allowed is two ounces.”

Or all penny covers and sheets might be marked thus :

“ For General Distribution.—The weight allowed is half an ounce.”

“ For Local Distribution.—The weight allowed is two ounces.”

It may, perhaps, be said that this plan only transfers the receipt of postage from the Post Office to the Stamp Office;

but it will be recollected that at the latter the postage would be collected in large sums, the number of payments being reduced, probably, in the ratio of at least a thousand to one.

The cost of stamping such an enormous number of papers may appear to be a formidable objection to this arrangement. With the aid of machinery, however, this cost may be reduced to a mere trifle.

The only objection which occurs to me to the universal adoption of this plan is the following: Persons unaccustomed to write letters, would, perhaps, be at a loss how to proceed. They might send or take their letters to the Post Office without having had recourse to the stamp. It is true that on presentation of the letter, the Receiver, instead of accepting the money as postage, might take it as the price of a cover, or band, in which the bringer might immediately inclose the letter, and then re-direct it. But the bringer would sometimes be unable to write. Perhaps this difficulty might be obviated by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by applying a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter, so as to avoid the necessity for re-directing it. If the bringer should put the letter into the letter-box, there would be no resource but to send it to the dead letter office; but, if proper pains were taken to inform the public, and legibly to mark the letter-box, "For Stamped Letters, Franks, and Newspapers only," such cases could seldom occur.

I am aware that many consider the required payment in advance objectionable. In the Appendix, (page 81,) the principle is fully considered. I have there shown a modification of the preceding plan which might be adopted, if it should be thought impolitic at once to attempt the universal adoption of that principle. I do not insert the modification here, because, however useful it may be as a temporary expedient, I am decidedly of opinion that it ought to form no part of a permanent

plan, and that to resort to it at all would be a step of very questionable policy.

On taking the letters from the box each must be stamped with the date and the address of the receiving-house, the marks being given by a *tell-tale stamp*; that is to say, a stamp, connected with mechanism (upon a plan well known) for the purpose of counting the letters as they were impressed. It would be unnecessary to mark the amount of postage, and therefore the stamp would not be varied. The letter, when stamped, must be thrown by the receiver into a box marked with the initial letter of the post-town to which it is addressed. Thus all letters, as received, would be assorted alphabetically; that is to say, all letters for post-towns beginning with A would be thrown together, &c.*

INCREASED FACILITIES OF DISTRIBUTION.

The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry begin their Report on the Post Office as follows: "The facility of frequent, punctual, and quick communication which the institution of the Post Office was calculated to secure, may be justly classed among the elements of profitable commerce. It is essential to the purposes of Government, and subservient to all the ends of national policy.

"In this view the establishment of the Post Office possesses a character distinct from, and an importance superior to its title to consideration as a productive branch of the revenue. Nor is its utility in this respect to be appreciated solely by the revenue derived directly from it, for it may be considered also as auxiliary to other branches of the public income.

"But whatever distinction may be observed between the more general and primary purposes of this institution, and its value separately regarded as an immediate source of revenue to

* See Appendix, p. 60, for further details as to the alphabetic assortment.

the Crown, it will be found that the same means may be employed to promote its several objects; and that, in a prosperous state of the country, its productiveness, in a financial calculation, will be measured by the proportion in which, under judicious management, it is made to contribute to the interests, the convenience, and the habitual indulgence of the community.

“ To prove the truth of this principle, it might be sufficient to refer to the immediate results of the well-known improvements introduced in the year 1784, upon the suggestions of Mr. Palmer, in the circulation of letters within the now United Kingdom.

“ Various causes have subsequently contributed to the vast progressive increase of the annual receipts of this department, which in twenty years, dating from the adoption of Mr. Palmer’s plan, were trebled, and have since become five-fold their previous amount. But a general comparison of the extent of the accommodation afforded, and of the quantity of correspondence maintained through the Post Office at different periods, will establish the principle already assumed, that the growth of this correspondence (and of the attendant revenue) naturally keeps pace with the amendment and extension of the means of intercourse, and with the increased wealth, commerce, and prosperity of the country, and will show that this effect, although it may have been in some degree counteracted, has not been prevented by the restraints of augmented taxation.

“ In looking at the Post Office, therefore, with a view to its regulation as a department of the revenue, it is indispensable that attention be principally directed to its more important uses, and to the efficiency of its arrangements for the attainment of those purposes.”*

There can be no doubt that one cause of the comparative falling off of the Post Office revenue is want of attention to the principles here laid down. The Post Office has too generally

* 18th Report of the Com. of Revenue Inquiry, pp. 3 and 4.

lagged behind other institutions in the progress of improvement, instead of being, as it might be, an example to the country of skilful and energetic management. Previously to the improvements of Mr. Palmer, the mail was about twice as long in proceeding from town to town as the stage-coaches. Mr. Palmer's improvements brought up the Post Office to an equality with other commercial institutions of his day, and, as stated by the Commissioners, led to an enormous increase of revenue. For many years past, while other institutions have been rapidly improving, the Post Office has again been nearly stationary; it has, consequently, fallen a second time in arrear, and, as a means of distributing the correspondence of the country, is, at present, lamentably inefficient.

In making these statements I imply blame to no one; to do so forms no part of the task which I have undertaken. It would, perhaps, be impossible for any one to read the able Reports which have been made by the past and by the present Commissioners of Inquiry, without feeling indignant at the disregard for the public interest, the jobbing and peculation which they expose.* It will be wise, however, to regard the past no further than may be useful in securing a better state of things for the future. To effect this will require an extensive change in the administration, and a reconstruction of the mechanism of the Post Office.

With regard to the administration of the Post Office, it may be remarked, that so long as the office of Post-master General is a political appointment, it is impossible that the individual selected, however anxious he may be efficiently to discharge his duty, can do more than acquire a general knowledge of the vast and complicated mechanism he is supposed to direct. The most efficient officer, therefore, is the secretary; but as he has not the requisite authority for effecting such improvements as he may think necessary, the responsibility does not in fair-

* See especially the Report by the present Commissioners on the Packets Establishment. April 30, 1836.

ness attach to him. Much may be expected from the known talent and energy of the gentleman recently appointed to this office, but it must be borne in mind that, if the preceding views are at all correct, the inefficiency of the Post Office results chiefly from the excessive and variable rates of postage; consequently that the removal of the evil depends on Legislative enactment; this consideration in a great measure explains the present state of things. Looking at those arrangements which were clearly within the control of the Post Office authorities, we find much that has received and has deserved general admiration; and in one respect, viz., the prompt and courteous attention paid to all letters of complaint, the Post Office has for many years been a model of excellence.*

It would here be out of place to enter into a general investigation of the defective system of the Post Office, I may, however, be allowed to mention a few facts.

About 6,000 of the letters which arrive in London by the morning mails, on their way to other towns, lie all day at the Post Office for want of a morning dispatch,† although there are excellent morning coaches from London to every part of the kingdom. The consequence of this delay is, that places corresponding through London, however near they may really be to one another, are, as regards facilities of communication by post, forced as far asunder as London and Durham.‡

* It is not generally known that the Duke of Richmond, when Postmaster General, was desirous of performing the duties of the office gratuitously, and that it was not until after he had been repeatedly urged by Government that he consented to accept a salary: even then it was only accepted prospectively. It is not, perhaps, consistent with the efficient discharge of important public duties, that the public servants should be unpaid, but it is impossible not to admire such an instance of generous disinterestedness.

† 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 477.

‡ In the 7th Report of the Com. of Post Office Inquiry, just submitted to Parliament, (Feb. 1837,) a morning dispatch of these letters is recommended. Oct. 1837.—Morning Mails to certain towns are now established.

If a blank post-day intervene, the delay is even more remarkable. A letter written at Uxbridge after the close of the Post Office on Friday night, would not be delivered at Gravesend, a distance of less than forty miles, earlier than Tuesday morning.

The extent to which personal intercourse takes place between London and the district within a circuit of ten miles, that is to say, between the places of business and the homes of thousands of professional men and tradesmen, is shown by the continued current of stage-coaches and other carriages along every road. There can be no doubt that the communication by letter, in the same district, would be proportionately great if the Post Office afforded the necessary facilities; but such is the ludicrous tardiness of the three-penny post, that no one thinks of employing it where dispatch is of the slightest importance.

To interchange letters between London and Hampstead, through the post, requires, under the most favourable circumstances, about ten hours: a messenger would walk over the ground in a quarter of the time.

A letter which shall arrive in London between six and seven o'clock, by a morning mail, would not be delivered at Hampstead, or any other place equally distant, till eleven or twelve o'clock.

A London tradesman residing at Hampstead, who should, from any cause, be prevented from returning home as usual in the evening, would be unable to prepare his family for his absence by a post letter, unless he wrote before three o'clock; and even after two o'clock a letter would be too late, if put into any district receiving-house.

If two letters were put into the proper district receiving-houses in London, between five and six o'clock in the evening, one addressed to Highgate, the other to Wolverhampton, (which lies 120 miles further along the same road,) the Wolverhampton letter would be delivered first.

In the charges for postage the most unaccountable anomalies exist; *e. g.*: there is a cross-post from Wolverhampton through Dudley, Stourbridge, and other places. Between Dudley and Stourbridge this post passes through the village of Brierly Hill. The postage of a letter from Wolverhampton to Dudley is fourpence; but from Wolverhampton to Brierly Hill, some miles further on, it is only one penny. And this is one of a large class of anomalies—so large, indeed, that the term is perhaps inapplicable; for it appears to be the rule, that while the postage between any large town and the neighbouring post towns is fourpence, that between the large town and the villages equally distant shall be one penny; that is to say, the charge to the public is in the inverse ratio of the cost to Government; for it is evident that this cost must be small where the number of letters carried is great, and comparatively large where that number is small.

The remedy for the defective arrangements which lead to these and many other inconveniences and anomalies, is, no doubt, to a great extent, independent of the reduction in postage which has been recommended: the increase in the number of letters, resulting from that reduction, would, however, greatly facilitate the necessary reforms. With regard to more frequent departures of the Mails, for instance, as two coaches would probably be required on some of the mail-roads, they might arrive and be dispatched one in the morning and one in the evening, not only without additional expense, but with great advantage to the Post Office, as a means of preventing an inconvenient accumulation of business at one hour of the day, and also as a means of reducing the number of cross-posts, and thus *centralizing* the business of the Post Office. There are serious objections to numerous cross-posts. Hitherto it has been found impossible satisfactorily to check the receipts for postage; and the number of cross-post letters which are lost is proportionately very great.*

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 489.

If the facilities for the general distribution of letters were rendered adequate to the wants of the public; and if the local distribution of the metropolitan district,* and of similar districts about all large towns, were managed, as it may easily be, so as to afford the means of frequent and rapid communication, these causes alone would produce a great increase of letters.† The extent of the increase thus obtained, as well as the extent of that which would result from the reduced postage, does not admit of exact calculation; but, judging from the effects produced by similar causes, (as the increase of letters

* The three-penny post is peculiarly in want of improvement. Its operations are not only slow, but irregular and expensive. The mileage for the wretched hacks which carry the bags is twice as great as for the mail-coaches. The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry (Twenty-first Report, p. 46) recommend the employment of the stage-coaches. To this it has been objected, that their punctuality cannot be depended upon; (Parliamentary Report, 1835, No. 443, p. 21;) but surely the means employed for enforcing punctuality on the part of the mail-coaches, are not less applicable to coaches travelling a short distance. Indeed all doubt on this subject is fully removed by the successful experiment of the West India Dock Company. For some time past the coaches which run every quarter of an hour between Billiter-square and the West India Docks have been quite as punctual in their departure and arrival, and nearly as quick, as the mail-coaches. This improvement is the result of a contract which the Dock Company has entered into with the coach proprietors for the conveyance of dispatches between the Company's office in Billiter-square and the Docks; by which contract punctuality is secured under certain penalties.

† The increase of travelling between places connected by railways may be cited in support of this view. The fares between such places have not been much reduced by the railways; (in some instances they are not reduced at all;) and yet it has been shown by Dr. Lardner that the number of travellers between places so connected has increased nearly four-fold. (See the Reports of the Bristol meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.) In his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the Blackwall railway, Dr. Lardner states the number of persons conveyed along the Dublin and Kingston railroad, in a single year, to be about a million and a quarter.

resulting from Mr. Palmer's improvements, and the greatly extended consumption of any article in general request which invariably follows a considerable reduction in price,) there is scarcely a doubt, in my opinion, that the total increase in the number of letters would exceed that which has been assumed.

The increase of MS. letters alone would be very great, for, in the first place, many more would be written, especially by the poorer and more numerous classes; and, in the next place, all, or nearly all, would be distributed by the Post Office; but the great increase would probably be in the transmission of printed circulars, prospectuses, catalogues, and prices current. In the opinion of commercial men, enormous numbers of such papers would be distributed by the Post Office, if the rates of postage were low. The question as to the probable increase is fully considered in the Appendix, (p. 68.)

Secondary distribution of letters, or that distribution which proceeds from each post-town as a centre, to places of inferior importance. In the present state of things, the secondary distribution of letters is in some places a source of loss. This appears to me to be undesirable: every branch of the Post Office ought, in my opinion, to defray its own expenses, although it is, at the same time, important that the ramifications should be as numerous as possible. The most equitable arrangement appears to be this: let the whole weight of taxation be thrown on the primary distribution, which ought to include every place which can be reached without absolute loss to the revenue, and let each department of the secondary distribution just defray its own expenses.

As some gentlemen, for whose opinion I have a very high respect, think that letters should be distributed for the same charge in all districts, even where, from the thinness of the population, their distribution would be a source of considerable loss to the Revenue, I think it necessary to examine this part of the subject more fully.

In the first place, it may be remarked, that a limit must be

drawn somewhere. No one would contend that letters are to be distributed at the minimum rate over a district such as may be found in many parts of Scotland and Wales, and even in some parts of England, where people in the receipt of letters live two or three miles asunder. A system of secondary distribution must, therefore, be provided for. It may, however, be said, give a discretionary power to some one; but a discretionary power lets in favouritism and error, whereas a self-regulating principle is a security against these evils. It would, perhaps, be some approach to a definite arrangement, to say that all villages shall be included under the primary delivery. I very much doubt if any important village would, under economical management, be excluded, by the principle which I advocate, from at least one delivery per day, (and there could be no necessity for a double dispatch to small places off the direct lines of road). The question, however, is, whether one part of the distribution shall be conducted at the expense of the other part?

It is said, that it is the interest of society to make some pecuniary sacrifice for the purpose of sending the post into remote places; because, generally speaking, they are the less penetrable retreats of ignorance. As an abstract proposition this is undeniable; and by extending the post to every place to which it can be conveyed without *injury* to the Revenue, the principle would be to a great extent adopted; inasmuch as such an arrangement would throw not only all the tax on the more populous places, but all the fixed expenses of superintendence, &c.: but to attempt to go beyond this, would, as it appears to me, be sacrificing the interests of the more populous, without benefiting the less populous places. For if the charge be in all cases made uniform, it is manifest either that the revenue must suffer, or that the charge, as regards the large towns, must be advanced. If government can give up the revenue, there is no difficulty in the matter; but if not, the adoption of this principle must lead to an increase in the charge on all letters. There is

no eligible medium between a penny and twopence, therefore the universal charge would become twopence: but twopence per letter, or a penny in addition to the primary charge, would, in all probability, suffice for the secondary distribution, as in very remote places there might be a delivery on the alternate days only, as at present. Thus, for the sake of uniformity, postage would be doubled to the whole community, when doubling it for the part only where the transmission is accompanied with increased expense would be sufficient to secure the revenue from injury. It appears, then, that the adoption of the principle under consideration would, as already stated, injure the towns without benefiting the villages.

Nor would the general revenue be very much augmented by such an arrangement. A charge of twopence per letter, or even three-halfpence, would probably exclude the great mass of printed correspondence, and it would diminish the correspondence of all kinds; it would also tend to maintain, as between large towns, the contraband conveyance of letters, and thus the Post Office would, to a considerable extent, as at present, have to distribute the least profitable part of the correspondence only.

The following is a sketch of the plan of operations which I would suggest.

Let the inhabitants of any district, acting through the Guardians of the Poor, or other recognized authority, be entitled, on paying in advance a small annual fee to the Deputy Postmaster of the town to which their letters are dispatched, to require that a bag shall be made up for the district; and let them arrange for fetching and carrying the bag, and for the delivery and collection of letters; charging the expense, which would be very trifling, upon the parochial rates, or upon each letter, as may be most convenient.* An extra postage, to be

* What are called fifth clause posts, or posts established on a guarantee given by the parties benefited to defray the expense, may be considered as in some measure a precedent for the proposed arrangement.

collected on the delivery of each letter, would, in a country district, delay the delivery but little, as the time of the Letter Carrier is occupied chiefly in walking from house to house.

The proposed arrangements should in each case be submitted to the approval of the central authority, (the Post-master General or Commissioners,) whom it might perhaps be necessary to empower to make arrangements for secondary distribution in any instance in which the local authority declined or neglected to act.

If this plan were adopted, the central authority of the Post Office would be relieved of nearly all care with respect to the secondary distribution of letters; the frequency, and, consequently, the expense of which would in each instance be regulated in exact accordance with the wants of the district.

Foreign and Colonial Letters.—For the sake of simplicity in accounting for the postage, it is very desirable that the Foreign and Colonial letters should be subjected to as nearly as practicable the same regulations as Inland letters.

As, however, it will probably be impossible in all cases to provide for the English postage on letters received from foreign countries being paid in advance, some peculiar arrangement with reference to Foreign letters appears to be required. The mode of dealing with them, which suggests itself to my mind, is the following:

Let all Foreign letters on *leaving* this country be subjected to a double rate of English postage, but let Foreign letters received into this country be delivered free. The postage claimed by the foreign government being in each case paid by the foreign resident.

This arrangement would appear to obviate the necessity for all negotiation with foreign governments on the subject of postage, and it would be practically the same in its re-

See the evidence of Sir F. Freeling, Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 351.

sults as though the English postage were charged in both directions ; the only difference being, (with few exceptions not worth regarding,) that in an interchange of letters the English resident would pay his share of the postage at once instead of at twice. The covers used should be legibly marked " Foreign Letter," and sold at uniform rates.

If, as I would recommend, the rates of postage already proposed for Inland letters were extended to Foreign letters, the prices of covers for Foreign letters would be exactly double those for Inland letters ; but as it appears necessary to treat Foreign letters differently from others, no inconvenience would arise to the operation of the general plan if the prices were higher.

For the sake of simplicity it appears desirable to treat all Foreign letters alike, although certain Governments might be willing to require payment of the whole postage in advance, and to account to the English Government for the English portion. And as, in many minds, the distinction between a foreign country and one of our colonies is not clearly defined, it would be desirable perhaps that Colonial letters should be placed under the same regulations as Foreign letters. If this were done, the covers would be marked " Foreign or Colonial Letter."

The reduction here proposed in the postage of Foreign and Colonial letters might easily be effected, for the increase in the number would be such that the payments for ship-letters might be reduced from 2*d.*, the present rate, to a farthing each, and yet amply remunerate the masters of vessels.*

* There is perhaps scarcely any measure which would tend so effectually to remove the obstacles to emigration, and to maintain that sympathy between the colonies and the mother country, which is the only sure bond of connexion, as the proposed reduction in the postage of Colonial letters. The importance of promoting voluntary emigration from Ireland in aid of the Poor Laws, renders this consideration, at the present time, deserving of the greatest attention.

The foregoing sketch will, I hope, sufficiently indicate the nature and extent of the reform which appears to be required in the Post Office. The necessary limits to a paper of this description have prevented my exhibiting the plan in all its details, and many auxiliary arrangements have been altogether omitted.

As my object has been to carry out the principles which I have endeavoured to develop to their full extent, I have avoided, except in one or two instances, speaking of any improvements which do not form essential parts of my plan; it would be easy to show that, with a less extensive reduction of postage than that which I have proposed, much may be done towards increasing the facilities of communication, and securing the collection of the revenue. I earnestly hope, however, that a reform will take place, at once thorough and complete; the more rigidly the subject is investigated, the more, I feel assured, will the practicability of the measures here proposed be made manifest.

The following is a summary of the conclusions which it is believed have been established in the preceding paper.

1. That the present cost of primary distribution is, for the most part, the result of complex arrangements at the Post Office.
2. That these complex arrangements would be avoided, if postage were charged, without regard to distance, at a uniform rate, (which is shown to be the only fair rate with reference to the expenses incurred,) and were collected in advance.
3. That the postage might be collected in advance, if reduced to the rate proposed; viz., one penny for each packet not exceeding half an ounce in weight, with an additional penny for each additional half ounce.
4. That, owing to the great simplicity of the arrangements which might be adopted under these conditions, the present

establishment of the Post Office, with a slight addition, would suffice for a four-fold increase of business.

5. That this increase of business would lead to greatly increased facilities of communication, as, for example, two departures and two arrivals of the London mails per day.

6. That these increased facilities, together with the greatly reduced charges, would have the effect of increasing the number of chargeable letters; in all probability, at least five and a quarter fold; which increase (the number of franks and newspapers continuing as at present) would produce the four-fold increase of business, for which, as it has been shown, the present establishment of the Post Office, with a slight addition, would suffice.

7. That the necessary cost of primary distribution is not the present actual cost, viz., 84 hundredths of a penny, but only 32 hundredths of a penny; the difference, viz., 52 hundredths of a penny, arising from the employment of the Post Office in levying an excessive tax, and from the consequent expensiveness of arrangements and restriction of correspondence.

8. That in consequence of the great reduction in the necessary cost of primary distribution which would be effected by the proposed arrangements, the proposed low rate of postage would yield a profit or tax of 200 per cent. on such necessary cost of primary distribution; which, *after paying for the distribution of franks and newspapers*, would afford a probable net revenue of £1,278,000 per annum.*

9. That the secondary distribution of letters ought to be untaxed, and the small unavoidable expense defrayed, in each instance, by the inhabitants of the district for whose benefit it is established; also that it may be so managed as not, in any

* The amount of revenue realized will, of course, depend chiefly on the increase in the number of letters, &c., the extent of which is necessarily very much a matter of conjecture; there is no doubt, however, that a large revenue will be obtained. See Appendix, p. 65, for a full examination of this question.

degree, to interfere with the simplicity of the arrangements proposed for effecting the primary distribution.

In treating this subject, it is not improbable that the want of *practical* familiarity with the arrangements of the Post Office may have led to some misconception in matters of minor importance; but I am not without hope that any such disadvantage may be counterbalanced by the absence of those prejudices in favour of an established routine, to which practical men are peculiarly, and, perhaps, unavoidably liable: and I feel assured that no misconception can possibly have arisen which materially affects the results at which I have arrived. The data from which these results are deduced are taken chiefly from Parliamentary Reports; they, as well as the calculations, are fully stated, and are consequently open to examination and correction.

Besides the state of the revenue and the necessities of commerce, there are other circumstances which clearly show that the present is a very desirable time for effecting the reforms here suggested.

The rapid extension of railroads now going on would of itself, in a short time, inevitably work a revolution in the system of the Post Office. Between Manchester and Liverpool, instead of two posts per day, as before the construction of the railroad, there are now five; and this improvement has increased the number of letters nearly one half. Indeed, it is obvious that the extensive employment of railroads will render it necessary to re-model the whole system of distribution. Let other independent changes then be made, while there is time to effect them.

The public attention, too, thanks to the persevering exertions of Mr. Wallace, whose success shows how much may be accomplished even by one Member of Parliament who shall thoroughly devote himself to his purpose, is at length beginning to awake to the evils of the present system; and the newspapers already manifest frequent indications of a growing anxiety for their removal.

Judging from the rapid growth of public opinion which we have recently witnessed with regard to other institutions, we may expect that in a few years, or even months, if "the still small voice" which, at present, gives scarcely audible expression to half-formed desires, be neglected, it will swell into a loud, distinct, and irresistible demand; and then a reform, which would now be received with gratitude, as one of the greatest boons ever conferred on a people by its Government, would perhaps be taken without thanks, and even with expressions of disappointment, because less extensive than unreasonable people might have expected.

Fortunately this is not a party question, some of the leading men of each political party having expressed themselves favourable to great changes. The Duke of Richmond, Earl Spencer, and Lord Ashburton, in the House of Lords, and Viscount Lowther, Mr. Hume, Mr. Wallace, Mr. Warburton, and many others, in the House of Commons, have declared themselves in favour of extensive reforms: the necessity for which may almost be said to have been acknowledged by the present Government, when they proposed to appoint a Commission of management, by the late Government, when they appointed a Commission of Inquiry. Lord Ashburton, whose opinion is deserving of great attention, appears to think that the cheap transmission of letters is so important that postage ought to be relieved altogether from taxation.

It is believed, therefore, that the proposed reform, if undertaken by Government, would not meet with opposition. Its object is not to increase the political power of this or that party, but to benefit all sects in politics and religion; and all classes, from the highest to the lowest. To the rich, as to the less wealthy, it will be acceptable, from the increased facilities it will afford for their correspondence. To the middle classes it will bring relief from oppressive and irritating demands which they pay grudgingly; estimating them even beyond their real amount, because probably of their frequent occurrence—

which they avoid by every possible contrivance, and which they would consider quite intolerable if they knew that nearly the whole is a tax. And to the poor it will afford the means of communication with their distant friends and relatives, from which they are at present debarred. It will give increased energy to trade; it will remove innumerable temptations to fraud; and it will be an important step in general education; the more important, perhaps, because it calls on Government for no factitious aid, for nothing in the shape of encouragement, still less of compulsion; but merely for the removal of an obstacle, created by the law, to that spontaneous education which happily is extending through the country, and which, even the opponents of a national system will agree, ought to be unobstructed in its progress.

We see, then, that the state of the revenue, the improved means of conveyance, the necessities of commerce, the proposed alterations in the controlling authority, the state of public opinion,—all things concur in rendering the present the most desirable time for a complete reform of the Post Office. A more popular measure could not be discovered. It would bring immediate, substantial, practical, indisputable relief to all. A thorough investigation will, I am satisfied, prove the practicability of the extensive reforms here suggested: but the most superficial examination will manifest the perfect ease with which great improvements may be effected. Let the Government, then, take the matter in hand; let them subject these proposals to the severest scrutiny, availing themselves of the information possessed by the able men who constitute the present Commission of Inquiry; let them proceed with that boldness which the existing state of the revenue justifies and requires, and they will add another claim—not inferior to any they now possess, nor one which will pass unregarded—to the gratitude and affection of the people.

POSTSCRIPT
to
THE THIRD EDITION.

SINCE the preceding plan was first sketched out, some important changes have taken place in the circumstances of the country, which it will be necessary to notice.

The net revenue of the Post Office upon the year 1836 was £1,622,700, being greater than for any year stated in the table at page 2, except 1825. As the first edition of this little work was written before the close of 1836, it was, of course, impossible to include in the calculations the revenue and other statistics of that year; this might have been done in the subsequent editions, but it was thought undesirable to admit new data which would disturb the calculations without materially affecting the results.

The revenue of the present year (1837) will, it is expected, exceed even the last. This progress is satisfactory in every point of view. The concurrent changes in the Post Office arrangements, among which we must look for the causes of this increase, though not of a decided character, are, for the most part, improvements; and as these improvements consist chiefly in reduced charges and increased facilities, they are in conformity with the principles herein advocated, and the results are, *pro tanto*, confirmatory of the soundness of those principles. The rates of postage have, in several instances, been reduced, and the clear income has increased; it has increased, too, notwithstanding the additional millions of newspapers to be carried and distributed for nothing, and notwithstanding the commercial depres-

sion, which has reduced the revenue in every other department.*

The present depressed state of the general revenue will appear to some to be a formidable obstacle to the plan. I do not see it in such a light, for several reasons. First, I consider it but temporary, and in the next place there can be no reasonable doubt that a reduction of postage would give a stimulus to commerce which would greatly benefit almost all the other sources of revenue. Conceding, however, for the sake of argument, that more slowness in the change is desirable than would be necessarily attendant on reducing the plan to practice, even if it were at once adopted by the Legislature in its full extent, there are various modes by which the approach may be made as gradual as the caution or timidity of the controlling authorities may dictate. It cannot be doubted that a reduction in postage to a certain extent would benefit the Post Office revenue, and an opinion to this effect is very general in the Post Office itself. Let, then, a general system of reductions be put into immediate operation, and extended as rapidly as the state of the revenue will permit; and concurrently with this, let the means here pointed out for simplifying the mechanism of the Post Office be adopted as far as practicable, in order that the consequent increase in the amount of business may not require an increased establishment. There are various modes by which this might be accomplished, but the following appears to me to be the most convenient.

Let the rates of postage between post-towns be reduced, say, one half, fractions of a penny being disregarded, and let the extra charges depend on weight, as in France, instead of on the number of enclosures, any packet not exceeding half an ounce being considered a single letter. The first of these changes would evidently reduce the varieties of charge by one half, the second would make way for the introduction of stamped covers; both would therefore tend to simplify the mechanism of the Post Office.

The gradual introduction of stamped covers might be managed by starting with a limited range to be from time to time ex-

* For a notice of the recent improvements in the Post Office, see page 88.

tended. Thus, in the first instance, the stamp might frank the letter from any post-town to all other post-towns within a range, say, of fifteen miles. If the extent of range were legibly printed on the cover, few mistakes would be made, as people would have little difficulty in determining whether any given post-town does or does not lie within fifteen miles of their own residence; and mistakes, if made, would produce very little inconvenience, as the price of the stamp might be considered as part payment of the postage, the remainder being charged on delivery; or, if it were thought necessary to avoid even this slight complexity, it would be no great hardship to charge the full postage, the loss of the stamp being the penalty for carelessness. Even in such cases the whole charge would be less than it now is.

As soon as the circumstances of the revenue permit, a further reduction of postage should take place, and the range of the stamped covers extended; and so on, till, in time, they would become universal.

I assume, that the use of the stamped covers is at first made optional, as in the proposed arrangement in the twopenny post department. In order that the public may be induced to employ them, it would be necessary that the minimum rate of postage, when collected in the ordinary manner, should at all times be rather greater than the price of stamps. Thus, the price of the stamp being one penny, the minimum postage should be twopence. This lower charge for stamped covers is not an artificial contrivance for forcing them into use, but is an equitable reduction, consequent on the simple and economical arrangements to which their employment would lead.

There is much to recommend this form of experiment; it would apply equally to all parts of the kingdom, and therefore would be impartial in its operation. It would be extending to the post-towns an advantage which, by the present system of penny posts, is most unwisely and unfairly confined to the villages. The experiment might be commenced on any scale however small (as a range of ten miles for instance), or however large; and might be extended slowly or rapidly according to circumstances. For these reasons, and because it would in the

outset supersede the lowest rates of postage only, and those which are most frequently evaded by contraband conveyance, it would not expose the revenue to any risk.

In making this suggestion public, I hope I have not exposed myself to be misunderstood. I do not propose it as a substitute for my original plan, from which I see no reason to depart in the slightest degree: it is offered as an answer to those who, thinking the adoption of my plan a change too violent and too dangerous to the revenue to be made on the sudden, are opposed to doing anything. To such objectors it furnishes an answer; and shows that, however desirable I may think the immediate and complete adoption would be, there are means of gradual approach which ought to obviate the difficulties of all those who admit the desirableness of the ultimate object.

It would be out of place here, and would occupy too much time, to reply to all the objections which have been urged in different quarters to certain parts of the plan; nor is this at all necessary, for every objection has, I believe, been replied to in Parliament, or in the public papers, by some of the many able advocates to whose aid the cause of Post Office reform is so much indebted, or has been answered by myself in anticipation. There is one objection, however, which I think it may be useful to examine fully, partly because it has been urged more frequently and confidently than any other, and partly for a reason which will shortly appear.

It has been argued that a five or six-fold increase in the number of chargeable letters would require the same increase in the number of mail coaches, for which I had not provided. There are two fallacies in this argument. It assumes, first, that the mail coaches are now fully laden; and, secondly, that they are laden with chargeable letters. The facts are, however, first, that there are very few mail coaches which would not bear a great increase of mail; and, secondly, that as respects those few, the chargeable letters form an inconsiderable part of the load.

These comparatively heavy mails are to be found only on a few of the great roads terminating in the metropolis, and even on these roads they are limited to the journey outwards. The

greater weight of the outward mail is not caused by an excess of letters, the number of which is much the same in either direction, but by a great excess of newspapers.

I have said, that as respects the few well-laden coaches the chargeable letters form an inconsiderable part of the mail ; but I believe few of my readers can be prepared for the fact, that if, setting aside franks and newspapers, a package were to be made of all the chargeable letters now divided among the four and twenty mail coaches which leave London every night, it might, without displacing a single passenger, and without exceeding or even equalling the present ordinary load in certain directions, be all forwarded by a single coach.

The *number* of newspapers dispatched from London by the outward mails is about half as large again as the *number* of chargeable letters ; but as one newspaper weighs on the average as much as six letters, it follows that the *weight* of newspapers is on the whole about nine times as great as the *weight* of chargeable letters. The franks, too, (including parliamentary papers,) dispatched by the same mails, weigh, at least, as much as the chargeable letters ; the weight of the chargeable letters alone is, therefore, only about the eleventh part of the whole outward mail. Consequently a five or six-fold increase of chargeable letters would augment the weight of the outward mail (which alone presents any difficulty) by about one half only, and making every allowance for the increased average weight of a single letter, which the proposed arrangements would probably produce, it is manifest that an additional mail coach in each of a few principal roads would amply suffice.

But as the coach increases its distance from London the weight of the mail gradually diminishes ; it would probably be sufficient, therefore, in order to obviate the present difficulty, for the auxiliary mail to proceed as far as the first large town ; as, for instance, the auxiliary Holyhead mail might stop at Birmingham. Indeed, all that would be required would be to contract with the proprietors of some of the night-coaches for the conveyance of a few sacks of newspapers. It is manifest, therefore, that the unavoidable additional expense would be comparatively trifling ; £10,000 a-year would, I am sure, ex-

ceed the real amount. But the necessity for even this addition is temporary ; for the few lines in which the mail is heavy are exactly those where railroads are in progress of construction, and it is obvious that, on a railroad, the addition of a few hundred weights to the mail is a matter of no moment. Instead, however, of a temporary addition of only £10,000 to the estimates, I have made a permanent one of more than £170,000, and yet have been censured, on the grounds stated above, for not adding enough.

A much greater addition to the mileage than £10,000 a-year is, however, required, though not for the reasons which have been urged. I have proposed that there should be two arrivals and two departures of the London mails per day, that is, an arrival and departure both morning and evening ; this would, of course, require that all the direct mails should be doubled ; and even then, it might be necessary to have auxiliary mails (or aid from stage-coaches) for a short distance from London on one or two of the principal roads, because the great dispatch of letters and newspapers will always be by the night mails. But to provide for the whole of this increase an addition to the present estimates of £75,000 (considerably more than the present cost of all the direct mails) would be ample ; making the whole allowance for the conveyance of mails about £210,000 instead of £310,000, as stated at page 24.

It would appear, then, that instead of estimating the mileage too low, I have estimated it too high by £100,000. It was my intention to make a liberal allowance here as in every other part of the estimates, but certainly not so greatly to exceed the correct amount ; this was undoubtedly an error, though an error on the safe side, and it is curious that the investigation which led to its discovery should have been made in consequence of my having been charged with erring in the opposite direction ; with being unreasonable in my claims instead of extravagant in my concessions. As I am reluctant to disturb the calculations, I have left the error uncorrected ; it must, therefore, be borne in mind, that I have an excess of £100,000 a-year in my estimates to cover errors of deficiency, should any, notwithstanding all my care to exclude *them*, be hereafter dis-

covered. That no material error of this kind exists, however, may fairly be inferred from the fact, that though the plan, with its estimates, has now been before the public for several months, and though both have been submitted not only to the general inquirer, but to the scrutinizing examination of those who have most opportunity for acquiring knowledge on the subject, no statement has appeared which invalidates any one of the calculations.

I may be allowed to add, that many individuals, and amongst them men as keen in the detection of error as unmerciful in its exposure, have assured me, that after taking up the pamphlet for the purpose of tracing out the fallacy on which, in their full belief, its suggestions were founded, after perusing and re-perusing, examining and comparing, after trying the chain as a whole and striking it link by link, they became convinced of its perfect soundness, and satisfied that the only error was in their own previous conceptions.

As my excuse for these statements, I must admit, that when I had completed my calculations, and even after I had examined them with the utmost anxiety to remove any error which they might contain, I could not avoid feeling some doubt as to the accuracy of the results, and some hesitation in submitting to the public a plan, which, if founded in error, would, from the extent of its innovations, subject me to much ridicule. The facts above stated, however, combined with the almost universal approval of the public prints, the support given in Parliament,* the London petition signed by so many men of high authority on commercial and fiscal subjects,† the auxiliary petitions from other towns, the resolutions of the Common Council of London and the Chambers of Commerce of Edinburgh and Dundee, the memorial of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,‡ and lastly the sanction, to a certain extent, of the Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry,§ have given me the confidence which I could not derive from my own unaided convictions.

* Mirror of Parliament, pp. 1419, 1628, 1630, 2008, 2201, &c.

† See Appendix, p. 96.

‡ See their Ninth Report.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

ERRORS AND FRAUDS ARISING OUT OF THE PRESENT MODE OF COLLECTING THE POSTAGE.

The following extracts are from the Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry.

“ It is also to be observed, that upon the taxation of letters in the evening there is no check, there being no examination similar to that which takes place in the morning in the Inland Office, and the duty of the tellers being confined to a computation of the general amount of the postage chargeable against each Deputy Post-master.*

* * * * *

“ The species of control which is exercised over the Deputy Post-masters is little more than nominal; and its defectiveness will be more fully seen hereafter from the necessary remarks upon the practice incidental to it in other offices. We, therefore, felt the more desirous to ascertain what degree of protection this portion of the revenue had derived from the practical conduct of the business relating to it in the Inland Department. An examination of the letter bill books, for this purpose, disclosed a series of inaccuracies, in the charges raised against the Deputy Post-masters in that department, far exceeding that frequency of minute error for which, considering the complicated nature of the duties, and the rapidity with which they are required to be executed, we were prepared to make allowance. In many instances, it appeared upon inspection that, for twenty-five successive days, the “Office Account,” as it is called, differed from the charges admitted by the Deputy Post-masters, and

* Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 66.

this with reference to towns affording the most considerable revenue, as Hull, Brighton, Exeter, Plymouth, Birmingham, Liverpool. Your Lordships may observe, on referring to the evidence of Mr. Johnson, who combines the duties of a President of the Inland Office with those of a senior clerk in the Letter Bill Office, and should, therefore, be peculiarly conversant with this branch of the business, that such a continued series of differences is not regarded as unusual in most of the large towns. His statement is corroborated by Mr. Brown, a clerk also in the Letter Bill Office, who says, that in the large towns there is scarcely a night that some variation does not occur.

“ We do not pretend to offer any accurate pecuniary estimate of the general result of the imperfect practice in raising these charges against the Deputy Post-masters; but we have grounds for stating, so far as our scrutiny has extended, that the ‘Office Accounts’ have most frequently fallen short of the true amounts of charge as corrected and admitted by the Deputy Post-masters. A comparative statement which we caused to be made from the Letter Bill Books of the accounts of 184 post towns, included in the first, second, and third divisions for the months of July and August last, showed that, in the former month, in 118 out of 158 cases, and, in the latter, in 113 out of 168 instances, an excess of charge was admitted by the Deputy Post-masters beyond the amounts of the respective office accounts for those periods. It is remarkable that, in some of those instances, as of Bath and Bristol, the daily differences consisted uniformly of short charges against the Deputy Post-masters throughout the period of two months, and the same was observable in the case of Plymouth for the month of August. The short charges against the two first-mentioned towns in this period amounted to £47 0s. 0½d. The total excess upon the whole of the divisional accounts alluded to (that is, the additional revenue brought to account by Deputy Post-masters beyond what they had been originally charged with in the Inland Office), amounted to £133 5s. 4½d.; the overcharges in the same period amounting to £16 10s. 7d. To what amount errors, either of taxation or telling, may have escaped correction it is not possible to ascertain; and we do not offer this statement as any criterion whereon to found any calculation of the extent of the differences that may have arisen upon the accounts at large. In one instance of recent occurrence which has fallen under our inspection, a short charge of £16 4s. against a Deputy Post-master, as admitted by himself, appeared within a period of twelve

days : in another, a sum of £7 4s. 7d. was added by a Deputy Postmaster to the charge of one day. It has, however, been stated to us that the duties here alluded to never were so accurately performed as of late.”*

It may be here remarked, that the Post Office authorities do not appear to have availed themselves of the means afforded by the wonderful powers of the machinery of the present day for facilitating and rendering more certain the different operations. The present varying rates of postage, no doubt, present a great difficulty ; still I do not hesitate to say, that it would be quite practicable to construct a stamp which, at one blow, should impress both the date and the required charge whatever that may be, and register mechanically both the number of letters stamped and the total amount of postage charged ; and that the use of such a stamp, so far from retarding the operations, would, in all probability, much accelerate them.

As regards the Cross Posts, such a machine would be invaluable. Its use would render loss to the revenue from fraud, or even error, next to impossible ; while, at present, however unsatisfactory the mode of accounting for the direct postage may be, that of accounting for the cross postage, which amounts to nearly £800,000 per annum, is even more so.

The following is part of the evidence of Mr. Robert Watts, an officer, whose duty consisted in superintending the assorting of letters at the Central Office.

“ Did you ever happen to detect the secreting of letters ? Not often ; I was once at an unpleasant concern of that kind : *unfortunately those cases have very often occurred*, but I cannot say that I individually detected any other person.

“ In those instances in which letters have been lost, letters carrying money for instance, has a detection taken place frequently in the office ?—*No, not often.*

“ How has the detection taken place ?—It used to do more when the paper circulation took place ; the notes used to be traced to the parties ; they used to be passed off in the neighbourhood of the letter-carrier ; they used to be traced by the solicitor ; *but, certainly, detection in the office is of rare occurrence.*”†

I am indebted to Mr. G. Napier, Advocate Depute, for the follow-

* Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 66.

† Page 499.

ing interesting account of the discovery and conviction of an offender in the Edinburgh Post Office, who had abstracted a bank note from a letter. The trial took place at Edinburgh, in March 1834.

In January 1834, Mr. Duncan, a merchant at Liverpool, put into the Post Office there a letter addressed to his mother, at Broughty Ferry, in Forfarshire, and containing a Bank of England note for £50 sterling. The letter, which had been expected on a particular day, not having reached the old lady, she immediately wrote to her son on the subject, and he again, being a mercantile man, and having kept a memorandum of the date and number of the note, immediately wrote to the Bank of England to stop payment of it. Inquiry was also immediately made at the different post offices of Liverpool, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Broughty Ferry, through all of which it should have passed in the proper course of transmission to the place of destination, but no trace of it could thus be got; no trace as to where it was lost, or even that it had ever been seen in the possession of the Post Office at all. All that could be learned was, that the letter containing the bank note had been put into the Liverpool Post Office, and had not reached its destination.

It happened, however, that one of the Tellers of the Commercial Bank of Edinburgh, being one night in the pit of the theatre, had his attention particularly attracted, by some accidental circumstance, to a person sitting immediately in front of him. The very next day a person, whom the Teller at once recognized to be the same individual, although completely altered in dress, being now muffled up in a cloak, and wearing green spectacles, and having a fur cap drawn much over his face, called at the Commercial Bank, and presented to the next Teller a £50 Bank of England note to be exchanged in Commercial Bank notes, who, according to custom, requested the person to write his name and address on the back. The person then wrote on the back of the note the words, "Jo. Wilford, College Post Office," and the money was paid him. When he had gone, the brother Teller, who had been in the theatre, asked, from mere curiosity, who that was, and was shown the signature upon the note. The note was then transmitted in the usual course to the Bank of England, and was there discovered to be the note stolen from Mr. Duncan's letter. It was then returned to the Commercial Bank for inquiry, and, from the accidental circumstance already mentioned, the Teller who had been in the theatre at once recollected the appearance of the person who had presented it. A clue being thus got, it was thought proper

first to ascertain whether that person could be found amongst the officers of the Post Office at Edinburgh. The Teller was, therefore, placed in a room into which every officer of the Post Office, as he arrives in the morning, comes to enter his name in a book, and, amongst them, the Teller there saw the person who had presented the stolen note. This person was James Wedderburn Nicol, who was, of course, apprehended; and in his lodgings, which were immediately searched, was found the fur cap, the spectacles, and a considerable portion of the Commercial Bank notes, or at least the same description of notes, for they could not be expressly identified. It was also ascertained that Nicol had borrowed the cloak in which he had appeared at the bank, and the whole had been so adroitly managed that, if the proof had not been particularly strong against him, he might have broken it down by proof of an *alibi*, as his absence at the Post Office had not been noticed, he having quietly slipped out at a favourable moment, run to his lodgings and disguised himself, got the note changed, thrown off his disguise, and returned to his place in the Post Office in an unaccountably short time.

It appeared that Nicol, who was well connected, and it is understood of previously good character, was tempted to abstract the letter, from having observed the presence and value of the note it contained, when, in the discharge of his duty, he held the letter up to a strong light for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was single or double. He pleaded guilty to the charge of theft, and was sentenced to transportation for life.

This story serves to illustrate the temptations to which those in the employment of the Post Office are exposed: it shows also that while the opportunities for the commission of fraud are frequent, the chance of detection is exceedingly remote. But for a curious combination of accidental circumstances it appears probable that this delinquent would have escaped. The narrative also leads to this reflection, that had either of two mistaken arrangements not existed, the offence would not, in all probability, have been committed. First, if postage were not so high, the note would probably have been cut into two parts and sent at different times. And secondly, if letters were charged by weight, instead of by the number of separate pieces of paper they contain, it would not be necessary for some one to hold up each before a light to examine its contents, and thereby be placed under strong temptation.

No. 2.

PREPARATORY ASSORTMENT OF LETTERS.

The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry* recommend a preparatory assortment of letters at the receiving-houses, similar to that here proposed. To this recommendation it has been objected by the Post-master General, that "the receivers are tradesmen, and any operation with the letters in an open shop, beyond the mere transfer from the receiving-box to the bag, must be highly objectionable, even if it tended to forward the business at the General Post Office; but any attempt at such assortment, with nearly 700 post towns classed in 24 divisions, would lead to extensive confusion, and would retard instead of expediting the delivery."† But the objection here stated does not appear applicable to the plan which I propose.

The present mode of procedure is, for the letters to be taken to the Central Office unassorted: at the Central Office they are first assorted into twenty-four divisions, each division corresponding to a line of road,—that is, all letters which go by the same mail-coach are put into a heap, and these heaps are then subdivided, so as to bring all letters for the same post-town together.

It appears, then, that a preparatory assortment of letters into twenty-four divisions is common to both the existing and the proposed arrangement. The preparatory alphabetic assortment, however, possesses two decided advantages over the other; first, it is made before the receiving-houses close; secondly, it is much more easily effected, and consequently much more rapidly and accurately done: for it requires no knowledge of the mechanism to be afterwards employed for the distribution of letters, but merely the power of deciding quickly whether a certain place is a post-town or not, a fact which the receiver may always ascertain by consulting an alphabetic list, and such a list is frequently consulted at present to ascertain the rate of postage; or, as the number of letters which present any difficulty must always be small, he may put them apart for assortment at the Central Office, by those who have more experience than himself; while the preparatory assortment now practised requires a knowledge not only as to whether certain

* Eighteenth Report, p. 64.

† Parliamentary Return, 1835, No. 512, p. 6.

places are post-towns or not, but as to the particular line of road to which every one of the 700 post-towns belongs. Frequent practice will certainly accomplish much ; but it may be doubted whether, amid such a multitude of facts, any amount of practice will afford that perfect familiarity which is essential to a high degree of accuracy and dispatch. If the alphabetic arrangement were adopted, it is probable that the first operation, after the letters arrived at the Central Office, would be, to bring all letters for the same post-town together ; they would then be put into the bags, and the bags assorted for the roads. Possibly experience may show that even more progress in the assortment might be made at the receiving-houses. Much would be accomplished by providing separate boxes for a few of the largest towns, as Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol. If this were done, a very considerable portion of the whole number of letters would be finally assorted ; for in these towns, and in London, nearly one-half of the Post Office revenue is collected.*

No. 3.

RECEIPTS FOR LETTERS.

There is an important improvement, the mention of which was reserved for the Appendix, because it is not essentially connected with those great changes which it has been the main object to recommend.

The evidence given before the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry shows the great desirability of some plan which would render it practicable and easy for the Post Office to give, when required, receipts for letters sent to the post.

In many instances such a plan would be the means of tracing lost letters : oftentimes it would protect the Post Office from needless applications and unfounded complaints ; and it would oppose an effectual bar to the fraudulent conduct of servants, who, under the present arrangements, are known, in many instances, to have destroyed letters, in order to pocket the postage.

I propose that every person desiring a receipt should, on taking the letter to the receiving-house, present a copy of the superscrip-

* Tables of Revenue, &c., 1834, p. 44.

tion, on which the Receiver should stamp a receipt, with the date, and his own address. Precisely such a stamp as is placed on the letter would suffice.

I propose that the charge for such receipt should be a halfpenny, and that, as a means of collecting the same, it should be required that the copy of the superscription should be made on a printed form, to be provided by the Post Office, and to be sold to the public at the rate of a halfpenny each, by the Receiver, either singly or in books, as might be required; a certain profit on their sale being allowed by the Post Office, as a remuneration to the Receiver.

These receipts would, I imagine, constitute good legal evidence of delivery; and as they might be made to form a cheap register of all letters dispatched by post, many persons would probably adopt the practice of taking them for that reason alone.

As a large number of persons would probably avail themselves of this arrangement, no small benefit might thus accrue to the revenue.

I am informed that precisely such receipts as are here described, except that a printed form is not employed, are given gratuitously in the Presidency of Madras.

A recent parliamentary return (1837—No. 497) of alleged losses in the Post Office for the eight years ending with 1836, as respects England and Wales, shows in a strong point of view the necessity for some such arrangement as the above. The return consists of 81 folio pages, closely printed in double columns, and contains upwards of 10,000 entries. The total amount of property is not stated in the return, but it has been estimated by Mr. Wallace at £618,951.* The variety of the claims is no less remarkable than their extent: one missing letter is said to contain a bill of exchange to the amount of £28,750†; while in another, the *enclosure* is, “Three dozen birds’ eyes.”‡

No. 4.

ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF CHARGEABLE LETTERS WHICH PASS THROUGH THE POST OFFICES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN A YEAR.

[The data on which this calculation is founded, are, 1st, The number of letters delivered in London and the suburbs, as far as the limits of the threepenny post; 2nd, The amount of postage collected within that district; and 3rd,

* Sun, Nov. 3, 1837.

† Page 60.

‡ Page 80.

The amount collected in the whole kingdom. As about one-fifth of the letters are post-paid, the amount of postage collected in the metropolitan district does not necessarily represent the total charges on the letters delivered in that district ; it may, however, be safely assumed that the postage paid in advance on the letters delivered, is balanced by the postage paid in advance on the letters collected in the district.]

The number of chargeable general post letters, brought into London by the mails in the course of a week, counting double and treble letters as one each, is at the present time (Nov. 1836) about	222,000
Of which the "forward letters," or those passing through London on their way to other post-towns, are about	36,000
Consequently the number of chargeable general post letters, delivered within the metropolitan district in a week, is about.	186,000
The number of letters delivered by the twopenny and threepenny post in a week is, at present, about.	270,000
Of which the general post letters included above are about	30,000
Consequently the number of twopenny and threepenny post letters delivered within the metropolitan district in a week, is about	240,000
And the whole number of chargeable metropolitan letters in a week is about	426,000
Or per annum about	22,152,000

The amount of postage collected in the metropolitan district, in the year 1835, after deducting for returned letters, overcharges, &c., was as follows :

* In the General Post department	£454,000
* In the Twopenny and Threepenny Post department	113,000
Total	£567,000

Being an average of about 6½d. per letter.

* Finance Accounts for 1835, p. 54.

* The amount of postage collected in the United Kingdom, in the year 1835, was £2,243,293, or about four times as much as that collected in the metropolitan district; consequently the whole number of chargeable letters which pass through the post offices of the United Kingdom in a year, may be assumed to be about $22,152,000 \times 4 = 88,608,000$.

Estimate of the Number of Franks passed through the Post Offices of the United Kingdom in a Year.

The number which arrive in London in the course of a week is, at the present time (Nov. 1836), about	53,500
The number dispatched from London in a week is about	41,200
	<hr/>
Total of franks passed through the London Office in one week	94,700
As one-half of these probably are Government franks, the greater part of which pass through the London Post Office, the number of franks carried by the cross-posts, even in the parliamentary vacation, will of course be considerably below the proportionate number of chargeable letters conveyed by the cross-posts; that number, as estimated by the amount of postage,† is about two-thirds of the number passed (inwards and outwards) through the London office. The number of cross-post franks, including those received and dispatched by the Dublin Post Office, will probably be about one-half of those passed through the London Office, say	47,300
	<hr/>
Making the whole number of franks per week	142,000
Or, per annum	7,384,000

* Finance Accounts for 1835, pp. 54 and 57.

† Ditto, p. 54.

Estimate of the Number of Newspapers passed through the Post Offices of the United Kingdom in a Year.

The number of newspapers dispatched by the London Post Office, per week, is, at the present time,* about 305,000

The number published in London, is probably about 500,000 per week ; consequently three in five are dispatched by the Post Office.

The number of provincial papers published is probably about 900,000 per week ; the proportion distributed through the provincial Post Offices, including those of Dublin and Edinburgh, is probably about three in ten ; the number will therefore be about . . . 270,000

Making the whole number of newspapers passed through all the Post Offices of the United Kingdom per week	575,000
Or, per annum	29,900,000
Say	30,000,000

No. 5.

ESTIMATE OF THE REVENUE WHICH WOULD BE DERIVED FROM THE POST OFFICE UNDER THE PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS, ASSUMING

1. The number of chargeable letters to remain as at present.
2. That it increase two-fold.
3. That it increase three-fold ; and so on to seven-fold.

In each case the number of franked letters and newspapers is supposed to remain as at present.

Though this calculation is necessarily founded to some extent on conjecture, it is confidently hoped that the caution used in making it has secured results not remote from truth.

It will be borne in mind, that the proposed arrangements provide for defraying the cost of distributing the franks and newspapers out of the postage received for letters ; also, that, as the cost of secondary distribution is to be met by a special charge exactly equal to such cost, both the cost and the receipts connected therewith may be altogether omitted in the calculation.

* Dec. 1836. This number is rapidly increasing.

From this calculation (see next page) it appears that, supposing the number of chargeable letters to increase six-fold, the benefit to the Exchequer would be practically the same as at present; and that, supposing it to increase seven-fold, that benefit would be augmented by about £280,000; while on the most unfavourable supposition, one indeed which can never be verified, viz. that the enormous reduction in postage should produce no increase whatever in the number of letters, the Exchequer would sustain scarcely any injury beyond the loss of its present revenue. In other words, while every individual in the country would receive his letters at an almost nominal expense, the whole management of the Post Office would bring upon the state a charge of only £24,000 per annum; and, as this would also cover the gratuitous distribution of franks and newspapers, it may fairly be considered as a mere deduction from the produce of the newspaper stamps.

Estimate of the Revenue which would be derived from the Post Office under the proposed arrangement.

		Estimated Cost of Primary Distribution, assuming the number of Newspapers and Franked Letters to remain under all circumstances as at present, but the number of Chargeable Letters,						
Hheads of Charge.—See page 10.	Present cost of primary distribution. (See page 10 column D.)	1st.	2nd.	3rd.	4th.	5th.	6th.	7th.
		To remain as at present, viz. 88,608,000 per ann.	To increase two-fold.	To increase three-fold.	To increase four-fold.	To increase five-fold.	To increase six-fold.	To increase seven-fold.
		Such increase would augment the whole number of packets to be distributed, whether Chargeable Letters, Franks, or Newspapers, in the ratio of						
		1-7 ^o to 1	2-7 ^o to 1	3-7 ^o to 1	4-7 ^o to 1	5-7 ^o to 1	6-7 ^o to 1	5-6 ^o to 1
Salaries and allowances	£ 222,510	£ 190,000	£ 209,000	£ 224,000	£ 230,000	£ 246,000	£ 255,000	£ 263,000
Allowances for special services and travelling charges.....	8,039	9,000	10,000	11,000	12,000	13,000	13,000	14,000
Conveyance of mails, &c.	135,919	179,000	223,000	267,000	310,000	354,000	354,000	398,000
Packet service, &c.	4,987	6,200	7,400	8,700	10,000	11,300	11,300	12,600
Tradesmen's bills, &c.....	9,974	12,000	13,000	14,000	15,000	16,000	16,000	17,000
Rents, tithes, and taxes	4,065	4,700	5,200	5,600	6,000	6,400	6,400	6,800
Law charges.....	5,913	6,000	7,000	8,000	9,000	10,000	10,000	11,000
Stationery, printing, & postage	3,539	4,200	4,800	5,400	6,000	6,600	6,600	7,200
Superannuation allowances, &c.	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248
Menai and Conway bridges, (tolls)	1,303	1,800	2,200	2,600	3,000	3,400	3,400	3,800
Total cost of primary dist.	426,517	393,094	462,148	526,848	582,548	647,248	705,948	763,648
Receipts		369,200	738,400	1,107,600	1,476,800	1,846,000	2,215,200	2,584,400
Net revenue or profit .....	.....	23,894	276,252	580,752	894,252	1,198,752	1,509,252	1,820,752
							Loss.	

No. 6.

PROBABLE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF LETTERS.

Which of the results exhibited in the preceding paper will be obtained by the measure contemplated, it is impossible to predict with certainty. Important material for conjecture, however, may be found in the following statement.

The sources of increase calculated upon are,

1. The virtual prevention of contraband conveyance.
2. An extension of the actual correspondence.

With respect to contraband conveyance, it is beyond all doubt that it is at present carried on to a very great extent. I have already stated (p. 25) that an extensive irregular distribution of letters is constantly proceeding in the manufacturing district around Birmingham; and it is well known that vast numbers are every day forwarded by carriers and coach proprietors. Not long ago there was seized in a carrier's warehouse one bag containing *eleven hundred letters*. Almost all parcels, especially such as are sent at stated times, (booksellers' parcels for instance,) contain letters; and not unfrequently large packets are sent by coach, consisting of letters alone.

Again, the vast extent to which the trade of the country has increased within the last 20 years, must have been attended by a proportionate increase in the amount of mercantile correspondence, while the great spread of education, and increase of population during the same period, must have greatly augmented the correspondence of all kinds.

Attention may again be called to the fact mentioned at page 4, that an increase of more than a half has actually taken place in the revenues of the French Post Office since 1821; and it may be remarked, that in the 20 years during which our own Revenue has been practically stationary, that derived from the Post Office of the United States has more than tripled.*

Now, as in regard to our own Post Office, the number of post letters during the last 20 years has not increased at all, it is manifest that the whole augmentation must have gone to swell the contraband conveyance. Nor is this surprising when we consider that the diminution in the price of almost all other articles has produced a virtual in-

* In each of the cases here cited, the revenue from our own Post Office inclusive, it is the *gross* revenue which is spoken of.

crease in the charge for postage; that the opportunities for such irregular conveyance have vastly multiplied; and that, in consequence of the increasing difficulty in enforcing any law which is not strongly backed by public opinion, the risk incurred in this illicit practice is greatly reduced.

It may be safely assumed that, practically speaking, all the letters at present conveyed in this irregular manner, will, by the proposed regulations, be brought to the Post Office.

Here also it may be remarked, that without interfering with the privilege of franking, the proposed reduction would tend greatly to relieve Members of Parliament and others from the importunity to which they are at present exposed, and thus convert no inconsiderable portion of the 24,000 daily franks into chargeable letters.

With respect to increase in the actual amount of correspondence, the proposed arrangement will bring two causes into operation, both very potent.

First.—Increased facility of communication.

Secondly.—Diminished expense.

On the potency of the former cause much light is thrown by the Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, as quoted at page 22, and I may here especially refer to the fact, that the consequence of Mr. Palmer's improvements, which merely tended to increase *facility*, was, in the course of twenty years, to triple the correspondence of the country.

But the second cause would probably tend to the increase of correspondence even more than the first.

That the lowering of duties most decidedly tends to increase consumption, is proved by the fact, that in scarcely any instance has the loss to the revenue been in the same proportion as the reduction. Several instances were cited in the first page of this little work showing that diminution in the rate of duty often occasions comparatively little decrease in its productiveness, while it is sometimes followed by an absolute increase.

It is manifest, however, that that which produces, the increase of consumption is a decrease not in duty, but in *price*. It is of no practical importance to the consumer how this price is made up, and it is only in its tendency to lower the price, or, what is the same thing, to improve the quality, or increase the facility of purchase, that the diminution in duty concerns him.

As in all taxed articles the price is made up of cost and duty, it is

manifest that the lowering of the duty cannot in the same ratio lower the price. Thus, on a reduction of one-half in the duty of coffee, the price fell by only one-fourth. In the change here contemplated, on the other hand, our dealings are at once with price. We do not propose to lower the duty on the transmission of letters in the hope of obtaining a reduction in postage, but at once to reduce postage itself. In considering the effects of this change, therefore, we have nothing directly to do with the diminution of duty, but only with a decrease in price. And this circumstance, fortunately, saves us much laborious investigation, as decrease in price is often the compound result of diminution in duty and increase in facility of production. Taking, therefore, one or two articles, of which, from whatever cause, the price has fallen, we will observe how far that reduction has resulted in increased consumption.

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; and perhaps it is not altogether beyond the bounds of possibility that a very long course of time should bring us to some such a result. Indeed, when we consider the immense increase which has taken place in travelling by water, wherever steam-boats have been brought into operation, and when we consider that the advantages which have led to this increase, viz., greater speed and certainty with reduced charges, are equally secured by the arrangements here proposed, this result is not quite so extravagant as might at first sight appear. Still, for many reasons, it would be quite erroneous to admit even the remote possibility of

such an enormous increase into any practical consideration of the subject; nor indeed is there any temptation to speculate on such distant chances. A reference to the table which precedes these observations will show, that an increase not more than a sixth part of that, the remote possibility of which has just been glanced at, would be sufficient to retain the revenue in its present state, while a yet smaller increase is all that has been counted upon as probable.

It is important to observe that that increase in the number of letters which would sustain the revenue in its present state, does not require any addition to the present actual expenditure in postage.* All that is necessary to secure the revenue from any diminution is, that the public should be willing to expend as much in postage as at present. Now it would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to point out any instance in which a reduction in the price of any particular article has not eventually, and even speedily, been followed by such an increase in demand, as has at least sustained the total expenditure in that article at its former amount. In every one of the instances given above, all of which are of articles of very general consumption, the total expenditure, so far from being diminished by the decrease in price, has considerably increased, and in some instances the increase is very great. Thus on coffee, the price of which, as stated above, has fallen one-fourth, the public now expends more than twice as much as it did before the reduction. And, making every allowance for the progress of population and wealth, this increase, when considered as not on the consumption but on the actual expenditure, must be pronounced a very striking fact. Nor is it to be explained by supposing that coffee has superseded other beverages, for, during the very same time, there has been a corresponding increase in the amount expended on tea, malt liquor, and spirits; an increase manifestly attributable to the same causes.

But the correctness of the principle, that a reduction of price leads to such an increase of demand as to sustain the total expenditure, has stood the test of experiment, on a small scale, in the Post Office itself.

When the limits of the twopenny-post and general metropolitan delivery were extended in 1831, the charges as respects a large

* To make this statement literally correct, a small allowance should be made to meet the expense of secondary distribution; and on the other hand, the present average postage should be given at $6\frac{1}{2}d.$ instead of $6d.$

portion of London, then first included within these limits, were of course reduced; the letters within this new district being charged twopence instead of threepence, and the twopenny rate on general post letters being abolished altogether. Now as this additional rate was received at the twopenny-post office, and as that office, notwithstanding its exclusive name, has the management of the threepenny letters, it is manifest, that while it entirely lost one branch of its revenue, it sustained a great reduction in its rates in another, so that nothing less than a very large increase in its number of letters could have saved its revenue from a most serious diminution; and that such a diminution was really anticipated will appear from the following report by the superintendent of the twopenny-post office.

“ A Return of the Gross Revenue of the Twopenny Post for the following Years : ”*

- 1830, £110,373. This was the year previous to the reduction of postage by extending the twopenny-post limits to a circle of three miles.
- 1831, £104,652. This year the reduction came into partial operation.
- 1832, £100,373. This year it was in full operation.
- 1833, £102,203.
- 1834, £109,148. This year the threepenny-post limits were extended to a circle of twelve miles.
- 1835, £112,924.
- 1836, £120,801.

It was calculated that the extension of the limits of the twopenny-post to a circle of three miles, which took place in 1831, would cause a reduction in the Revenue to the extent of upwards of £20,000 per annum.”

It appears, then, that instead of the calculated deficiency of £20,000, there is an increase of £10,000, making a difference of £30,000 between the result anticipated and that actually obtained. The amount is in a measure complicated by the extension of the threepenny-post limits in 1834, but the actual effect of this alteration is comparatively slight.

* Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, p. 22.

Considerable reductions have recently taken place in the postage of foreign letters. These reductions have been accompanied already by a great increase in the receipts for such letters.

I may add, that there is no instance within my knowledge in which reduction of postage has, after a while, been attended by loss to the revenue.

There is a fact supplied by the Post Office accounts which illustrates in a curious manner the truth of the principle that small demands will, from their superior number, produce as great an aggregate as large ones. Most of my readers are aware that the fine paid with a letter at the General Post Office after the appointed hour for receiving letters is sixpence, while the fine paid for a newspaper, under similar circumstances, is only a halfpenny. Now the Eighth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry shows the amount of these fines respectively for the year 1835 to be as follows :—

	£.
Sixpences for late letters	1,135
Halfpence for late newspapers	1,020

At that time the whole number of newspapers (early and late) dispatched by the evening mails is understood to have been rather less than the whole number of letters. The proportion probably differed but little from the sums stated above.

In pursuing this question it will be convenient to consider the bulk of the letters written as arranged in two classes, viz., letters on business, and letters between friends and relations.

With respect to the former class, in addition to an immense number of letters at present forwarded by contraband conveyance, there is the large class of invoices, now sent most frequently with the goods to which they relate, but which, as I am informed by mercantile men whom I have consulted, would, under the new regulations, be invariably sent by post, as letters of advice.

Again, there are the lists of prices current, which, especially in commodities liable to frequent fluctuations, it is of importance should be received at short intervals.

Speaking of prices current, Lord Lowther, in his very able Report on the Post Office, says,

“ It is, I think, plainly shown by the evidence taken, that great advantage would arise to trade from the transmission of prices cur-

rent at a small rate of postage. It is affirmed, by various witnesses, that throughout the country there is a continually increasing desire among persons in trade for such information of the state of the markets in London and elsewhere as prices current would afford. That the furnishing of this information is very much restricted by the high rate of postage, and that if it were more generally afforded, it is probable that much more business would be done. It is also stated, that the increase in the number transmitted at a low rate of postage would be such, that the Revenue required would be much greater than it now is under the high rate of postage,—one witness, Mr. Cook, estimating the increase, if allowed to be transmitted at a low rate of postage, at three millions of prices current annually.”*

Prospectuses too, such as are already issued to some extent by merchants, manufacturers, and shopkeepers, would become a very large class of post letters. For example. a manufacturer introducing some improved article, a shopkeeper receiving new patterns, or a bookseller issuing a new work, would gladly avail himself of any inexpensive means of immediate communication with every individual of the class from which he expected his customers.’

The following is a statement in corroboration of these views, with which I have been favoured by Mr. Charles Knight, the publisher.

“ Upon the point on which you desire my opinion, with reference to the productiveness of the Post Office Revenue under a greatly reduced scale of charges, I have no hesitation in believing that if the rate of postage throughout the country were reduced to a penny, many hundreds of thousands of prospectuses of new books, and of publishers’ catalogues, would be annually circulated. In my own case, I should feel that such a mode of circulation would be by far the cheapest and most efficient plan of advertising. To be able to address the information which a prospectus communicates, with absolute certainty, to the persons likely to be interested in its perusal, would be a most advantageous method of advancing the distribution of books, and would obviate a great part of the difficulty which exists in putting such information effectually before the inhabitants of rural districts especially. If 2000 such lists could be circulated monthly for about £8,—which they would be under your plan,—I should be too glad to spend £100 a year in placing these

* Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry.—The date of Lord Lowther’s Report is May 1835.

lists periodically in the hands of country booksellers, professional men, and literary societies;—and I have no doubt that every publisher in London would feel it his interest to adopt the principle. Advertisements in the newspapers, however efficient and indispensable for attracting public attention to new books, are random shots which may or may not reach the individuals and classes for whom they are meant.”

Auctioneers’ catalogues, announcements of sales, of changes of residence, of the opening of new establishments, of exhibitions, lectures, &c., and various other papers intended to attract the attention of distinct classes of the community, would, in numberless instances, be circulated by means of the post.

It is also important to observe, that it is very much the practice of tradesmen in managing their correspondence, to defer writing until they have such an accumulation of matter as will justify the expense of postage; nay, in many instances I have known persons deterred by this expense from communicating important information until the period of its utility was past. Under the new arrangement the practice would be to write as each occasion arose; and thus to distribute into several letters the matter now accumulated in one.

In most commercial establishments it is the rule not to receive an order, (unless post paid,) for less than a certain fixed amount; and in some, where the profits are low, this amount is placed as high as 5*l*. Here the direct influence of the high rates of postage in reducing the number of letters, and in restricting trade, is manifest.

For the following statement, with reference to this part of the subject, I am indebted to Mr. Dillon, of the house of Morrison and Co.

“I have no doubt but that a very decided reduction in the rate of postage would cause a very considerable increase in the number of trading and mercantile letters.

“We receive in the year many thousand letters; a large proportion of these are orders for goods, varying from some hundred pounds down to five pounds sterling; but if we execute an order lower than five pounds we *charge* the postage, so that practically five pounds becomes the minimum.

“At a rate of postage so low as one penny, a great number of explanatory letters on business, and letters on matters of detail, would be written. Occasions are of *constant* occurrence in which we do not write, and are not written to, because the matter, though important

enough to write upon, is *not* important enough to pay, or to cause others to pay, the postage. I refer here to questions as to the mode of conveyance of goods, as to the colour or pattern of articles ordered, or to an ambiguous or an illegible phrase in a letter received, and a thousand other matters. These cases all imply double postage—a letter and a reply.

“The sending *invoices* by post, (so that they should also serve as letters of advice,) instead of inclosing them in goods, would alone cause a great increase in the number of letters.

“In the higher class of mercantile transactions the increase of letters would perhaps be inconsiderable; but then the *actual* number of letters in such cases must necessarily be small. Wherever the *number* of letters is large, however important may be the transactions they refer to, I have no doubt but that economy is regarded, and that the number of letters is kept down by the *pressure* of a high tax. From the amount of the tax levied (which is notoriously large in comparison with the actual cost) economy in regard to postage has become a *habit* among mercantile men, and is made, so far as it goes, a point in mercantile education. The reducing the rate of postage so low as to make it an almost imperceptible item in relation to profits, would undoubtedly very materially increase the number of business letters.”

Another practice which obtains to some extent among tradesmen is this:—A shopkeeper in the country has occasion to transmit orders to two or more London tradesmen; these are frequently written on one large sheet, and addressed as a single letter to one party, who divides the sheet, and distributes the several parts. The whole number of such letters is perhaps not very large, but it may fairly be considered as the exponent of a multitude which are altogether suppressed by the restrictions which lead to such cumbrous artifices.

With respect to letters between friends, it may be first remarked, that the observation made above, with reference to the practice of waiting till there is such an accumulation of matter as will justify the expense of postage, applies with at least equal force here. There is oftentimes a desire to communicate at short intervals, as once or even twice per day, some single fact; as the state of a person suffering under severe illness: and it would excite much surprise in those whose station places them quite above such considerations, to learn how high in the scale of society economy in postage is found to operate as an obstacle.

Nothing is more common than for persons in comfortable circumstances to write letters simply because they have had the good fortune to obtain franks, or to find opportunities of sending by private hand ; and when it is considered that a person residing in a distant town, a gentleman upon a tour, or a commercial traveller on his journey, could, at the expense of 30s. per annum, send a daily bulletin of his health and progress, some faint idea may be formed of the extent to which this species of correspondence is likely to increase. And here may be noticed, as corroborating this probability, the very common practice of sending a newspaper with some short phrase, single word, or conventional mark, illicitly inscribed, or at least conveying information by the hand-writing of the address.

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, from a list previously agreed upon, with which the newspaper was franked. “ Sir Francis Burdett,” I recollect, denoted vigorous health.

In addition to the increased correspondence which, from the causes already stated, would arise amongst the present writers of letters, it must be carefully borne in mind that this species of communication would be made accessible to new classes, and those very numerous ones ; domestic servants, for instance, who constitute one of the most numerous classes of labourers, are, in general, so far removed from their friends, as to have little opportunity of personal communication. And when to this we add the separation occasioned by marriage, apprenticeship, the necessity of seeking employment, going to school &c., we shall probably come to the conclusion that there are very few families to be found throughout the country, and more especially in the manufacturing districts, without some member, or, at least, some near relative, being so circumstanced as to create a desire for communication by letter. When, again, we consider that, from many causes, as, for instance, increased and increasing facility of travelling, growing knowledge, and rising spirit of adventure, this locomotive disposition is rapidly advancing ; and, again, that the very facility of

communication here recommended would greatly stimulate its progress, it will be difficult to fix a limit to the amount of correspondence that may be looked for in this quarter. That the present very small amount of communication among the poorer classes is caused by their inability to meet the expense of postage, rather than by apathy or ignorance, will be abundantly shown by appealing to the experience of such Members of Parliament as hold any intercourse with the labouring classes.

I am indebted to Mr. Thornely, M. P. for Wolverhampton, for the following statement, which shows how oppressively the present rates of postage are felt by the poor.

“I was surprised to learn at the Wolverhampton Post Office how many letters are detained for poor people till they can raise the amount of postage. The letter-carriers offer them in the first instance, and then they remain in the Post Office, perhaps two or three weeks, till the postage can be raised.”

The following is an extract of a letter from Mr. Porter, of the Statistical department of the Board of Trade, which, while it tends to strengthen the probability of the above results, is valuable also for the view it takes of their moral importance.

“In the present, and still more, I trust, in the future condition of society in this country, post communication may be placed among the wants of the poor; but it is a want which now must for the most part be left ungratified. The opportunities which I have of procuring franks enable me to contribute towards keeping alive feelings of kindness and affection on the part of separated relatives which might otherwise become blunted or obliterated by disuse. May we not presume that many young persons of both sexes, who are continually drawn to this metropolis from distant parts of the kingdom, and are thenceforth cut off from communication with their early guardians, might, under different circumstances, be kept from entering upon vicious courses, to which the temptations are so great, and against which the restraints, in their case, are so few.”

The vast importance (financially speaking) of opening the Post Office to these numerous classes, will appear on comparing the amount of revenue derived from the duty on those articles of which they are the principal consumers, with that obtained from articles, the use of which is limited to the wealthy. Thus, for instance, the duties on malt and ardent spirits (which, beyond all doubt, are principally consumed by the poorer classes) yield a yearly revenue of about

thirteen millions, while the annual revenue obtained from wine (the beverage of the wealthy) is only seventeen hundred thousand pounds. The wish to correspond with their friends may not be so strong, or so general, as the desire for fermented liquors, but facts have come to my knowledge tending to show that but for the high rate of postage, many a letter would be written, and many a heart gladdened too, where the revenue and the feelings of friends now suffer alike. In one instance with which I became acquainted, a brother and sister, residing, the one at Reading, the other at Hampstead, had suspended intercourse for nearly thirty years; that they were deterred solely by considerations of expense is proved by the fact, that on franks being furnished by the kindness of a member of parliament, a frequent interchange of letters was the immediate consequence.

How many who can write are thus prevented from exercising the art, and how many who would write are thus deprived of a strong motive for acquiring it, time alone will show; but a glance at what is now doing in popular education will discover the strength of the desire, and the evil of the prohibition.

One source of increase, though not, perhaps, of great pecuniary importance, should be here glanced at; viz., the rapidly increasing desire for the collection of statistical and general scientific information. Thus, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, by means of an extensive correspondence, collected a mass of most valuable matter relative to benefit societies. This inquiry probably would not have been commenced, and certainly would not have been completed, had not the Society had the command of franks. And many other inquiries relating, for instance, to education, to the practice of medicine; to various departments of science, as astronomy, meteorology, and geology; as also to general statistics, are, beyond all doubt, suppressed at present by the cost of postage. It is needless to enlarge on the importance of such inquiries to commerce, science, and good government.

From what has been advanced above, I hope it will appear,—

1. That without any addition whatever to the present number of letters written, there would, under the new regulations, be a great increase in the number legally conveyed, arising in some measure from the partial voluntary disuse of the franking privilege, but chiefly from virtual prevention of contraband conveyance.

2. That the number of post letters thus greatly increased, would further be multiplied, without any addition to the number of letter-

writers, or even increase of letter-writing, by the breaking up of one long letter into several shorter ones.

3. That a large number of papers, (chiefly printed,) and now either not circulated at all, or distributed by hand, would be sent through the Post Office, as the most certain, most expeditious, and cheapest mode of conveyance. And

4. That in addition to all these important sources of increase, there would be an enormous enlargement in the class of letter writers.

But, in considering the subject of increase, it must be remembered, that however desirable, and however probable, a large increase may be, it is not counted upon as either certain or essential to the plan. The proposed regulations are not founded upon the presumption that, in their adoption, the revenue is secured from all risk of suffering. What I have endeavoured to show is,—

1. That it is very possible the revenue may not suffer at all; and
2. That it is highly probable it will not suffer much.

To secure the Post Office revenue from any further injury than the slight increase in the expense of Post Office management, it is only necessary that the public should expend as much in postage after the proposed change as at present. And to establish the high probability, and indeed almost absolute certainty of this sustained expenditure, I may again refer to the striking fact, that it is scarcely possible to find a single instance where a reduction in the price of any article, or convenience, has been followed by a reduction in the amount expended thereon; whilst in that which most nearly approaches the conveyance of letters; namely, the conveyance of persons and goods, the reverse is notoriously the case.

Supposing, however, that the Post Office revenue should suffer even a serious diminution, it can scarcely be doubted that the cheap transmission of letters and other papers, particularly commercial documents, would so powerfully stimulate the productive power of the country, and thereby so greatly increase the revenue in other departments, that the loss would be more than compensated.

In fine, while some risk is apparently justified by the present state of the general revenue, while the risk involved in the proposed alterations is comparatively small, while there is even no inconsiderable chance of an eventual gain to the Post Office revenue, and little less than a certainty of a beneficial effect on the revenue taken as a whole, there is one thing beyond all doubt, namely, that the

adoption of the plan will confer a most important, manifest, acceptable, and indisputable benefit on the country.

No. 7.

PAYMENT IN ADVANCE.

Fears have been expressed lest the proposed demand of payment in advance should be found objectionable to the public, and thereby prove restrictive of correspondence; and the late increase in the number of letters passing between this country and France is appealed to as confirmatory of these apprehensions.

But in respect to these letters, besides the option of not paying in advance being given, two unquestionably potent causes of increase have also been brought into operation; first, a reduction of postage, and secondly, increased facility of transmission. The existence of an option will undoubtedly have some influence upon the amount of correspondence; but the extent of influence will depend almost entirely upon the rate of postage. In the case of the French letters just named, where the lowest charge is thirteen pence, the effect is probably important; but the real question is, what would be the effect if the postage were one penny only? The pecuniary difficulty would unquestionably be slight, and the moral difficulty would be in a great measure removed by the knowledge that this demand was essential to the very low rate of postage; that the choice lies between the postage of a penny, payable in advance, and one perhaps of two-pence, payable upon the present plan.

Uniform payment of postage in advance, however, is not an untried experiment; it is the established plan in the presidencies of Bengal and Madras; and although the rate of postage is not low, being only one-third less than ours, the obligation to pay in advance is not complained of by the residents, nor thought materially restrictive of correspondence. This fact is so decisive, that further argument may appear needless, but the importance of the subject makes me desirous to leave nothing belonging to it unexamined; I must therefore ask further indulgence of my reader.

For the purpose of forming an estimate of the extent to which the required payment in advance would affect the number of letters written, let us analyse the correspondence of the country, thus,—

Letters may be primarily divided into letters which form part of a correspondence; and detached letters, *i. e.*, letters to which no answer is returned.

The letters which form part of a correspondence may be subdivided into—

1. Those of which each party to the correspondence pays for one; and,
 2. Those of which one party to the correspondence pays for both.
- The detached letters may be subdivided into—
3. Those paid for by the writer; and,
 4. Those paid for by the receiver.

The first class, or that containing letters of correspondence of which each pays for one, comprises probably five-sixths of the whole number of letters conveyed, and would be practically unaffected by the plan of invariable payment in advance; for it is obvious that so long as each party pays for one letter, it can be of no consequence whether he pays on the dispatch of his own, or on the receipt of his correspondent's.

As regards the second class, *viz.*, the letters to which answers are given, but of which one party to the correspondence pays for both, the party paying may be the correspondent who writes first, or he who writes last. If the correspondent who writes first is desirous of paying the postage of both letters, he might easily accomplish this, under the proposed arrangements, by inclosing in his letter a stamped cover, to free the answerer; or if the other correspondent wished to pay for both letters, he might enclose a stamped cover in his reply. If to save another so small a charge as a penny were considered a matter of propriety, the means here described would soon be established by custom; the stamped cover being enclosed and received without remark. It appears, then, that the second class of letters, as well as the first, would not be affected by the obligation to pay the postage in advance.

The third class, that containing the detached letters which are paid for by the writer, is obviously provided for by the proposed arrangement.

The fourth class, or that containing the detached letters which are now paid for by the receiver, is therefore the only class which presents any difficulty.

With reference to this class it may be remarked that it is exceedingly small, containing, probably, not so many as one letter out of

twenty; and even of this small number the probability is, that few would be affected by the regulation in question. The class consists chiefly of orders for goods, or instructions to tradesmen and others, which partake of the nature of orders. I can scarcely think that the necessity for paying the postage of one penny could interfere to prevent the sending of such letters to any appreciable extent; but should it ever so operate, the dealers, rather than have their business thus obstructed, would soon make it their practice to allow the postage of orders, &c., in deduction from the amounts of their bills.

The remainder of this class of letters consists, I believe entirely, either of such as ought not to be sent unpaid, as letters soliciting orders, subscriptions, &c.; or such as ought not to be sent at all, as those written by vindictive people for the purpose of putting the receivers to the expense of postage. If the postage were necessarily paid in advance, many of the first description of letters would be sent post-paid; the remainder, together with the whole of the second description of letters, would undoubtedly be suppressed: but this, so far from being an objection, is no inconsiderable recommendation to the proposed plan. It would deprive the thoughtless, the impertinent, and the malicious, of a means of annoying others, which is now but too often resorted to; and no one, I presume, would regret the small amount of revenue which would be sacrificed in obtaining so desirable a result.

It appears, then, that whenever an interchange of communication shall take place under the proposed arrangements, the expense of postage may be divided between the two parties or defrayed entirely by one or by the other, as may be mutually agreed upon, which is precisely the state of things at present; but that when the communication is one-sided, the obligation to pay the postage will lie with the writer instead of the receiver of the letter; and this, in my opinion, is a change very much wanted, as no one ought to have it in his power to compel another to incur an expense, however small. But this desirable restriction will, I contend, operate very rarely to prevent correspondence, and in no instance disadvantageously to society; for with every desire to examine the question fairly and candidly, I really am at loss to discover any case in which it is desirable for one person to write to another at the expense of the latter, and in which, under a rate of postage almost nominal, necessity, or good feeling, would not secure a reply.

But if, in some cases beyond my foresight, the principle of uniform payment in advance should prove restrictive of legitimate correspondence, a counterbalance will be found in the removal of those feelings of delicacy towards the purse of one's friend, on the one hand, and his feelings, on the other, which at present so often prevent the sending of a letter. The experience of every Member of Parliament will prove that numberless applications for franks are made on such grounds.

The result of a very careful examination of the subject is the conviction that the proposed payment in advance would probably not be restrictive of correspondence at all, and certainly not to any appreciable extent; unaccompanied by a reduction of postage, and an accelerated rate of delivery, it undoubtedly would meet with great opposition, but this is not the measure proposed.

Perhaps, indeed, without requiring payment in advance, the rates of postage might be reduced to twopence, but the delivery could not be rapid; and surely there can be no doubt whether the public would prefer a delay in payment entailing a slow delivery and a postage of twopence, or a payment in advance that would secure a rapid delivery at the postage of one penny. The wish of the public is only the aggregate of the wishes of individuals; and I cannot imagine that any man can desire to subject himself to a charge of twopence, instead of a penny, for the privilege of exercising the like extortion on others.

However, if, after all, it should be thought unwise at once to attempt the universal application of the principle of payment in advance, I would submit the following arrangement for consideration; stating at the same time, that I have great doubts of the policy of adopting it in preference to the other plan even as a temporary expedient.

Let the public exercise an option between using the stamped covers, as described at page 28, and sending the letter 'uncovered and *unpaid*. Under this arrangement the financial accounts would lie between the central office and the *distributors* of letters; as there could be no necessity for giving a further option of paying the postage in money on putting the letter into the office, there would be no such accounts between the central office and the *receivers* of letters. Still, as the distributors are much more numerous than the receivers of letters, accounts would be increased in number. Let the postage of such letters be something higher than the price of stamped covers,

say a penny more, that is, two pence for half an ounce. Let the unpaid letters be kept separate from the others throughout their progress, for the sake of convenience in making out the accounts. On the arrival of the bags at the place of destination, let the stamped letters be first assorted and dispatched for delivery; then let the unpaid letters be accounted for, assorted, and dispatched for delivery by another letter-carrier; or by the same on his return, after completing the first delivery. In country places, where the houses are scattered, and the letters few, one delivery might serve for all.

Under this arrangement, the rapid delivery, to obtain which I have proposed the payment in advance, would still be secured as regards the stamped letters; while the higher charge for the unpaid letters, and their late delivery, (the unavoidable, not factitious consequences of their being unpaid,) would, I think, in a short time, so greatly reduce their number, that the option might be withdrawn without difficulty. The expense to the Post Office resulting from this anomaly might be reduced, if necessary, by restricting the delivery of unpaid letters to once per day, in places enjoying a plurality of deliveries, selecting for this purpose the most convenient hour of the day. And for the sake of simplicity in the accounts, I would recommend that the option should be confined to letters not exceeding half an ounce in weight, so that the postage on each should be an invariable sum. No one could object to this restriction, as the conveyance of greater weights is for the most part a novelty.

It has been urged as an objection to the required payment in advance, that it would destroy the security for the delivery of letters which is now derived from the letter-carrier having to account for the receipt of postage—that an idle letter-carrier might destroy the letters to save himself the trouble of making his round. In reply to this objection I would remark, that the present security, such as it is, applies only to part of the correspondence, there is nothing to prevent the destruction of franked or paid letters. But it is said that a letter-carrier is now obliged to make his round for the delivery of the unpaid letters, and, therefore, that as it would save but little trouble, there is slight temptation to destroy the others. As regards an important part of the correspondence, it appears, then, that under the present arrangements, the only security afforded for the delivery of the letters is that the letter-carrier is obliged to make his round. Now let us examine the security afforded by the proposed arrangements. At page 61 a plan is suggested which will enable any one, for a small fee,

to obtain a receipt for any letter put into the Post Office. The fee is so trifling, (only a halfpenny,) and the trouble would be so little, that there can be no doubt the plan would come into extensive operation. Every letter-carrier would therefore know that, as regards many of his letters, receipts had been taken, and that if any of these letters were destroyed, inquiry and detection would certainly follow; he would therefore, as at present, be obliged to make his round. But he would have no means of distinguishing the receipted from the unreceipted letters, (there is no difficulty in distinguishing the paid from the unpaid letters,) therefore he would be careful to deliver all.

It follows, then, that the proposed arrangements are superior to the present as a security against idleness on the part of the letter-carrier. It is needless to point out their superiority against his dishonesty; the collection of the postage is no security against the abstraction of a money letter if the contents exceed the postage.

In conclusion, I may observe, that the proposed payment in advance would effect a material reduction in the number of returned letters, and save the public the expenses attendant upon them. The returned, refused, mis-sent, and re-directed letters, and overcharges for the year 1835, cause a reduction on the gross revenue amounting to no less than £110,000.

Coleridge tells a story which shows how much the Post Office is open to fraud, in consequence of the option which now exists. The story is as follows.

“One day, when I had not a shilling which I could spare, I was passing by a cottage not far from Keswick, where a letter-carrier was demanding a shilling for a letter, which the woman of the house appeared unwilling to pay, and at last declined to take. I paid the postage; and when the man was out of sight, she told me that the letter was from her son, who took that means of letting her know that he was well: the letter was *not to be paid for*. It was then opened, and found to be blank!”*

This trick is so obvious a one that in all probability it is extensively practised.

* Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge, vol. ii. p. 114.

No. 8.

INTRODUCTION OF THE PLAN.

With the view of combining, as far as possible, the advantages of the tentative method with those attendant on the immediate and entire development of the plan, the following mode of bringing it into operation is submitted.

That the whole plan be made the subject of one enactment, Commissioners being appointed with the requisite powers for carrying it into effect; and being authorized to introduce the changes in such manner as may appear to them expedient, agreeably to the arrangement adopted in the case of the Poor Law Commission.

Considerable time would manifestly be required before the plan could be brought into general operation. Meanwhile, and, indeed, this should be the first step taken, the measure could be applied to some particular distribution. It is recommended that this should be the local distribution of the metropolitan district, or that which is now conducted in the twopenny post department, which includes the threepenny post delivery.

There are many reasons why this district should have the preference. To its extent and importance are added the advantages of a Post Office Establishment distinct in almost all its parts from the General Post, with distinct receiving-houses, (except in the suburbs,) and distinct accounts; while, in common with other such districts, it is relieved from the variableness of charge depending on the number of enclosures.

The priority assigned to London, too, could excite no jealousy, as the alteration would merely place the metropolis on a level with many other districts. It is, perhaps, needless to remark, that it is no part of the plan, in this stage of its operation, to alter the rate of general postage.

Again, by selecting this district, the experiment would be brought under the immediate observation of Government. Little more change would be required than to reduce the postage, whether of twopence or threepence, say to a penny per two ounces; to admit packages not exceeding one pound in weight; to require payment in advance, by either of the modes pointed out at page 28; to employ the short stages for the conveyance of the mails, their complete fitness for which has been demonstrated by the successful arrange-

ments of the West India Dock Company ; (as already stated ;) and by these and other means, which may readily be devised, to secure more frequent, rapid, and economical distribution.

As some parts of the district within the range of the threepenny post ought, from the thinness of their population, to be placed under the arrangements for secondary distribution, (described at page 40,) this first application of the plan would try its working in all the important parts.

Finally, if this first step should show the necessity of any modification of the plan previous to its being brought into general operation ; and if such modification should not have been provided for by the powers conferred on the Commissioners, the necessity for an amendment of the Act would have been made so manifest that I conceive there would be no difficulty in effecting the required change. There would be nothing to undo, except to amend an Act which had not been carried into effect, as the practicability of the proposed reduction of postage in the metropolitan district is undoubted, the whole cost of management, even under the present expensive arrangements and restricted correspondence, being only two-thirds of a penny per letter. To effect such a relief from taxation, and to render the facilities of communication adequate to the wants of the people in a district containing about one-twelfth of the population of the United Kingdom, would of itself be an immense improvement.

No. 9.

PROGRESS OF POST OFFICE REFORM.

As the posture of affairs with reference to the Post Office has undergone some changes since the first appearance of the preceding pamphlet, it will be useful here to take a brief review of the occurrences connected therewith.

And, first, as to the improvements actually carried into effect. The most important of these is the partial adoption of a recommendation of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry,* by the establishment of day mails on one or two of the principal roads. Letters may now be sent by a morning post to Ireland, and to Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester ; and though these ad-

* See their Seventh Report.

ditional opportunities are saddled with some troublesome restrictions, such, for instance, as the one against sending the morning papers, they are justly welcomed as valuable in themselves, especially in the case of letters passing through London; and yet more as the forerunners of future improvement. On one important line, too, the rate of conveyance has been greatly accelerated by advantage being taken of the Grand Junction Railway, and much credit is due to the Post Office for the promptitude with which this new opportunity was seized. Some inconvenience, indeed, has arisen in the late delivery of the letters thus conveyed, but this will probably be of short duration.

Reference has already been made to a reduction in foreign postage—a portion of which has been effected during the present year; the increase in the revenue consequent on this improvement may reasonably be expected to stimulate the Post Office to further reductions. It must be admitted that the change has been made with due caution. To convey letters to the Mediterranean at the rate of “only 10s. per oz.,”* will not be censured as a Quixotic undertaking by those who happen to know that wool is brought from the antipodes at the rate of 1½*d.* per lb.

An important legislative improvement has taken place by the consolidation of all the Acts (141 in number) relative to the Post Office. The law, as it stands at present, has the triple advantage of compactness, brevity, and perfect intelligibility; the phraseology of the new Acts being free from that affectation and verbosity which render so many of our laws obscure. For this important measure the public is indebted to the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry.†

Another enactment, which may be of considerable use, authorizes the Post-master General, with the consent of the Lords of the Treasury, to make unlimited reductions in postage, both partially and generally; and I believe it is in contemplation, under this authority, to reduce the postage of letters between post-towns not more than seven miles apart to twopence.

The Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry have continued their important labours; and the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Reports, which they have published during the year, contain much valuable matter, in addition to that already referred to. The Ninth Report, the last of the series, is on the subject of the Twopenny Post Office.

* See Post Office Advertisement.—“Morning Chronicle,” Aug. 22, 1837.

† See their Seventh Report.

This Report contains the evidence which I had the honour to give on this branch of the subject ; in which I endeavoured to point out the principal defects in the present arrangements, and to suggest the remedies. My principal recommendations were, that postage should be reduced to one penny, and collected in advance, by stamped covers or otherwise ; that the daily number of deliveries should be immediately doubled ; and that, by the employment of district post-offices and other specific means, the time occupied in distribution should be reduced one-half.

After carefully and patiently examining these suggestions, and after hearing the opinions of the Superintendent of the Twopenny Post Office and the Secretary to the Stamp Office, the Commissioners recommended the immediate adoption of the plan in part ; viz. so far as to give the public the option of using the stamped penny covers, (the charge for letters not so covered remaining as at present,) to increase the weight allowed in a single packet, and to extend the number of daily deliveries by one ; (leaving the further adoption of the plan to depend, in some measure, on the results of the proposed experiment ;) and, on the presentation of the London petition, of which I shall speak hereafter, Lord Duncannon announced that it was the intention of Government to carry so much of the plan into effect.

This could not be done immediately, however, as a new Act appears to be necessary for authorizing the issue of the stamped covers. But I should hope that the public may soon see the plan in operation.

In justice to myself, however, I must here observe, that this experiment affords no sufficient test of the practicability and advantage of my plan. Its success can only prove that so much of the plan is good, and its failure can only show that so much of the plan, when taken alone, is defective. On this subject I shall give here a letter which I addressed to the Secretary of the Commissioners, and which appears in the Appendix to the Ninth Report ; and I shall add an extract from the report itself, showing that the Commissioners do me the honour to concur in this opinion.

“ DEAR SIR, 2, *Burton Crescent*, 8th June 1837.

“ I trust the Commissioners of Post-Office Inquiry will excuse my requesting their attention to the probable results of the experiment about to be made in the Twopenny Post-Office.

“ Lord Duncannon is understood by the public to have stated, that envelopes will be sold at one penny each, which will frank letters

within the limits of the twopenny and threepenny delivery; in addition to which, his Lordship did me the honour to acquaint me that it was intended to limit the weight of such letters to one ounce, to allow weights from one to six ounces to be conveyed under twopenny covers, and to add one to the number of daily deliveries, but at present to make no other change. These are undoubtedly very important improvements, but, I submit, they do not amount to a fair test of my plan.

“ In ‘ Post-Office Reform,’ and in the evidence I had the honour of giving before the Commissioners, I have endeavoured to show the importance and practicability of much more frequent and rapid deliveries than are now made; and I am not aware of any valid objections to those views.

“ The increased facilities thus proposed to be afforded form a most important feature of my plan. As regards the twopenny post, they would, in my opinion, conduce more to increased correspondence than even the reduction of charge. In the experiment which it is intended to try, little will be done to improve the facilities for correspondence, and therefore an important cause of increase in the number of letters will be scarcely brought at all into operation.

“ Again, I have pointed out means by which the cost of management may be reduced by the adoption of more simple and economical arrangements; as an instance, I would mention the employment of the short stage coaches. But it does not appear that there is any intention of adopting many of these improvements.

“ The experiment, if tried thus partially, will, I fear, produce the following unfavourable results:—

“ 1. Injury to the revenue; arising partly from a want of economical management, but chiefly from an insufficient increase in the number of letters to compensate for the reduced postage.

“ 2. Injury to the plan which I have proposed, in consequence of the experiment being erroneously considered by many as a test.

“ 3. Dissatisfaction on the part of others, who will consider the plan as unfairly treated, and the question as to its practicability still undecided.

“ Entertaining these views, I should think it a neglect of duty if I did not submit them respectfully to the consideration of the Commissioners.

“ The experiment which I have proposed would (allowing for the difference in the extent of reduction of postage) be a fair test of the general plan. If the experiment succeeded, the Commissioners would, I trust, be encouraged to proceed; if it fail, the whole question

would be set at rest. The experiment cannot possibly involve the loss of much revenue: it is a complete and definite step, and will, if successful, be of itself a great good, and it does not necessarily lead to any further change.

“ In conclusion, I beg most respectfully to thank the Commissioners and yourself for the attention paid to my suggestions, and for the courtesy which I have invariably received. I trust I shall not be thought unreasonable on the present occasions. My objections to the arrangement contemplated by the Commissioners apply simply to its being considered a test of my plan. Looking at it as a means of reducing taxation, the measure, as far as it goes, is in my opinion, an excellent one.

“ I remain, my dear sir, yours very truly,

“ *To J. R. Gardiner, Esq.*

“ *ROWLAND HILL.**”

&c. &c. &c.

The Commissioners say, “ In proposing that letters shall be conveyed by means of stamped covers, and for a charge of not more than half the present rates, we do not anticipate that the increase of correspondence will be so great as to compensate for the reduction of postage.

“ We are of opinion that any very large increase in the number of letters could only arise from combining with the introduction of stamped covers an additional number of deliveries, and establishing district offices, by means of which an interchange might be effected in a very short space of time, which cannot be done whilst the whole correspondence is collected simultaneously and conveyed to the chief office to be sorted and dispatched from thence.”†

* * * * *

“ The experiments we have proposed will enable your Lordships to ascertain to what extent the public are disposed to adopt stamped covers for the conveyance of letters in and around London, and whether any inconvenience or dissatisfaction would arise if the whole of the revenue of the ‘ London District Post’ was collected in this manner. If it is found practicable to bring the stamped covers into general use, the accounts and charges will be got rid of, and the arrangements of the department so much simplified that there will be no longer any difficulty in increasing the number of deliveries and establishing sorting-offices in different parts of the metropolis.

“ In that case we have little doubt that the number of letters would be multiplied to such an extent as would in a short time compensate

* Ninth Report of Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, p. 87.

† Page 8.

for the reduction in postage which we have recommended, and render the 'London District Post' not only the cheapest, but the safest and most expeditious means of communicating with and effecting an interchange of letters and packets between different parts of the metropolis and the suburbs."*

The covers are manufactured upon a highly ingenious plan of Mr. Dickinson's, the blue lines, which are in fact formed by silken threads enwoven in the texture of the paper, being intended as a security against forgery, and should it appear that there is need of such precaution, there can be no doubt that this plan will be found efficacious. Twopenny covers are also to be supplied, which will frank any packet not heavier than six ounces.

The general plan, which is sketched in these pages, has been repeatedly brought before Parliament; in the first instance by Mr. Hume, and afterwards by Mr. Wallace, who moved for a Committee to examine into its merits; the question, however, was not pushed to a division, as it was stated on the part of government that the plan was under consideration. The subject was again introduced on the presentation of petitions by Mr. Grote, Mr. Hutt, and Mr. Villiers.

In the House of Lords the question was discussed on the presentation by Lord Ashburton of the London petition referred to at p. 54. On this occasion his lordship gave an able abstract of the plan, to nearly all the leading features of which he added the sanction of his high authority.

As this petition is, from the signatures which it bears, a document of great importance, it is here given *in extenso*.

"The humble Petition of the undersigned Merchants, Bankers, and other Inhabitants of London,

" SHEWETH,

" That it is of high importance to the success of the Commerce, Manufactures, and Agriculture of this country, and to the promotion of civilization in every form, that communication by post should be swift, certain, and cheap.

" That, although such communication is now generally certain, yet, owing to the infrequency of transmission, and to the slowness of delivery, it is not so swift as it readily might be, and it is not cheap.

" That these great evils of slowness and dearness are not productive of any advantage to the Revenue sufficient to counterbalance their injurious effects.

" That, as regards the latter evil in particular, your Petitioners are

* Ninth Report of Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, p. 9.

decidedly of opinion that the dearness of postage, instead of being beneficial to the Revenue, is positively injurious to it, owing to the great amount of illicit carriage of letters under the present system, and to the great extent to which communication is altogether prevented.

“ That so powerful have been the causes acting against the Post Office Revenue—the chief of which, in the opinion of your Petitioners, is the high rate of postage—that during the last twenty years, while the population of the country has increased nearly one-third, and education and commerce have extended in even a greater ratio, the receipts from the Post Office have not increased at all.

“ That, owing to the present ease of conveyance between all the post-towns in the country, and to the great number of letters generally carried together, the cost of transmission, when divided among the separate letters, is almost imperceptible, and may be left out of consideration in determining the rate of postage.

“ That the cost of the general management of the Post Office would be greatly reduced by the establishment of a uniform rate of postage, and the facility of delivery greatly increased by requiring that such postage should be paid in advance.

“ Your Petitioners, therefore, pray your Honourable House that a uniform and low rate of postage may be established, instead of the present varying and high rate.

“ That such rate be henceforth one penny (paid in advance) for every letter or packet of letters under half an ounce in weight, with an additional penny for each additional half ounce, to any convenient amount.

“ That advantage may be taken of the facilities which exist (particularly as respects large towns) for the more frequent transmission of the mails than once in twenty-four hours.

“ And your Petitioners will ever pray.”

The following signatures are attached to the petition :—

“ The Right Hon. the Lord Mayor.

Merchants.

George Barnes, Esq.

Messrs. John Chapman and Co.

James Colvin, Esq.

Messrs. Copeland and Garrett.

Sir Charles Cockerell, Bart. and Co.

Messrs. Davidsons, Barkly, and Co.

Messrs. James Dunlop and Co.

Messrs. Fletcher, Alexander, and Co.

Messrs. Gledstones and Co.

Messrs. Gregson, Melville, and Co.

Messrs. G. W. S. Hibbert and Co.

Messrs. Hunter, Gouger, and Co.

Messrs. M^cCalmont, Brothers, & Co.

Messrs. Moffatt and Co.

Messrs. Montefiore, Brothers.

Messrs. James Morrison and Co.

Messrs. Morris, Prevost, and Co.

Messrs Palmers, Mackillop, Dent,
and Co.
James Pattison, Esq., M. P.
Messrs. John Pirie and Co.
Messrs. Small, Colquhoun, and Co.
Messrs. George Wildes and Co.

Bankers.

Messrs. Curries and Co.
Messrs. Hanburys, Taylor, and Lloyd.
Messrs. Hankey and Co.
Messrs. Jones, Lloyd, and Co.
Sir J. A. Lubbock, Bart., Forster,
and Co.
National Bank of Ireland.
Messrs. Overend, Gurney, and Co.
Messrs. Prescott, Grote, and Co.
Messrs. Rogers, Olding, and Co.
Messrs. Spooner, Attwoods, and Co.
Messrs. Twining.
Messrs. Wright and Co.

Assurance Companies.

Atlas.
Hand in Hand.
Licensed Victuallers.
Sun.
Westminster.

Men of Science.

Dr. Arnott.
William Allen, Esq. (the petition to
the Commons only).
Charles Babbage, Esq.
Dr. Birkbeck.
J. R. McCulloch, Esq.
N. W. Senior, Esq.
Colonel Torrens.

Solicitors.

Messrs. Adlington and Co.
Messrs. Amory and Coles.

Messrs. Austen and Hobson.
Messrs. Ashurst and Gainsford.
Messrs. Clarke, Fynmore, and Flad-
gate.
Messrs. Desborough and Young.
Messrs. Dyneley, Coverdale, and Lee.
Messrs. Freshfield and Sons.
Messrs. E. and J. Lawford.
Messrs. J. and S. Pearce, Phillips,
and Bolger.
Messrs. William Tooke and Son.
Messrs. Taylor and Field.
E. A. Wilde, Esq.

Publishers.

Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock.
Messrs. Charles Knight and Co.
Messrs. Longman, Rees, Orme,
and Co.
John Murray, Esq.
Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.

Printers.

Messrs. Clowes and Sons.
Andrew Spottiswoode, Esq.

Miscellaneous.

Messrs. Allen, Hanburys, and Barry,
Chemists.
Messrs. B. and M. Boyd, Stock-
brokers.
Messrs. R. W. and G. Crawshay and
Co., Iron-masters.
Messrs. William M. and John Christie
and Co., Hatters.
Messrs. B. T. and W. Hawes, Soap-
• boilers.
Sir Henry Meux, Bart.
Messrs. Trueman and Cook, Brokers.
Messrs. Travers and Sons, Grocers.
Messrs. Warner and Sons, Grocers."

A petition from Wolverhampton also was presented to the House of Lords by the Earl of Clarendon.

The following memorial was likewise addressed to the Treasury by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

“ TO THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF HIS MAJESTY’S
TREASURY.

“ *The humble Memorial of the Society for the Diffusion of
Useful Knowledge,*

“ SHEWETH,

“ That cheap communication by post would afford highly important facilities to the collection and diffusion of information, and thus greatly accelerate the education of the people.

“ That the present rates of postage, so far from affording these facilities, constitute a most serious tax on literature, creating obstacles, or involving expenses, in almost every stage of the progress of a literary work. In preparing the MS., the charges for postage impede, and in many cases prevent, the collection of the requisite data. In printing, the postage of proofs and revises frequently adds as much as 20 per cent. to the cost of composition. In publication, the distribution of prospectuses through the post, which, with moderate charges, would undoubtedly be resorted to as the most effectual mode of attracting attention, is almost altogether prevented; and, however small the work itself may be, the post is never employed in its distribution.

“ That your Memorialists are decidedly of opinion, that the difficulties thus opposed to general diffusion of knowledge are not compensated by any advantage to the revenue; on the contrary, they are convinced that the present high rates of postage are positively injurious to the revenue itself: in proof of which, they have only to appeal to the extraordinary fact, that during the last twenty years, with a population rapidly improving in numbers, wealth, and education, the revenue from the Post Office has not improved at all. Still your Memorialists are unwilling to rest a question, affecting in so high a degree the education of the people, on any purely financial consideration; and they feel assured, that an enlightened government will not consider it sound policy, for the sake of avoiding the risk of some injury to a comparatively unimportant branch of the revenue, to continue a system so prejudicial to the best interests of society.

“ That your Memorialists have carefully examined the pamphlet on Post Office Reform, published by Mr. Rowland Hill, and are of

opinion that the arguments and facts contained therein, relative to the great advantages to be derived from a reduction in the charge of postage, are highly worthy of the consideration of your Lordships."

The Chamber of Commerce of Edinburgh, after having appointed a Committee to consider the subject, on receiving the report, unanimously adopted resolutions in support of the plan, agreeing, at the same time, on petitions to Parliament, and a memorial to the Treasury. The Chamber likewise directed that copies of its resolutions should be forwarded to the Chambers of Commerce in Glasgow, Greenock, Port-Glasgow, Leith, Dundee, Montrose, and Aberdeen.

On the 19th of October, the question was discussed at considerable length in the Common Council of the City of London, being introduced in an able speech by Mr. Pritchard. The discussion terminated in the adoption of resolutions approving of the plan, and seconding the recommendation of the Commissioners with reference to the twopenny-post, and of petitions to Parliament founded on the same.

Many other petitions are ready for presentation : among them, one from the members of the Stock Exchange. At Aberdeen and Elgin, Town's Meetings, convened expressly for the purpose, have been held, and petitions unanimously adopted. Many other towns, both in England and Scotland, have resolved on petitions, through their respective Town Councils.

THE END.

