

SOUTHERN CITIZEN.

WHAT DO WE LIVE FOR, BUT TO IMPROVE OURSELVES AND BE USEFUL TO ONE ANOTHER?

VOLUME III.

ASHEBORO', (N. C.) FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1839.

NUMBER 33.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY:

BY

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TERMS

Two Dollars per annum, in advance, or Three Dollars, if not paid within three months from the date of the first number received.

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From Brother Jonathan.

POST-OFFICE REFORM.

We have always been of opinion that the present rates of postage were established upon a wrong basis as well as extravagantly high, and that some grand plan could be devised, by which the expense upon papers and letters could be reduced, to the immense benefit of the intellectual and business community.—It has been officially stated, we believe, that an agent had been sent to England by the President to examine into Mr. Rowland Hill's celebrated plan, for the purpose of introducing the same into the Post Office Department in the United States. People have comprehended the general idea of Mr. Hill's scheme, so that it proposed to charge a penny on each letter to all parts of the country, but they are not acquainted with the reasonings and facts upon which he based his theory, or with the good practical results which must follow its adoption. This information is fully and satisfactorily given in the leading paper of the August No. of the Democratic Review, and we propose at this time to give the substance of that article, that our readers may form their own judgments of the feasibility of a scheme of reducing postage to Mr. Rowland Hill's plan in this country.

The writer in the Democratic Review commences by expressing his surprise, that, while the newspapers of the United States have kept so accurately informed of the state of stock operations in London and other financial matters, little or no general interest here, no investigations should have been made into the important developments of the Post Office Reform, which have extensively agitated the British public for the last two years.

"In the whole range of human improvement and progress, there is no more to be found a more brilliant triumph of genius, than is presented by the present state of this great question of Post Office Reform in England. A few simple principles of arithmetic, proved by demonstrations by calculations impossible to be shaken, called universal attention to a proposal that at the first blush might have been ridiculed as the mere fancy of a visionary; and soon, as a natural consequence, created such confidence in its details, as to make it revolutionize the whole of the existing system of government postage, and to sweep away and utterly abolish not merely the pre-existing machinery of post office management and revenue, but all the pre-existing ideas, and the immemorial practice on the subject."

"The British system of postage seems to have been established and carried on very much like our own, that is with a Postmaster General, and the requisite number of subordinates, appointed in the various towns throughout the kingdom. The Post Office Department was regarded as just as indispensable to the nation as the Army, or the Navy or the

Church; and the people, though oppressed by it, never thought to disturb it, till this simple yet magnificent scheme of Mr. Rowland Hill was submitted to their consideration. This Mr. Rowland Hill, is, it seems, a private gentleman of London, who, having devoted his attention to the subject, published a pamphlet, in which he proposed to remodel the whole Post Office System by abolishing altogether the existing rates of postage, and with them the practice of charging double and treble postage, &c., according to the number of enclosures, together with all the complex arrangements for keeping the postmasters' accounts at the Department, and for the primary distribution of letters—and to substitute in their stead a uniform rate of postage, without regard to distance, of one penny for each half-ounce, collected in advance."

Startling as the proposed change appeared, yet such was the interest felt by the people in the reasoning and facts, which led Mr. Hill to his extraordinary conclusions, that the result ere long was a complete conviction of their accuracy in all essential particulars, and the entire practicability, as a consequence of accomplishing for the country the unexampled amount of good which the adoption of the proposed changes could not fail to produce.

The first statement of Mr. Hill, which riveted attention, was, that notwithstanding the immense increase of population, commerce, wealth, and education in Great Britain, and of all other sources of revenue, the Post Office had not increased. Indeed he shows from convincing figures, that the revenue had decreased within the last twenty years. He also shows, that, while the Stage Coach Duties, for conveyance of persons and parcels had increased, the receipts for carrying letters had diminished. His conclusion, of course, was, as ours must be, that the rates of postage were altogether too high; and that the revenue would really have been greater in the same period of time, had the rates been much less. This is not a deduction but a fact; for in France where the postage is less onerous than in England, the receipts have increased from twenty-four to thirty-seven million of francs.

Mr. Hill states that the net revenue derived from the English Post Office is double the entire cost of management; that one-third of the mail at least consists of franks and newspapers; from which it follows that the tax on the transmission of letters in the British empire is more than three hundred per cent on the actual cost of their transmission. This is indeed an imposition on the people, and it strikes us with surprise that Lord Brougham and other statesmen for the diffusion of useful knowledge did not think of the reduction of postage as a more important means for the disseminating of intelligence than any cheapness to which they could bring books and pamphlets. The highest beneficial results would doubtless accrue both in England and in this country by the unobstructed circulation of letters, and the many cheap and excellent non-political publications of the day. Take for instance our weekly sheet, the Brother Jonathan, containing as it does more reading matter than an ordinary duodecimo volume, selected from the very best sources, together with intelligence from all parts of the world—what universal instruction and pleasure would it not impart, could it be circulated through the United States at one-fifth its present rate of postage!

The following is a forcible view of the present unjust and extortionate system. Suppose the Post Office were not a monopoly by law, suppose private capitalists were free to compete with it, the business of transmitting letters would then be carried on on the ordinary principles, with all that economy, attention to the wants of customers, and skilful adaption of means to the desired end, which are usually practiced by those whose interests are involved in their success. But the conductors of the Post Office, being secure of their places, have no stimulants to enterprise and good management, and the people must submit. They cannot set up an opposition. The Legislature is also responsible for any mischief resulting

from the present establishment. If they find, on due investigation, that it is bad, it is their business to change it. It has already been determined to do so in England, and from present indications, we should suppose that Mr. Hill's plan is likely to be as warmly received in this country. In England it met with opposition from all the directors and clerks of the Post Office; here it will not, for it is understood that the Postmaster General favors the plan. Owing to the bad roads, bad conveyances, and other difficulties of travel in this country, the Post Office has not with us as it has in England, yielded a handsome revenue, but with every increase in the facilities of exportation, of course the expense of sending the mails must be decreased. In a few years at furthest we may send our mails as cheap as they do in England. Mr. Hill shows that this is now remarkably cheap. He shows that with all the present enormous and unnecessary expense, the cost of carrying each letter does not amount to over one penny and a third. Supposing, however, that the letters were transported on his plan, with an outlay of no more than is requisite, each letter might be reckoned at about eighty-four hundredths of a penny each. So nice is Mr. Hill in all his calculations.

Let these astounding disclosures by arithmetic of the mysteries of postage, with its concomitants of double and treble letters, should be deemed inaccurate or impossible, Mr. Hill verified his calculations by another test which left nothing to be doubted. He formed a minute and careful estimate of the cost of conveying the mail between London and Edinburgh, a distance of four hundred miles—and found it to be, including the mails of all the intermediate places, five pounds per day.

The average net weight of mail carried for this sum, he found to be six hundred weight, which made the rate to be, sixteen shillings and eight pence per hundred weight. The cost of conveyance was, therefore—

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, but one thirty-sixth of a penny.

As the distance to Edinburgh much exceeded the average which letters, &c., would have to be carried—Mr. Hill deduced from the above incontestable results the first grand principle of his scheme, viz:

"If 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 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, as the expense 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 of a letter to make the expense of transit amount to one farthing, he laid down the next leading principle of his plan, viz:

"That, taxation apart, the charge ought to be precisely the same for every package of moderate weight without reference to the number of enclosures."

Mr. Hill next examined into the machinery of his department, and he found that the present mode of conducting the office required a great number of checks. A number of departments existed which under his plan would be totally unnecessary. As letters and papers were forwarded, there were great temptations to robbery and fraud, and cheating the revenue, in consequence of the necessity of examining letters, of the varying rates of postage and the intermixture of paid and unpaid letters. The remedy, therefore, was to be found in simplification. If all the letters were franked the trouble would be abridged six-fold, and if any means could be devised by which all the postage could be collected before the passage of the letters through the central office, the same result would be obtained.

From considerations like these, (with others which do not enter so much into our system.) Mr. Hill was led to adopt another great principle, as essen-

tial in his proposed modification of the post office arrangements, viz: "That the postage, in addition to being of a low and uniform rate, and regulated by weight, should in all cases be made payable in advance." A combination of these principles developed his plan; the postage ought to be of a very low rate to reconcile the public to its payment in advance, and it ought also to be uniform to simplify the mode of accounting for its receipt, and payable in advance, which would narrow down all further charge by the post office of a letter to its safe and prompt delivery.

This article being already somewhat too extended for our little sheet, we shall defer the further exposition of this feasible plan and its advantages till tomorrow or the day after.

Owing to the present high rates, it is the practice of the common carriers, who pass from town to town, to convey letters and deliver them for one penny each. It is thought that the number sent in this way far exceeds those deposited in the Post Office. When, besides this mode of forwarding letters, we reflect that vast numbers are sent by private opportunity, we may conclude that not over half as many letters and packages go by the mails as by other modes of conveyance. It is, therefore, by no means an extravagant calculation, to say that the Post Office would, in the event of the proposed reduction, have three times the amount of carrying to perform that it now has. To add force to this argument, we need but remind our readers, who are in the habit of travelling from city to city, of the repeated applications, which they have, to take charge of letters, even from perfect strangers. There is, probably, not a single steamer and rail-road-car, passing between Boston and Philadelphia, which does not carry more letters in the pockets of the passengers, than in the mail-bags or letter-boxes. Reduce the rate of postage and you have, of course, all the letters which are now sent by private hand. No man would trouble his friend, much less a stranger, to carry a small parcel, when he could send it by mail for a penny. Let it not be supposed, however, that it is the intention to carry any single package for a penny. Far from it; the proposition is that the charge for postage should not exceed one penny per half-ounce, without regard to distance, and that heavier packages to any convenient limit, for instance, quarter of a pound, should be charged at the same rate, in order to preserve the simplicity of the system, and to prevent the Post Office from being encumbered with heavy parcels.

The following is the mode by which it is proposed to collect the postage in advance: stamped covers to be issued by the Post Office for all the requisite weights of packages, and to be sold at such a price as to include the postage; each of these covers to have the weight which it would be entitled to carry legibly printed on the stamp, and to go through the mails in all respects like a frank.—Economy and 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, should be required to keep them for sale; and to make it their interest as well as that of stationers to do so, a discount should be allowed to them. For the forgery of these stamps, their low price would afford but little temptation, and the stamp of the receiving-house should be struck on the frank stamp to prevent their being used a second time.

As we have no stamp officers in this country, of course the stamps would have to be made at and purchased from the Post Offices. Some difficulties might occur for a length of time with those people, who brought unstamped letters and threw them into the boxes; but it would be an easy matter to advertise over such box, "All letters must be paid for in advance," or, in a large establishment, have a clerk stationed at the box, till people became accustomed to the new arrangement.

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 machine, called a tell-tale stamp, which, by a

process of mechanism, upon a plan well known, count the number of letters impressed; and, for facility of distribution, each letter, when stamped, is to be thrown by the receiver into a box, marked with the initial letter of the post-town, to which it is addressed.

The difficulties that might arise with regard to foreign letters, Mr. Hill obviated by a suggestion, equally characterized by its simplicity, efficiency, and liberal philanthropy. As it would be obviously impossible to provide for the English postage on foreign letters being paid in advance, he proposes that all foreign letters on leaving the country should be charged a double rate of English postage, and that all foreign letters coming into the country should be delivered free. The postage claimed by the foreign government being in each case paid by the foreign resident, this arrangement would be practically the same in its results—the only difference being that the English resident would have to pay his share of the postage at once instead of twice, and all necessity for any negotiation with foreign governments would be obviated.

The plausible objection that under his system the mails and the Post Office would be loaded with an amount of business impossible to be executed, he abundantly answered as we have seen, by proving that the existing establishment, with a slight increase, would suffice for a four-fold amount of business, of the accuracy of which there could not be a reasonable doubt, and which would be sufficient not merely to defray all expenses, but to place the government in nearly the same position as at present with regard to revenue, besides the other, and scarcely comparable advantage of securing to the country the priceless benefits that would result from the system.

The following are some of the conclusions which Mr. Hill believed he established by his calculations and reasoning:

"1. That the present cost of primary distributions 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.

"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 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: eighty four hundredths of a penny, but only thirty-two hundredths of a penny; the difference, viz: fifty-two 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."

It is very evident that the feasibility of Mr. Hill's proposition depended altogether on the correctness of his facts and calculations. The Parliamentary Committee, appointed for the purpose, entered into a laborious and patient investigation of the whole matter, and found his statements rigidly correct.—They published several voluminous reports, which poured a flood of light on the subject. In that report, examined by the writer in the Democratic Re-