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LETTER from the COURT of DIRECTORS to the GOVERNMENT of India.

Public Department, 15 December (No. 47) 1852.

Our Governor-general of India in Council.

Para. 1. WE now reply to the letters and paragraphs noted in the margin, relating to the proposed reform of the Post-office system in India.

2. The inefficient state of the Post-office department has been a subject of complaint for many years; and various measures have from time to time been adopted (the last and the most important in 1839) for promoting "the rapid and secure conveyance of the Mails and the reduction of the Postage Rates." Shortly after the adoption of the system of Post-office administration now existing in this country, attention was directed to the question of reforming the Indian system on the same basis, and various schemes for carrying out this object were submitted to us by your Government in the years 1846, 1847 and 1848. Not being in possession of the information necessary to enable us to decide on the question, we contented ourselves at the time with directing your attention to various points which seemed to require special consideration before a decision was arrived at, and with desiring that no measures should be taken for an alteration of the present system without our previous sanction.

3. As the best means of obtaining the requisite materials for a sound judgment on such an important and complicated question, your Government decided on the appointment of Commissioners at the several Presidencies to inquire into the defects of the existing Post-office arrangements, and to report their views as to the proper remedies to be applied, with special reference to the system adopted in this country, and to the importance of forming a plan applicable to the whole of India. The gentlemen named in the margin were nominated to this important duty; and the result of their inquiries is embodied in a joint report, agreed to after the completion of their inquiries, and in the separate memoranda and numerous appendices by which the report is accompanied.

Public Letters, dated
24th August (No. 29)
1850;
28th August (No. 23)
1851, paras. 2 and 3
4th October (No. 30)
1851;
23d January (No. 3)
1852;
13th February (No. 9)
1852.

Mr. Cecil Beadon for
Bengal and the North-
West Provinces;
Mr. Henry Forbes for
Madras,
Mr. William Courtney
for Bombay

4. The range of the Commissioners' inquiries embraced the whole of the Post-office administration, and their recommendations extend to an entire reform of the existing system, based on the following leading principles: the substitution of an uniform charge of half an anna on letters not exceeding a quarter tola in weight, accompanied by an alteration in the present ascending scale of weight for inland postage; the prepayment of letters by means of stamps, prepayment being enforced, as in this country, by means of a double charge on unpaid letters; the entire abolition of franking, and the charge of nominal postage on official letters to public departments.

5. Your Government, concurring generally in the conclusions of the Commissioners, have referred the subject for our instructions, and the Governor-general expresses his earnest hope that we shall give the necessary authority for carrying into immediate effect the proposed measures of reform.

6. Before proceeding to notice the particular recommendations made by the Commissioners, we have to express our general concurrence in the remarks made by the Commissioners and by the Governor-general, as to the duty of the Government to provide for the community at large the necessary means for the safe, speedy and cheap transmission of their correspondence, in consideration of the monopoly of the carriage of letters established in favour of the Post-office.

7. In supporting their proposal for the levy of a low uniform rate of postage without reference to distance, the Commissioners address themselves to the remarks made in our Legislative Despatch, No. 16 of 1846, where we drew attention to the apparent difference of circumstances, which seemed to render it doubtful whether the measure could be supported by the same arguments on which its adoption was recommended in this country. In the course of their remarks on this point, the Commissioners show that the main grounds on which an uniform rate of postage was adopted in England, viz., the comparatively small proportion which the cost of conveyance bears to the postage levied, and the fact that the cost of transmission to long distances depends less on distance than on the number of letters to be conveyed, do actually exist in India, though the proportion of cost in the case of the first of those grounds differs from that which was found to exist in this country. It is with much satisfaction, therefore, that we express our concurrence in the conclusion arrived at, that there is nothing in the circumstances of India to prevent our extending to it the advantage of an uniform rate of postage for a single letter, irrespective of distance.

8. The questions of the scale of weight and of the rate of postage to be introduced in connexion with the above change, are very minutely and carefully discussed in the Commissioners' Report.

9. The conclusion in favour of maintaining the present maximum weight of a quarter of a tola for a single letter (being little more than one-fifth of the maximum weight of a single letter in this country) is fully warranted by the considerations stated by the Commissioners; and the proposed amendment of the ascending scale of weight seems well calculated to secure the object of preventing the practice of "clubbing," by which the Post-office is so much defrauded; while, at the same time, it will have a tendency to lessen to some extent the weight of the mails.

10. As regards the rate of charge, abundant evidence is adduced to show, on the one hand, the effect of the present rates in suppressing correspondence, and in leading to the evasion of postage on such as is actually carried on; and, on the other hand, the large increase which may reasonably be expected in the number of letters sent through the Post-office, if the charge should be materially reduced.

11. We have come to the conclusion, after careful consideration, that sufficient grounds are stated for the adoption of the proposed uniform rate of half an anna for a single letter. It is true that at the proposed rate the postage collections on the existing amount of chargeable correspondence would be reduced from Rs. 14,30,001 to Rs. 5,17,994, and that an increase of paying letters passing through the post, to the extent of 147 per cent., would be required to make up the deficiency of Rs. 9,12,007. But, on the other hand, independently of the number of letters which will be brought under charge by the proposed abolition of the privilege of franking private correspondence, there seems good reason to believe, from the results which followed in India the reduction of the postage rates in 1837 and 1839, and from the similar results which in this country and in America have ensued from the adoption of a low uniform rate of charge, that an actual increase of letters carried by the Government mails will, within a moderate period, take place to the required extent.

12. The addition to the weight of the mails, consequent on the contemplated increase in the number of chargeable letters, will bear a comparatively small proportion to the present total weight. The weight of chargeable letters at present passing through the Post-office amounts to less than 19 per cent. of the whole; the remainder consisting of newspapers and free letters, in the proportion of 24 per cent. of the former, and 57 per cent. of the latter. The required increase of 147 per cent. in the number of chargeable letters, would involve, therefore, an addition of little more than one fourth to the aggregate weight of articles sent by the post; and it is satisfactory to find that for the conveyance of this additional quantity the existing establishments are believed to be, on the whole, fully adequate.

13. We

13. We formerly referred to the proposed supersession of the present system of money payments, by one of prepayment by stamps, in these terms: "To relieve the Post-office from cash transactions would certainly facilitate its operations, and admit of its establishments being greatly reduced; it would also tend to obviate embezzlements to which it may at present be liable." These advantages are set forth at length by the Commissioners, who further show that, by means of proper precautions, the frauds which we were apprehensive might take place in connexion with the custody and distribution of the stamps may be effectually guarded against.

14. We accordingly approve of the introduction of the system; but we agree that it will not be proper at once to enforce the absolute prohibition of sending letters without prepayment, though the check which exists in this country, of charging double postage for such letters as are sent unpaid, may properly be adopted, in order to limit the practice as much as possible. The system should not, of course, come into operation till such arrangements have been made as will afford every practicable facility of procuring stamps to the inhabitants of the rural districts.

15. Your Government has recorded no opinion as to the suggestion of the Commissioners, that the postage stamps shall be obtained from the Stamp-office in London. We shall take no steps in the matter till we hear further from you on the subject; but we would in the meantime observe, that there seem to us no adequate grounds for the Commissioners' proposal. The main reason alleged is the security from fraud which the English system of manufacture is believed to afford; but the Commissioners themselves express the conviction, that "the risk of loss by forgery in India would be less than in any civilized country of Europe, or the United States of America, or in most of the Crown colonies." The additional expense, therefore, of procuring the labels from this country seems to us unnecessary, and we should wish immediate attention to be directed to the machine at the Stamp-office at Calcutta, referred to by the Commissioners (para. 140), in order that it may be ascertained whether it can be made applicable to the manufacture of the postage stamps.

16. Under any circumstances, we think it likely an objection will be entertained to the assimilation of the postage stamps in India to those in this country, as regards design and colour, as the mere difference of the inscription would not probably be thought to afford sufficient protection against the use in this country of the Indian labels of lower value. Some different device and colour should therefore, in our opinion, be adopted for the stamps in India: and it seems to us that the Company's arms or crest would be the most suitable for the purpose.

17. We approve of the proposal to abolish absolutely and unreservedly the privilege of franking private correspondence; and we agree that, with the proposed low rates of postage, it is unnecessary to continue the advantage at present enjoyed in this respect by soldiers and sailors; classes which, since the Act of 1840, came into operation, have enjoyed in this country no special privileges as regards inland postage.

18. With regard to official "franking," a change is imperatively called for, both by the abuse of the existing system, and by the necessity of adopting some plan which is likely to impose a check on the present enormous bulk of official correspondence. There is only one opinion expressed as to the extent of this latter evil; and the Governor-general states that, in his belief, "it is no exaggeration to say that tens of thousands of letters in number, and tons of official documents in weight, are annually conveyed by the Post-office in India utterly without necessity."

19. The Commissioners state that they have "experienced considerable difficulty in devising any scheme which, while it will continue to officers employed in the service of the State freedom from the charge of postage on letters sent and received by them, on the public business alone, will at the same time enable the Post-office to show a credit for the service it performs for the Government, and secure greater attention to economy by preventing the mails being unnecessarily loaded with official correspondence." The plan proposed for the

accomplishment of these objects is to abolish the privilege of official franking, as it now exists; and to credit the Post-office with the postage due on letters and parcels posted by certain officers on the public service; the number of officers empowered to send such packets without actual payment of postage being at the same time reduced within the closest possible limits.

20. We are unwilling to issue any positive orders, adverse to the recommendation of the Commissioners, on a subject to which they have given the care and attention which this point has evidently received at their hands. We must, however, express our strong conviction, that the difficulties referred to by the Commissioners could only be effectually met by a plan analogous to that which exists in the Government departments in this country, by which all official letters would be prepaid either in money or stamps. Prepayment in money would be opposed to the object of preventing, as much as possible, cash transactions in connexion with the Post-office; but to the use of stamps for the purpose, we see no sufficient objection. The expense would be inconsiderable; if, as we anticipate, the postage stamps are manufactured in India; and so far are we from attaching importance to the other ground of objection stated by the Commissioners, viz., the danger that the stamps would be used for their private purposes by the officers entrusted with them, that we are satisfied our officers would regard with abhorrence the abuse contemplated, and would abstain as rigidly from the use of the stamps as they would from the employment, for their private purposes, of Government money placed under their charge.

21. Notwithstanding, however, the confidence we feel in the high principle and honourable feelings of our public servants, every means should be used in connexion with this, as with every other opportunity of abuse, to guard against its occurrence. It will therefore be proper to make it generally known, that the franking of a letter not exclusively on the public business, or the use of Government stamps for freeing private correspondence (according to the plan which may ultimately be adopted), is not only to be abstained from as a "point of honour," but that it is a practice which involves a positive breach of trust, and will be punished accordingly.

22. Having thus signified our approval of the measures which are to form the basis of the new postal system of India, we leave it to you to carry out, as you may see fit, the various other recommendations of the Commissioners for securing the interests of Government, and for rendering the Post-office more available for the great body of the people. We shall confine our further observations to such points as appear to call for our special orders.

23. The Commissioners came to the conclusion not to recommend any change in the present rates of charge, or in the scale of weight for Indian newspapers; but at the same time they were of opinion that, if it were thought desirable to establish an uniform rate of postage for newspapers, a single rate of two annas would be the proper charge for a "single" newspaper. The Governor-general, thinking it desirable to encourage the circulation of newspapers as much as possible, proposes the adoption of an uniform rate of one anna on all newspapers transmitted through the Post-office.

24. The grounds stated by the Commissioners appear to us conclusive against the larger reduction proposed in the rates of charge, at least for the present; but we are willing to leave it to your Government either to adopt the uniform rate of two annas on a single newspaper, should you think fit to make the change, or to allow matters to remain on their present footing, till it shall have been seen how far the Post-office revenue recovers from the effects of the reduction of the letter postage, and especially how far the existing means of conveyance are likely to be available for any increased weight, beyond that of the additional letters which will be transmitted by post in consequence of that reduction. We also are of opinion that the suggested assimilation of the scale of weight for European and Indian newspapers should not now be adopted, as that measure would, if unaccompanied by a reduction in the rates of charge, check the circulation of English papers, which we should much regret.

25. It is proposed by the Commissioners, with the object of maintaining uniformity of administration, that the Post-office throughout India should constitute one

one department; the Postmasters-general of the several Presidencies, together with their subordinates, being relieved from all dependence on the local governments, and placed under the immediate control of an officer to be styled Director-general, who should act in immediate subordination to the Government of India.

26. We decidedly object to the introduction of a measure so wholly at variance with the principles and usage which obtain in other departments, nor is it at all necessary for the purpose of securing the required uniformity of practice. We do not doubt that advantage will arise from placing the Postmasters-general at each Presidency in immediate correspondence with the officer who, under whatever denomination, may be vested with the general supervision of the Post-office department throughout India; but we are of opinion that all requisite arrangements may be made without that supersession of the authority of the local governments which the Commissioners contemplate, and which we should consider as most injurious and objectionable.

27. In connection with this part of the subject, the Governor-general has recorded his sentiments on the disadvantages of the present system of selecting the Postmasters-general from the members of the civil service, and has submitted for our decision the question of appointing to those offices persons not belonging to our service.

28. We are aware that the important situation of Postmaster-general has not generally been filled in a manner which has tended to the good administration of the department. From the testimony borne by the Governor-general to the excellent administration of the Post-office in the North-western Provinces by Mr. Riddell, and from the fact that three of our civil servants have applied themselves to the study not only of the Indian postal system, but also of the systems of this country, and of others in Europe and America, with the diligence evinced in the report before us; we are happy, however, in being able to draw the conclusion that any defects in the management of the Post-office in times past, have not arisen either from the field of selection being too limited, or from any disinclination on the part of our servants to apply themselves to the duties of the department.

29. Under the constitution given by the Legislature to the services in India, there has been set apart for the conduct of the civil administration, a numerous body of highly educated individuals who have received a special training for its duties, and have been brought under stringent obligations for the purpose of securing their due subjection to the government they serve, and their strict fidelity to their high trusts. The agency thus created affords the means of filling efficiently the highest appointments in every branch of the Administration; and all that is required is, that before an individual is appointed to an important office, his known character and qualifications should be carefully scrutinized, with special reference to the nature of the duties to be performed; and to any other peculiarities of the office which may seem to require consideration. If the power of selection be thus carefully exercised, we apprehend that the difficulties stated by the Governor-general with regard to the office of Postmaster-general will be sufficiently met; and we must therefore decline to sanction in this case a departure from the established principle, that all the high civil offices are to be filled by members of our covenanted service.

30. The bad effects which have resulted from the appointment as local postmasters of officers charged with the performance of important duties in other branches of the Administration have frequently attracted our notice, and we approve of the intention to substitute the employment of uncovenanted servants, who will give their whole attention to the duties of the department. The plan for carrying out this change, which is sketched out in Mr. Beadon's memorandum, seems likely to prove very beneficial; and we agree with the Governor-general in estimating very highly the opportunity which the change of plan will afford, of providing on an extended scale for the employment of respectable natives.

31. Having now recorded all the observations which appear to be called for with reference to the report of the Commissioners, we have great satisfaction in

expressing our entire concurrence in the opinions stated by the several members of your Government as to the industry, ability and sound judgment displayed by those gentlemen in the performance of the duty entrusted to them. We have signified our approval of the greater part of the measures recommended; and we entertain a confident hope that the introduction of the proposed improvement will tend largely, not only to the comfort of individuals, but also to the material and intellectual advancement of the community at large.

32. We have entered into communication with Her Majesty's Postmaster-general with reference to the Commissioners' proposals, arising out of suggestions from that department with regard to the payment in one sum of the total postage, steam and inland, on letters to and from India; and the establishment of a book post between England and India, at an uniform rate of charge, to be paid also in one sum. We shall duly acquaint you with the result of our correspondence on these subjects, and shall at the same time inform you of the mode in which the accounts of steam postage between Her Majesty's Post-office and our several Governments in India shall hereafter be adjusted.

We are, &c.
(signed) *J. W. Hogg,*
R. Ellice,
&c. &c.

London, 15 December 1852.

(A true copy.)

East India House,
20 December 1852.

T. L. Peacock,
Examiner of India Correspondence.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONERS for POST-OFFICE INQUIRY, with APPENDICES.

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Cecil Beadon,
Commissioner.