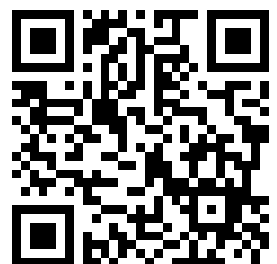

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THE
FIFTH REPORT

OF THE
COMMISSIONERS

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO

THE MANAGEMENT

OF THE
POST-OFFICE DEPARTMENT.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
FOR HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1836.

CONTENTS.

FIFTH REPORT , dated 11th April, 1836	Page. 8
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LIST OF APPENDIX TO REPORT ON PRICES CURRENT.

(A.) Lord Rosslyn and Lord Stormont's Report	5
(B.) Lord Lowther's Report	6
No. 1. Memorial of William Reid and Son	8
No. 2. Memorial of Thomas Smith	9
No. 3. Memorial of Isaac Weld	10
No. 4. Memorial of John Cramsie	10
No. 5. Postmaster-General's Report on last Memorial	11
No. 6. Postmaster-General's Letter relative to Charges upon Unstamped Commercial Publications	11
No. 7. Postmaster-General's Report as to the Rate of Composition, &c.	11
No. 8. Post-office Return of the Names of all Periodicals forwarded by Post under 4 & 5 Will. IV. c. 44	12
No. 9. Post-office (Dublin) Return of the Annual Average Number of List of Imports and Exports transmitted	12
No. 10. Post-office Return of Dublin List of Imports and Exports, with the present Rate of Charge	13
No. 11. Extract from the Evidence of Lord Lowther	14
No. 12. Evidence of James Cook, Esq.	15
No. 13. Evidence of Charles Edmunds, Esq.	17
No. 14. Evidence of G. M. V. Dadelszen, Esq.	19
No. 15. Evidence of Henry Burgess, Esq.	20
No. 16. Evidence of John Teesdale, Esq.	23
No. 17. Evidence of George Moffatt, Esq.	23
No. 18. Evidence of T. J. Dimsdale, Esq.	26
No. 19. Evidence of Joshua Bates, Esq.	29
No. 20. Evidence of George Byrom Whittaker, Esq.	32
No. 21. Evidence of Matthew Uzielli, Esq.	34
No. 22. Evidence of Samuel Johnson, Esq.	35
No. 23. Evidence of Benjamin Critchett, Esq.	38
No. 24. Evidence of Charles Pressly, Esq.	41
No. 25. Evidence of Charles Pressly, Esq.	42
No. 26. Evidence of M. B. Peacock, Esq.	43

TO THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF HIS MAJESTY'S TREASURY.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONERS appointed to inquire into the POST-OFFICE DEPARTMENT by a Treasury Minute of 9th May 1835.

YOUR LORDSHIPS having referred to us several Memorials complaining of the high rate of Postage charged for the conveyance of Commercial Lists and Prices Current, we have proceeded to investigate this subject, and to consider whether certain facilities might be given for the transmission of Periodicals of this nature, without injury to the Revenue. App. 1, 2, 3, & 4.

This question engaged the attention of a former Commission appointed to inquire into the Post-office Department: after examining several merchants, brokers, and officers of the Post-office, they presented two Reports to the Treasury in May last, stating the result of their Inquiry.

From these Reports, and the Evidence which accompanied them, we have received much valuable information. App. (A.) (B.) 12,
13, 14, 15, 16, 17,
18, 19, 20, 21, 22,
& 23.

We have also obtained the opinion of Lord Lowther, who is intimately acquainted with all points relating to the transmission of Prices Current. App. 11.

We agree generally with the suggestions which he has made, and beg to submit his Report and Evidence for your Lordships' consideration.

By the Act 4 and 5 Will. IV. c. 44, the Postmaster-General is authorized to contract for the conveyance of certain Unstamped Publications, formerly circulated under the privilege of the Clerks of the Roads. Very few Publications have, however, been sent under this authority, and the rates of composition which have been demanded by the Postmaster-General are so high as to amount almost to a prohibition. Lord Lowther, p. 5.

We find that in France, and generally on the Continent, the circulation of Prices Current, at a low charge, is encouraged by the Government, and we are of opinion that any facility which can be given for the transmission of mercantile information must tend to promote the commercial interests of the country; we, therefore, beg to recommend to your Lordships, in the first place, that English Prices Current, and Publications of a similar nature published in this country, be permitted to pass through the medium of the Post-office without the imposition of a charge so high as to impede their general circulation.

We are aware that from the immense correspondence, the number and size of Newspapers, and the heavy bulk of Parliamentary and official documents, it would be impossible, under the present arrangements of the Post-office Department, to give to all mercantile Publications that facility which might otherwise be desirable: nevertheless we are of opinion, that the conveyance by post of Prices Current, under certain restrictions, will not materially add to the weight of the mails, or occasion much inconvenience by the additional duty which will be imposed on the Clerks of the Inland Office.

Lord Lowther in his Report recommends that Prices Current should be permitted to pass free through the Post-office, but that they should be required to be printed on paper bearing a stamp. His Lordship proposed that twopence should be the maximum rate of duty charged, and contemplated the reduction of this duty to one penny, if it did not admit eventually of a still further reduction. We are

also of opinion that it would be more convenient that the charge for the transmission of these Publications should be in the nature of a stamp, as this tax would be collected with much greater facility and certainty than a postage, and avoid the additional duty which must, otherwise, be imposed on the Post-office.

With respect to the amount of duty to be imposed, we felt inclined to suggest to your Lordships that the charge should not exceed a halfpenny; but, when we take into consideration the reduction which is contemplated in the Stamp Duty on Newspapers, we fear that it may be deemed inexpedient, at present, to permit the transmission of Prices Current for a less charge than that which is imposed on Newspapers.

We hope, however, that after the proposed system has come into operation, and its effect been experienced, your Lordships may find it practicable to permit the free transmission of Prices Current by post, if printed on paper bearing a halfpenny stamp.

App. 24, 25, & 26.

From the evidence of the Secretary of the Stamp-office and the Solicitor of the Post-office we are induced to believe that our recommendations can be readily carried into effect by authorizing the Commissioners of Stamps to affix a stamp bearing a certain duty on Prices Current intended for circulation by post, (such Publications, when unstamped, not to be made liable to any penalty,) and by giving a power to the Postmaster-General to allow them to go free of postage if so stamped.

It will be proper, at the same time, in order to protect the Revenue and guard against frauds, to authorize the Postmaster-General, with the concurrence of the Lords of the Treasury, to define what Publications shall be permitted to circulate as Prices Current, and to make regulations with respect to the form in which they shall be received.

Lord Lowther, p. 15.

And, further, to prevent their becoming a vehicle for advertisements, it has been recommended that "strict rules should be laid down that they should contain nothing but the names of the articles to be sold, and their prices, and that the names and residences of the sellers should be excluded."

If Prices Current are allowed to circulate on payment of a halfpenny stamp, we think that they should be restricted to half an ounce in weight, which would be sufficient for the ordinary purposes of trade; and a higher stamp duty might be required for anything exceeding this. In case, however, they should be subjected to the same charge as Newspapers, it would be unfair to impose a restriction on them which did not equally apply to Newspapers.

We regret that we are unable, at present, to submit to your Lordships any general plan for the transmission of Foreign Prices Current. The question is embodied in the other propositions which have been made by the French Government; and, when the result of the negotiation now in progress is made known, we shall be glad to take the subject into consideration, if your Lordships desire that we should do so.

Office of Woods,
11th April 1836.

DUNCANNON.
H. LABOUCHERE.
SEYMOUR.

APPENDIX.

(A.)

TO THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF HIS MAJESTY'S TREASURY.

REPORT of the COMMISSIONERS appointed to inquire into the POST-OFFICE DEPARTMENT by the Treasury Minute of the 17th February, 1835.

WE have lately directed our attention to the transmission of Prices Current, and other commercial information, by the post, at a low rate of charge, and have received much valuable information upon that subject, as well from brokers and merchants as from the officers of the Post-office, which we beg leave to submit to your Lordships' consideration.

It appears from that evidence that the Post-offices of foreign countries have adopted the principle of permitting Prices Current, and other commercial information, to be transmitted by the post at a very low rate of postage, accompanied, in some cases, by a small stamp duty.

The information which might be communicated by means of Prices Current, conveyed either through this kingdom, or to and from foreign countries, at a small charge to the parties concerned, cannot fail to be highly beneficial to persons engaged in trade, but we feel that it is an important part of our duty to examine with great caution any proposal which may materially affect the Revenue. 1st. That of the Post-office, by diminishing the correspondence, or exposing it to suffer from the same frauds which prevail in the transmission of Newspapers, and for which great additional opportunities may thus be afforded. 2dly. Of the Stamp-office, by the probable diminution of Advertisements.

As we consider that it is a subject that requires the closest and most deliberate investigation, we do not feel ourselves justified in recommending to your Lordships any alteration in the present rates of postage; but we beg, at the same time, to observe, that we do not express an opinion contrary to the principle of transmitting Prices Current at a low rate of postage, or postage-free, with a moderate stamp duty, provided that, upon a more extended inquiry, and more mature examination, it should appear that no very prejudicial effects are likely to arise to the Revenue, or that the public loss of Revenue may reasonably be expected to be compensated by adequate advantages in the encouragement and increase of the trade of the kingdom.

There is one circumstance, however, connected with this subject, that is mentioned in the evidence of Mr. Uzielli, a gentleman engaged in an extensive foreign business, to which we would wish to draw your Lordships' attention, viz., the regulation of the Post-office by which a Price Current, or printed letter from the Continent, with a band round it, open at the sides, (the manner in which these papers are circulated abroad,) is charged as a double letter in consequence of the band. It has been represented to us that it is quite impossible to make a foreign correspondent understand that while a single sheet, no matter how large, is charged by the English Post-office only as a single letter, a printed Price Current, with the band round it, (*which is necessary to enable it to pass at a low rate through the Post-offices on the Continent,*) should, in consequence of the band, be liable to an increased rate in England; and, as it appears to us that the additional charge in such a case may be considered as not altogether reasonable, we beg to submit it as our opinion that the present regulation in this respect should be altered.

We had intended to have pursued our inquiries into the Steam-packet Establishment of the Post-office, and had called for various Returns as to the prime cost and outfit of steam-boats, and the expense of working them, with a view to consider how far it might be for the public advantage that this service should be performed by contract or establishment. We had not, however, an opportunity

(A.)

Lord Rosslyn and
Lord Stormont's
Report.
May, 8, 1835.

Evidence,
Nos. 19—30.

(A.)

Lord Roslyn and
Lord Stormont's
Report.
May 8, 1835.
App. Nos. 6—12.
Evidence,
Mr. Peacock.

of investigating the subject, and can, therefore, only transmit to your Lordships the documents relating thereto which have been furnished to us by the Post-office.

We had also examined the Solicitor as to his fees and emoluments, and proposed to have consulted the heads of other Revenue Boards, with a view to considering whether it might not be expedient that this officer should be remunerated entirely by a fixed salary instead of fees, as recommended by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry.

App. No. 11.

We had procured a detailed statement of the establishment of the Post-office in London for the last year, but we have not investigated sufficiently the nature of the receipts from the public, in the shape of fees for various services, to be able to judge how far it might be proper to abolish them. It is to be observed that no very general rule appears to prevail with regard to the application of the fees. Those collected by the letter-carriers are divided among them; and the Secretary's Fee Fund is stated to be applied in part to the increase of the salaries of particular officers, and the remainder carried to the account of the general revenue.

London, May 8, 1835.

ROSSLYN.
STORMONT.

TO THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF HIS MAJESTY'S TREASURY.

(B.)

Lord Lowther's
Report.
May 8, 1835.

(B.)

FINDING that, with respect to the question of facilitating the transmission of Prices Current by the Post-office, I cannot come to the same conclusions upon the evidence that my colleagues in the Commission of Inquiry have arrived at, I beg leave to submit to you a Report as an individual Commissioner. I think the evidence the Commissioners have taken not only sufficient upon which to form an opinion, but such as demands a recommendation for taking effectual measures to supply important facilities to commerce which are now wanting. I beg leave to report as follows:—

The principle of the Post-office at its establishment, as is distinctly laid down in the 12 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.

It does not appear that under the present system any advantage is held out to correspondence upon subjects of trade over general correspondence; on the contrary, it appears that, while political discussions and the miscellaneous contents of newspapers go free, under the privilege of a newspaper stamp, Prices Current, and other periodicals solely mercantile, though of smaller bulk than newspapers, have no privilege of the kind, but pay as highly as private letters.

See Evidence,
Nos. 12—20.

It is, I think, plainly shown by the evidence taken, that great advantage would arise to trade from the transmission of Prices Current 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 acquired 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.

It appears by the evidence of Mr. Critchett, of the Post-office (p. 39), that the Prices Current now sent by the Post-office under *that denomination* do not exceed a few hundreds. The lists prepared by the tea trade are upon one sheet, and are transmitted as single letters, but they contain private written communications, which would still be sent as letters, even were the alteration made which I propose. The statements in the evidence also generally agree that the probable effect of facilitating the transmission of Prices Current would be to increase, instead of to diminish, the number of mercantile letters now written.

Over the whole of the Continent of Europe, where the circulation of mercantile intelligence is probably of much less national importance, a privilege similar to

this is allowed to printed Prices Current; and in the United States of America they are allowed to pass through the Post-office (according to the evidence of Mr. Cook) free of any charge, or, as stated by Mr. Bates, at a postage of 1 cent only.

With a view to ascertain the extent of the difficulty that might be experienced by the Post-office if Prices Current were circulated at a low rate of postage, His Majesty's Postmaster-General was requested to direct some person, competent to afford explanations upon the subject, to attend upon the Commissioners, and Mr. S. Johnson, Second President of the Inland Office, and Mr. Critchett, Inspector of Letter-carriers, were sent for that purpose. To their evidence I beg to refer. It will be seen that the chief objections stated by the Post-office are,—

1st. The increase of business, which, it is said, might render it impossible to send off the mails in time :

2dly. The increased opportunity for fraud, by writing private communications upon the privileged papers.

After making all due allowance for these objections it appears to me that in an establishment which, by its energy and skill in arrangement, can meet the increase of business in two evenings of the week occasioned by the dispatch of 20,000 additional Newspapers, there would in practice be found little difficulty in providing for the increase of business which the transmission of Prices Current would involve. With respect to the opportunities for fraud, I conceive that this danger would be greatly diminished by requiring all printed lists, &c., to which this privilege might be granted, to be put into the Post-office under a band open at the sides (as in the case of Newspapers), and that it should be extended to those only which, with the cover, may not exceed half an ounce in weight. The absolute necessity of a restriction as to weight is obvious; I believe that half an ounce will be sufficient for the object in view: and with these restrictions I venture to submit that Prices Current, or lists of any merchandise with prices attached, including booksellers' lists, be allowed to be transmitted by the post at a small charge. From the smallness of the size of these lists, and perhaps the thinness of the paper which would be used in order to keep within the weight, I think that there would be a much greater facility in detecting any writing than in the case of Newspapers, which the law permits to go free, notwithstanding this risk; nor is any limitation provided as to their number on account of the probable increase to the Post-office business. Mr. Critchett states that frauds to the extent of £100 per week are *detected*, and that there is a suspicion of fraud to four times that extent. Now it is to be observed that, if a single word be found written on a Newspaper, it is charged as a letter of more than an ounce weight. If all those detected were merely charged as single letters, the amount would probably be not, at the utmost, more than one-twelfth of £100 per week. The same witness says it is only people who have little to do who commit these frauds, and that they are never found in the Papers sent by News-agents, or those received by extensive houses. But as Prices Current would all be sent by men of business, and chiefly by extensive houses, it does not seem that the risk of fraud would be increased by allowing their free transmission as stamped Papers. It is presumed, therefore, that neither of these objections need be held valid against attempting an improvement, otherwise desirable, in the transmission of mercantile intelligence, and which, it would seem, might be accomplished by employing a few additional sorters.

With reference to the charge to be imposed on the transmission of papers of the description referred to by the post, I conceive that 2*d*. should be the maximum rate; and although, in the preceding part of these observations, the term of "a low rate of postage" has been used, I am of opinion that the preferable mode, both as regards the certainty of payment to the Revenue in the first instance, and as saving time to the Post-office, would be, instead of charging a postage upon them, to allow them to be transmitted *free* through the Post-office, but to require that they should be printed on paper bearing a stamp, which would show that the required taxation had been made at the Stamp-office. The Revenue being thus guarded, I should look forward to the time when the rate of duty might be lowered to 1*d*., if it may not eventually admit of a still further diminution.

With regard to the transmission of Prices Current to the Continent, and the delivery of Foreign Prices Current sent to this country, I conceive that the same principle might be applied, and that they may be forwarded free from this country if bearing a stamp, but that Foreign Prices Current should be subject to a postage of 2*d*. upon delivery here. And I would here beg to draw attention to the cir-

(B.)

Lord Lowther's
Report.
May 8, 1836.

Evidence, No. 23.

(B.)
 Lord Lowther's
 Report.
 May 8, 1835.

cumstance stated by Mr. Uzielli, a gentleman engaged in an extensive foreign business, as to the system at the Post-office of charging a Price Current or printed letter from the Continent, with a band round it, open at the sides (the manner in which they are circulated abroad), as a double letter, in consequence of the band.

It seems quite obvious that the practice of charging an additional rate of postage, equal to that of a single letter, for every scrap of paper, however light, although it may answer in this country, where the rate is known and acted upon, ought not to be observed with respect to letters and packets from abroad, where no such rule has obtained or is understood; and as it has been represented that it is impossible to make a foreign correspondent understand that a single sheet, no matter how large, is charged by the English Post-office 1s. 2d., while several dozen separate bits of paper put up together, and weighing in all not half so much as the large single sheet, will be liable to a charge of 3s. 6d., I therefore beg to submit it as my opinion that, at all events, the present system in this respect ought not to continue.

We had intended to have pursued our inquiries into the Steam-packet Establishment of the Post-office, and had called for various Returns as to the prime cost and outfit of Steam-boats, and the expense of working them, with a view to consider how far it might be for the public advantage that the service should be performed by contract or establishment. But as we were aware that a strong opinion had been expressed in favour of performing the Post-office Packet Service by contract in the Report of the Commissioners in the year 1788, by the Finance Committee in the year 1797, and by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry in the year 1830, the Commissioners had not an opportunity of investigating the subject, and can therefore only transmit to your Lordships the documents relating thereto which have been furnished to them by the Post-office.

Mr. Peacock's
 Evidence.

We had also examined the Solicitor as to his fees and emoluments, and proposed to have consulted the heads of other Revenue Boards, with a view to considering whether it might not be expedient that this officer should be remunerated entirely by a fixed salary, instead of fees, as recommended by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry.

We had procured a detailed statement of the establishment of the Post-office in London for the last year, but we had not investigated sufficiently the nature of the receipts from the public, in the shape of fees, for various services, to be able to judge how far it might be proper to abolish them. It may be observed, however, that they are in general carried to the public account, the officers of the establishment being paid, for the most part, entirely by fixed salaries.

I found that the Commission appointed by the Lords of the Treasury in August last had furnished the Postmaster-General with a statement of the several recommendations of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, and requested him to prepare a paper showing in what cases these had been carried into effect, and the reasons which had prevented the remainder being adopted. This paper had not been furnished when that Commission closed its proceedings, and we therefore applied for it as soon as we were appointed by your Lordships to continue the Inquiry, but it has not been transmitted to us.

LOWTHER.

London, May 8, 1835.

I had prepared the draft of this Report, which my colleagues have only partially agreed to; but I have thought it best to give my own views on the subject.

No. 1.

Unto the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

The Memorial of William Reid and Son, Leith,

No. 1.

Memorial of
 Wm. Reid and Son,
 Leith,
 Feb. 10, 1835.

Humbly Showeth,

Leith, 10th February 1835.

That your Memorialists are the publishers of the "Leith Commercial List," copies of which, of different dates, are here, with respect, fully submitted for your Lordships' consideration.

That the "Leith Commercial List" has existed for nearly 40 years, during which time it has been found of great utility in furnishing the earliest information of the arrivals and sailings of vessels, at and from this and other Scottish ports, their cargoes, &c., which it is of the utmost importance to merchants, brokers, and underwriters, to have by the very first opportunity.

That, from the commencement of its publication, it has been privileged to go by post free of postage duty, without which privilege it could not have existed.

That, under the Act 4 and 5 of His present Majesty, c. 44, your Lordships have been pleased to authorize a scale of composition with the publishers of unstamped periodicals, under which the Leith List is subjected to a postage duty of 15s. per annum, nearly one half of its annual price to subscribers, which is £1. 1s. 6d.

That, from its very limited circulation, varying from 200 to 220 copies, the List is quite unable to afford this, we humbly submit, unreasonable charge; and, if prevented from going by post, its utility will be destroyed, and its publication will cease.

That your Memorialists humbly conceive that it is not the spirit of the Act, or the intention of your Lordships, to subject to postage duty periodicals of this description, containing no remark of any kind, but simple matters of fact important to those interested in maritime affairs.

That the suppression of the publication would be partially injurious to the mercantile interests, while the gain to the Revenue from the postage duty would be very trifling.

Your Memorialists have further to state, that they have been called upon by the Secretary of the General Post-office for Scotland, in conformance with the Act, to transmit to him an account of all the Lists sent through the Post-office from the 5th of April last, in order to their being subjected to the said duty of 15s. per annum.

Your Memorialists are convinced your Lordships will not sustain this claim, on the ground that it is not consistent with justice, for the following reasons, viz. :

1. That the first intimation of the change to take place was received on the 25th of August last, which also stated that due notice would be given of the time when the new arrangements would come into operation.

2. That the notice was only received on the 2d of January of this year, accompanied by a claim for postages for the last nine months, thus exacting what your Memorialists could not be supposed to have made arrangements for, or in honour call upon their subscribers to pay.

3. That it is impossible to make up such an account, as most subscribers, availing themselves of the privilege hitherto enjoyed, are in the practice of transmitting the List by post to the outports, over which we have no control.

May it therefore please your Lordships to authorize the abandonment of this retrospective claim, and allow this publication the privilege it has enjoyed for upwards of 37 years of going by post free of duty.

We have the honour to be,
My Lords,
Your Lordship's obedient and very humble Servants,
W. REID and SON.

No. 1.

Memorial of
Wm. Reid and Son,
Leith,
Feb 10, 1835.

No. 2.

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

The Memorial of Thomas Smith, of "Prince's Price Current,"

Respectfully Showeth,

43, Mincing-lane, 15th March 1835.

That, on reference to a letter, dated the 17th February, signed Thomas F. Fremantle, and on reconsideration of the same, your Memorialist can come to no other conclusion than that the letter in question was not intended for him but for some other person that contemplated "unstamped commercial lists should be forwarded free of all charge," because your Memorialist offered to pay for them on delivery at the General Post-office, or in any other way your Lordships might direct.

By the Act of the 4 and 5 William IV. c. 44, it is enacted, that certain unstamped publications have from time immemorial been sent by the General Post-office from London to places within the United Kingdom at a certain small annual charge, and much injury and inconvenience may arise to the public by the repeal of such privilege.

In conformity to which your Memorialist continues to tender 4s. 4d. per annum, or to save trouble of accounts, 1d. on delivery of each List at the General Post-office.

The charge which the Post-office have laid down in this case of 10s. 6d. per annum, is illegal, unequal, and extravagant, and although it may be urged that it is the same as was paid to the clerks of the road, it was obtained under official influence, and is almost equal to the stamp-duty on newspapers.

The original charge, 4s. 4d. per annum, settled during the administration of Mr. Pitt's government, which amount your Memorialist can prove to have been paid, and which some of the old clerks of the road must recollect to have received, is moderate and equitable, and which your Memorialist is willing to pay; but should any attempt be made to enforce the payment of 10s. 6d. per year, it will be contrary to the spirit and words of the Act of Parliament before referred to.

Your Memorialist therefore humbly prays, That your Lordships will be graciously pleased to take into consideration the law relative to forwarding unstamped Lists into the country, and direct that the clerks of the General Post-office will be pleased to receive such a sum as shall be equal, when compared with charges made to the proprietors of other papers, who have this privilege conferred, and in which the commercial public are much interested.

T. SMITH.

No. 2.

Memorial of
Thomas Smith, of
"Prince's Price
Current, London."
March 15, 1835.

No. 3.

To the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

The Memorial of Isaac Weld,

No. 3.

Memorial of
Isaac Weld, of
Dublin.
July 15, 1835.

Showeth,

Custom-house, Dublin, 15th July 1835.

That Memorialist, in the year 1800, was appointed by his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, pursuant to the provisions in the Stamp Act, to publish the daily accounts of imports and exports.

That, in the year 1824, upon placing the cross channel trade under the same regulations as the coasting trade, Memorialist represented to Government the difficulties which must arise to the accurate fulfilment of the duties of his appointment, from the absence of Custom-house entries for free goods; and Memorialist was informed from the Treasury that, so long as he held the appointment, every practicable facility should be afforded to him at the Custom-house for the completion of the accounts.

Memorialist therefore now prays, That the cargo books may be left, in course, for a limited period, at his office in the Custom-house of Dublin, or that free access may be regularly opened to them at convenient hours in the other offices where they are received.

Memorialist also prays, That these official publications of the imports and exports may be sent to the out-ports, and to the country, free of postage, or else that the postage may be reduced to the former charges, payable to the clerk of the roads, the new demand of £1. 1s. per annum for composition for postage being double what was formerly paid, and amounting nearly to a prohibition.

(Signed)

ISAAC WELD.

No. 4.

To the Right Honourable and Honourable the Lords of His Majesty's Treasury.

The Memorial of John Cramsie, of Belfast, Merchant,

No. 4.

Memorial of
John Cramsie, of
Belfast,
Nov. 7, 1835,
enclosing a Copy of
the "Belfast Mer-
cantile Register."

Showeth,

Belfast, November 7th, 1835.

That in the year 1807 the publication of the imports and exports of the port of Belfast was commenced by the late Francis Taggart, under Government licence to publish such free of stamp-duty, under a clause in the Irish Stamp Act.

That said Francis Taggart died in the year 1822, when Memorialist obtained from the Marquis of Wellesley, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, a similar licence, which Memorialist still enjoys, and continues the publication under the title of the "Belfast Mercantile Register."

That said publication, since Memorialist became the proprietor, has been of great use and importance to the mercantile interest of the empire, as the various Chambers of Commerce, as well as many public officers who have made reference for information, can bear testimony.

That Memorialist has been furnished by the Secretary of the Irish Post-office department with accounts charging Memorialist with £13. 2s., being at the rate of 10s. 6d. per annum. for each number transmitted through the Post-office,—this charge being made under certain regulations entered into by your Honourable Board for compounding postage and stamps upon unstamped publications.

That Memorialist, conceiving there must have been an error in charging this sum of 10s. 6d. per annum, has declined paying said accounts, inasmuch as the sum charged is greater than the entire stamp-duty on said publication (if stamped) would amount to, viz., 8s. 8d. per annum.

That, from the limited circulation (being useful to merchants only), the emoluments are very small.

That a charge of postage or a stamp-duty must, as Memorialist believes, stop the publication altogether.

That, upon obtaining proprietorship of the publication, Memorialist engaged to pay £60 per annum to Mrs. Taggart, the widow of the former proprietor, which annuity since has been regularly paid to her, being the only income said widow has for the support of herself and three children.

Memorialist therefore prays—

That your Honourable Board may be pleased to direct that the Postmaster-General shall continue the privilege heretofore conferred upon, and enjoyed by, Memorialist and the original proprietor of the "Belfast Mercantile Register," of transmitting said publication through the Post-office free of expense, or grant Memorialist such relief as your Honourable Board may deem right.

And Memorialist, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

JOHN CRAMSE.

No. 5.

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

General Post-office, November 30th, 1835.

MY LORDS,—I have the honour to return the Memorial of John Cramsie, praying that the "Belfast Mercantile Register" may pass free of postage, upon which your Lordships have requested my opinion; and I beg to state, for your Lordships' information, that this is one of the unstamped commercial publications which were allowed to pass free by the post under the privileges of the Clerks of the Roads, which privileges were abolished by the Acts 4 & 5 Gul. IV. c. 44, and by the 9th section of which the Postmaster-General was authorized, with your Lordships' consent, to contract with the proprietors of such publications as had previously been circulated under the privileges of the Clerks of the Roads, for forwarding them by Post at an annual rate to be agreed upon.

The settling of the rate to be paid has produced much discussion between the Lords of the Treasury and the Postmaster-General; and in the last letter from this department on the subject, dated 22d April last, the Postmaster-General requested their Lordships' instructions for his guidance.

I therefore request that your Lordships will be pleased to refer to that letter, and to favour me with your decision on the question.

I have the honour to be, my Lords,
Your very obedient humble servant,
LICHFIELD.

No. 5.

Postmaster-General's Report on the Memorial of John Cramsie.

No. 6.

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

General Post-office, 22d April 1835.

MY LORDS,—In conformity with Sir Thomas Fremantle's letter of the 26th ultimo, I have the honour to state, for your Lordships' information, that the amount of revenue derived from the composition for conveyance by post at present required to be paid by the proprietors of the unstamped publications, formerly sent under the privilege of the Clerks of the Roads, may be estimated at about £800 a-year, and that the loss to the revenue by reducing the present charge to a sum equal to 25 per cent. on the price of each publication would be about £270 per annum.

In reply to the inquiry as to the number of proprietors who have readily paid the composition authorized by the Lords of the Treasury, by Mr. Baring's letter of 7th November last, I beg to state that of all these publications in Great Britain and Ireland, 14 in number, six only have hitherto paid the amount demanded, viz. :—

- Customs Bills of Entry,
- Lloyd's List,
- Wettenhall's List,
- Mercantile Price Current,
- Sound List, and
- Cork List of Imports and Exports,

and some of these not without remonstrance.

I have now to request your Lordships' final instructions as to the rate of composition to be fixed, and the date from which the same is to be demanded, in order that the necessary communication, as suggested in Sir Thomas Fremantle's letter already referred to, may be made to the respective parties.

It may be right to add that the effect of the proposed rate of composition of 25 per cent., as compared with that at present sanctioned, will be a reduction of charge to 11 of the publications in question, to two the result will be the same as at present, and in one instance, that of the "London Mercantile Price Current," the alteration will produce a small increase of charge, viz., from 10s. 6d. to 11s. 4½d. per list per annum.

I have the honour to be, my Lords,
Your Lordships' obedient humble servant,
MARYBOROUGH, Postmaster-General.

No. 6.

Postmaster-General's Letter relative to Charges upon Unstamped Commercial Publications.

No. 7.

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury.

General Post-office, 18th March 1836.

MY LORDS,—With reference to my predecessor's letter, dated 22d April, 1835, I beg leave to state, for your Lordships' information, that the proprietors of the "Belfast Mercantile Register" and of the "Waterford Shipping List" have suffered the composition chargeable in lieu of postage for the conveyance of their publications by post to run into arrear, the debt from the former, up to the 5th of January last, amounting to the sum of £175. 9s. 6d., and from the latter, for the same period, to the sum of £74. 18s. 9d.; and that the Secretary to the Post-office at Dublin has made repeated applications for the payment of the sums due, without obtaining a single remittance from either of the parties.

I have therefore to request that I may be favoured with your Lordships' early decision as

No. 7.

Postmaster-General's Report as to the Rate of Composition, &c.

12 APPENDIX to FIFTH REPORT of the COMMISSIONERS appointed to

No. 7.

Postmaster-General's Report as to the Rate of Composition, &c.

to the rate of composition which should be taken from the proprietors of certain unstamped mercantile publications, formerly sent under the privilege of the Clerks of the Roads, for their conveyance by post; and, in reminding your Lordships of the subject, I beg more particularly to advert to my predecessor's Report, dated 9th February, 1835, to which I am not aware that I have anything to add.

I have the honour to be, my Lords,
Your Lordships' most obedient humble servant,
LICHFIELD.

No. 8.

Post-office Return of the Names of all Periodicals forwarded by Post under 4 & 5 Will. IV. c. 44.

No. 8.

A RETURN of the Names of all Periodicals which have been forwarded by Post at a certain Annual Rate under the Authority of the Act 4 & 5 Wm. IV. c. 44; also the Sum for which the Postmaster-General has contracted for the Conveyance of each of these Periodicals, and the Total Amount received for their Conveyance, from the 5th October, 1834, up to the 5th October, 1835.

Name of Periodical.	Sum for which the Postmaster-General has contracted for Conveyance of each.	Amount Received for Conveyance, from 5th Oct., 1834 to 5th Oct., 1835.			Amount Received for Conveyance, from 5th April, 1834 to 5th Oct., 1834.			Amount Remaining Due to the 5th Oct. 1835, at the Rate of Composition fixed by the Postmaster-General.		
		£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
PUBLISHED IN LONDON.										
Daily Statement of Packets and London Shipping and Commercial List	750 0 0 per Ann.	750	0	0	375	0	0
Custom-house Bills of Entry	1 1 0 per Ann. for each List	Nil.			21	10	6	37	5	6
Lloyd's List of Shipping	0 15 0 ditto	..			60	3	9	134	11	3
Nicholson's Price Current	0 15 0 ditto	..			Nil.			94	17	6
Wettenhall's Course of Exchange	0 15 0 ditto	..			30	3	9	66	7	6
Sound List	0 15 0 ditto	6	3	0	12	18	9	16	10	0
Prince's Price Current	0 10 6 ditto	Nil.			Nil.			102	7	5½
Mercantile ditto	0 10 6 ditto	7	1	9	14	11	4½	21	0	0
SCOTLAND.										
Clyde Commercial List	1 1 0 ditto*	Nil.			Nil.			233	2	0
Leith ditto	0 15 0 ditto			35	15	0
IRELAND.										
Dublin List of Imports and Exports	1 1 0 ditto	9	3	9	5	15	6	3	3	0
Waterford Shipping List	1 1 0 ditto	Nil.			Nil.			65	9	9
Limerick List of Imports and Exports	0 10 6 ditto	9	14	1	6	5	11	3	8	4
Cork ditto	0 10 6 ditto	11	0	5	8	8	0	3	16	1
Belfast Mercantile Register	0 10 6 ditto	Nil.			Nil.			154	6	11
Total		793	3	0	534	17	6½	972	0	3½

* In the Return made to the late Commission of Inquiry in March last this was stated at 15s. per annum, owing to an error in the Return from Edinburgh as to the days of publication, subsequently discovered here.

The Cove Day Note and Dublin Law Recorder, which appear in the Return of March last, alluded to above, are not included here, there being no charge made for them; since that Return was sent in Mr. Godby has explained that the former is only a Manuscript Paper not now sent through the Post Office, and that the latter is only occasionally forwarded by post about 20 times in the year.

The total amount payable to the Revenue upon the existing Rates of Composition for the year ended the 5th October 1835, is

London Publications (exclusive of Packet and Shipping List) £414 4 10
Scotland ditto 177 17 0
Ireland ditto 180 11 7

Total £772 13 5

General Post-office,
14th January, 1836.

(Signed) G. H. FREELING.

No. 9.

Post-office (Dublin) Return of the Annual Average Number of List of Imports & Exports transmitted.

No. 9.

A RETURN showing the Average Number of the Dublin List of Imports and Exports Annually transmitted by Post, when sent under the Privilege of the Clerks of Roads.

Number sent of each Publication.	Total Number Annually.
11	3,443

Inland Office, Dublin,
24th July, 1835.

No. 10.

No. 10.

RETURN of the Average Number of Dublin List of Imports and Exports sent Weekly, with the Present Rate of Charge, and the Charge of the Clerk of the Roads for Transmission when sent under their Privilege.

Post-office Return of Dublin List of Imports & Exports, with the present Rate of Charge.

DUBLIN LIST OF IMPORTS AND EXPORTS.

Charges made under the 4 and 5 Wm. IV. c. 44.

£1. 1s. per List per annum.

Average Number now sent Weekly.

The Average Number forwarded by Post is 11; the Publication is daily, *i. e.*, Six Days a week; the Average Total Number of Lists forwarded from Dublin is therefore 66.

Number Annually transmitted by Post when the Postage was payable to the Clerks of the Roads.
Unknown in London; a reference has been made to Dublin for the information.

Sum received by the Clerks of the Roads for the transmission of the List, and whether the Charge was made upon each Publication separately.

The Charge of the Clerks of the Roads for Transmission was at the rate of 10s. 6d. per annum for each separate List sent under their Privilege.

General Post-office,
22d July, 1835.

(Signed) FRANCIS FREELING, Secretary.

EXAMINATIONS.

MINUTES of EVIDENCE taken before the POST-OFFICE COMMISSIONERS.

No. 11.

21st March, 1836.

Extract from the Evidence of Lord Lowther, so far as relates to the Transmission of Prices Current.

No. 11.
 Extract from the
 Evidence of
 Lord Lowther.

YOUR Lordship has directed your attention a good deal to the subject of the propriety of transmitting the Prices Current through the Post-office at a cheaper rate than is now the case?—Last year my attention was directed to that subject from the applications of several merchants of the city of London, when I acted as Commissioner to inquire into the Post-office, and my colleagues and myself instituted an inquiry into it. I was impressed with the necessity of, or rather the advantage, to commercial men, and to the country generally, from the increase of trade, and from the facility it would give to retail dealers in laying in their stores, if such a measure could be carried into effect. The subject was new to me when I commenced the inquiry, but upon the investigation I was impressed with the conviction that it would be highly beneficial to the trade of the country generally; and subsequent consideration has confirmed me in that view, as I have since been upon the Continent, and I find that the government of France encourage the circulation of Prices current at a low charge; I think it is at the charge of 1*d.* divided into a halfpenny charged for the stamp, and a halfpenny for the postage, which makes 1*d.* altogether. These are allowed to be circulated in France (handing in a paper); it is merely a commercial announcement, and it shows the difference of charge on Prices current coming here from the Continent, to that on the same thing coming from one part of the Continent to another. From Paris to Calais it is charged only 1*d.*, and from Calais to London it would be 2*s.* 4*d.*

Now confining yourself, in the first instance, to the question of the transmission of Prices current in Great Britain and Ireland, will you have the goodness to state what scheme you conceive it would be advisable to adopt?—I believe I held a different opinion from my two colleagues, which I think I expressed in the Report I presented to the Treasury from myself, and at that time I should have thought the Revenue would have gained, as well as that it would be a great convenience and benefit to the trade, if a stamp-duty had been fixed at 1*d.*; but circumstances have altered since, and newspaper stamps are proposed to be reduced to 1*d.* I stated in my Report that I would only propose 1*d.* on Prices current, in the first instance but I thought afterwards it was capable of still further reduction. I think it would certainly be necessary for the protection of the Revenue to limit Prices current to a certain weight, and I regret that the double sheet frequently used for newspapers was not foreseen when the Stamp Act was made.

That is with regard to newspapers only?—Yes, with regard to newspapers.

Will you have the goodness to state what weight you think it would be expedient to fix?—I think for the actual purposes of trade, I should propose one halfpenny stamp, the paper not to exceed half an ounce; if it exceeded half an ounce, then 1*d.*, and if it exceeded an ounce and a half, then 1½*d.*; and so I would go upon a graduated scale. This is the practice at the Post-office in France.

Now with reference to the question of the transmission of Prices current between this country and foreign countries, will you state to the Commission any suggestions that have occurred to you upon that subject?—I think it should be as low as would defray the expense of its transmission. I think not more than 1*d.* for a long postage, such as to Rotterdam or Hamburg. I think that both there and in the continental market there is an appetite for Prices current; for instance, the prices of wine at Bordeaux are very desirable at this market. A considerable number of those lists would be sent from Bordeaux to this country if they could be sent at a small postage.

In point of fact, at present, does an English Price current pay no more in going through France for postage than a Price current printed in France?—I am not aware whether it does or not. I never saw an English Price current in France. I saw the French Prices current in all the coffee-houses, in my visit, all through the south of France. Upon the subject of foreign Prices current—last year I had the greatest number of complaints as to Prices current coming from Canton, in China, for the tea merchants here. I think that is one [*handing in a paper*]; it is charged 1*s.* 7*d.*, coming as a ship letter from Canton. There is another sent as a newspaper; [*producing another paper*] that is charged 4*s.* 9*d.* I believe the Postmaster-General diminished the rate of postage afterwards upon several complaints being made.

Would you suggest that the Prices current should be put on a different footing from ship letters, or would you reduce ship letters equally with Prices current?—It is a different branch totally; it is of importance that the greatest facility should be given for the transmission of information upon matters of trade, where there is no private communication. There are five or six places in different parts of the world, great commercial cities, such as New York and Petersburg, and Canton, where merchants and extensive retail dealers wish to be informed of the prices of the articles in those cities from whence the produce comes. I think it is very probable the transmission of Prices current would swell the amount of the delivery from the Post-office very much. The Post-office objected last year, at least Mr. Johnson, when he was

examined here, and Mr. Critchett, objected to it on account of the labour it would cast upon the office; but when I look at the quantity of letters and papers that go through the Post-office at Paris, as compared with those through the Post-office in London, it is comparatively small. Mr. Piron told me there were 100,000 printed papers of different descriptions went out of Paris every day, and they worked seven days in the week. He has published a book upon post-office regulations which has confirmed the statement he made to me. There are between 40,000 and 50,000 letters, which makes the business of the French Post-office very great.

Would you let the Prices current go free of postage, having a stamp, or would you propose to make them pay a slight postage going out to the West Indies, and other parts?—I would have them have a stamp, and go free.

Those that go out you propose to let go with a stamp, and those that come in by paying a slight sum for postage?—Yes. The limitation I should recommend upon the transmission of Prices Current would be to guard against their being made the vehicle for advertisements. Strict rules should be laid down that they should contain nothing but the names of the articles to be sold, and their prices, and that the names and residences of the sellers should be strictly excluded. I only make this suggestion as the commencement of a new system, and which might be extended afterwards. I conceive that Prices Current coming within the limits of half an ounce—they being constantly in the habit of printing the same heading, only merely with the alteration of price—might be sold for a penny, even with a half-penny stamp.

No. 12.

28th March, 1835.

Mr. James Cook was called in and examined as follows:

What is your business?—That of a produce broker, connected with the India and China, West India, and American trades. I am a partner in the firm of Trueman and Cook.

Are you generally acquainted with the trade of London?—Very much so.

Are you generally acquainted with the Prices current and news lists?—Yes.

Does it appear to you that if there were more facility given for their transmission by mail that their number would very much increase?—Yes, considerably.

Are there lists published for each separate trade?—Yes.

Would those lists be sent to the country more extensively if they were allowed to go by post at a small charge?—Yes they would increase; I know a firm, which now publishes 800 Prices current a quarter, (equal to 3,200, for the year,) that would print 2,000 per month, making 24,000 annually, if the charge was moderate. The postage upon the 3,200 has amounted to £147, whereas the 24,000, if only 2d. for the stamp, and 1d. for the delivery was charged, would yield £300.

How often does this come out?—I said quarterly.

Do you know how these Prices current are sent now?—Yes they are forwarded through the Post-office, but I am aware Prices current, to a large extent, are conveyed in parcels by the mails, and other coaches, and are delivered by agents in the different towns, by which the Government is deprived of the postage.

Then they send them not directed, but trusting to their agent in the country to deliver them according to his list?—Yes.

With respect to Prices current of stock and shares, and the market price of other articles such as corn, do you conceive that they might have the same extension of sale?—With respect to Prices current of corn, shares, stocks, public funds &c., I think great publicity is already given through the newspapers, but similar intelligence relating to prices of produce, is not so furnished; The Times, Morning Herald, Morning Post, and Morning Chronicle, give little or no information as to the state of the Colonial markets.

Have the dealers in the country towns, or in the manufacturing towns, much desire to know the state of the London markets as to the colonial produce?—There is an increasing desire on the part of the people, in the country, to obtain the earliest and best information.

Is there an increasing desire for Prices current spreading through the country?—Yes, I should say that information widely disseminated is very desirable, but I am aware, that many of our large traders feel the inconvenience of it. In almost all trades there are "middle men," technically called "dealers," who buy from the importers, and sell to the retailers, whose business again, it is to resell to the consumer. Many of the large retailers have been getting rich, and instead of going to the wholesale dealer, apply direct to the importer, through the agency of their brokers, thereby gaining the intermediate profit. Intermediate dealing has very much fallen off in all trades, particularly in the sugar, tea, and dry-saltry departments, and the effect of allowing price currents to be circulated at a moderate charge would be a benefit to the shopkeeper, for he would then be put in possession of regular information, which is now in some measure withheld by the expense of postage. Throughout the country there are still dealers engaged in trade, who would not hail the measure as any boon to them, for the tendency of it would be to destroy in a great measure their trade, by giving too much publicity to the state of the markets.

Have you any notion to what extent the circulation of Prices current would go, assuming that there was to be a moderate charge of postage upon them?—My calculation is, that the Post-office would have a yearly increase of about three millions of circulars of Prices current, by which the Government would get a larger revenue than they do at present, equal to £40,000.

No. 11.

Extract from Lord Lowther's Evidence, March 21, 1836.

Examinations.

No. 12.

Mr. James Cook.
28th March, 1835.

Examinations.

No. 12.

Mr. James Cook.
28th March, 1835.

What is the average cost of a Price current that is published once a week?—It varies: there is a difficulty in answering the question. At Liverpool a circular is published jointly by about twenty brokers, they agree upon one form, and have their names attached to it, detailing the weekly transactions in the market. I receive one every *Monday*.

What do you pay for it?—I pay for it merely as a letter, viz. 11d., postage.

You do not purchase it?—No, it is not the business of commission agents to charge for Prices current; their object in publishing is to give publicity, and to get business thereby.

Are those what you call news letters?—We call them Prices current: most of those which circulate in the country are published by commission agents, brokers and others, and they charge nothing for them. They are more to be depended upon as coming from practical people.

Is there not a Price current published by a man of the name of Price?—Yes, and others by Finlayson, &c.

What is the price of them?—I think the charge is £1. 1s. a quarter, but the circulation of them through the Post-office is not large.

Assuming "Price's Price current" to be of a reasonable weight, under half an ounce, if that list could be circulated at twopence is it your opinion that a great number of them would be transmitted through the post?—There would be more sent, but the great increase of circulation would consist of Prices current, made out by the broker.

[A paper was shewn to the witness.]

What should you call that paper?—It is published by a foreign merchant for his customers on the Continent, but I do not conceive that the question now put applies to this Inquiry, if it be confined to the United Kingdom,

Have you sufficiently considered the distinction between news letters written by brokers and commission agents after the market and printed lists, such as Wettenhall's, with reference to the difficulty there would be in distinguishing between the two?—There would be no difficulty in distinguishing the one from the other. I now receive a printed circular and Price current by the post, in the shape of a letter sealed, and am charged postage, but in the event of their being allowed to circulate at a moderate rate they should be folded like a newspaper.

That would be a saving of expense in postage to the broker, but would it be a general convenience to the public?—It is no saving of expense to the broker when he transmits the letter to his correspondent, and his correspondent pays the postage, but it is an accommodation to the retail dealer in the country, inasmuch as he gets information which otherwise might be withheld by the expense of postage. The Price current informs him what has been passing, and he is enabled to direct his purchases accordingly.

As a matter of necessity for your business you now receive a letter from Liverpool for which you pay 11d.—if you received that at 3d. the revenue would lose the difference between the 11d. and 3d. but if that sort of letter was to go at a diminished postage would they increase very much in number?—I have no question but there would be a great increase to the Revenue, much larger than would be generally expected.

If these Prices current are only published privately, how would the small dealer be enabled to derive an advantage?—The retail shopkeeper is injured by too heavy a postage, for if A, a commission agent, communicates with B, a retailer in the country, and if the postage is 11d., A knows full well that B dislikes to pay so heavy a charge,—but if B is only moderately charged, he will be glad to receive a Price current, which is now in some degree withheld. The advantage of information to B, and to all in his situation, is important, for he will observe, by the Price current and printed circular, that he has paid the wholesale dealer 60s. per cwt. for his sugar, whereas it could have been purchased in the market through a different channel at 57s.

Suppose the case of a man in a country town who wants to know the price at Liverpool, how can he know it from a Price current, unless it is sent?—Such is the rivalry in trade, that if he be a man of any credit or character, the commission agent is almost sure to find him out, and send him a Price current, either direct, or through the intervention of a traveller.

If a grocer in a country town wrote to him saying, "I shall be glad to have a Price current regularly," would he send it to him?—It would be conveyed to him probably without the necessity of an application.

Suppose a grocer living at Guildford or Farnham,—what means has he of ascertaining the real price of sugar, if he wants to lay in his stock for three months forward?—I have before explained, that it is the business of the agent to trace out the buyer in the country, and to send him a Price current, free of charge, in order to induce him to buy sugar at the market price. The agent gets a commission for his trouble, and don't count the cost of a Price current.

Can you say how he gets it?—I think he gets it by parcel.

How often is "Price's Price current" published?—Weekly.

Are there any Prices current published more than once a week?—There are Prices current published almost every day, particularly after large public sales. At the termination of an indigo sale for instance, I forward Prices current to Leeds, Liverpool, &c.

When you send such a letter to Leeds to your correspondent there, is that Price current re-printed, or re-lithographed, or re-written by him, and sent about to his customers there?—No, he does not do that; but if I were permitted to circulate Prices current at a low rate of postage, I should then try to extend my country business, and, consequently, give information to *all* the buyers of indigo in Leeds, Manchester, and elsewhere.

Should you send any Prices current to America?—No, but the merchants would.

You have not an extensive correspondence with America?—I have not.

Or with Europe?—Not to any extent.

Can you state whether there would be many Prices current likely to be sent abroad, if they could be transmitted at about the same charge as they would be circulated for in England?—To a very considerable extent.

Do you suppose that there would be any great demand in America for Prices current published in England, if they were transmitted at a low rate of postage?—Yes, there can be no question about it.

And to South America?—Yes.

Are you aware whether any one letter goes, and that the London prices are then re-printed at New York, or any other large towns?—My impression is, that most of the American houses in Liverpool and London, have agents in America, and that such agents in America, re-print the letters in the same way as foreign European houses transmit their information to the Continent.

Do you suppose that the original Prices current would go from this country, if there were not such a heavy charge upon them?—I think they would.

Do you know whether Prices current are sent to Hamburg or Genoa?—I think that Prices current are reprinted on the Continent.

A Hamburgh Price current was shewn to the witness.

Have you any means of judging whether, if letters could be sent in that form, they would go for circulation on the Continent?—That depends on the charge for printing; if the expense be less on the Continent than in England, they would probably be re-printed. There are however cases, where the foreign merchant prints Prices current in this country in the foreign languages, to a very large extent, and forwards them by the steamer to his agents on the Continent to be circulated. A moderate charge of postage, however, would no doubt obviate this.

Do you take in the Price current of Paris?—Yes, the Journal de Commerce.

How do you get it?—Through the foreign newspaper office.

Do you think there should be any distinction as to the price paid for news, letters, and Prices current between our own colonies and foreign countries?—I think no distinction should be made: the Continental trade has become exceedingly valuable of late years; out of 240 millions of pounds of cotton made into yarn last year, only one-fourth was retained for the consumption of the United Kingdom; the remainder was exported to foreign parts, the largest quantity by far being shipped to Belgium and Holland, the Hanse towns, Trieste, and Venice, Turkey, and the Levant, &c.

Is the high rate of postage, generally, in England, felt as a burthen upon the trade?—I think it bears heavily on the trade and commerce of this country. In the United States of America Prices current are allowed to pass through the Post-office free of charge.

Have you any means of judging between the scale of the postage of these countries and other countries?—I have no scale, but the charge in England is much larger than in any other part of Europe.

No. 13.

1st April, 1835.

Mr. Charles Edmonds, was called in and examined, as follows.

Where do you live?—No. 9, Change Alley, Cornhill.

What is your business, Mr. Edmonds?—A Canal Dock, and Stock Broker, and Broker of shares in general.

Are you concerned in any Prices current?—Yes.

Which are they?—It is Edmonds's prices of shares, 9, Change Alley, Cornhill.

Have you an extensive circulation of that?—I have.

In town, or country?—Both in town and country.

What is your mode of circulating in the country?—By post.

What postage do you pay?—I pay the usual postage, as for letters; and if I write to a friend in the country, I avail myself by writing on the list, and then it goes as a single sheet.

Had you ever any agreement with any of the clerks of the roads in the Post-office, to circulate these Prices current at a diminished price?—No; when people come from the country, they are directed to call upon me for a list, and some of my friends I send to weekly; they don't mind the expense of postage, and some don't like to pay the postage every week. I send to some once a fortnight, to others, once every three weeks, and to others once a month, and to others every three months and six months, some every twelve months.

Did you ever endeavour to negotiate with the clerks of the roads at the General Post-office to circulate these lists at a diminished rate of postage?—No, but I have frequently sent my printer to the Stamp Office, to know whether they would allow me to have them stamped, that they might go free of postage.

Are you aware that it was among the privileges of the clerks of the roads, previously to July last, that they were permitted, as a portion of their salary, to circulate newspapers abroad at a diminished rate of postage?—I was not aware of it.

If these papers could be circulated at twopence postage, either by stamping or postage, should you get an increased number of subscribers at three halfpence or twopence?—Yes, it would increase them to three or four times the quantity.

What is the present amount of circulation?—From four to five hundred a-week.

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Examinations.

No. 12.

Mr. James Cook.
28th March, 1835.

No. 13.

Mr. C. Edmonds.
1st April, 1835.

Examinations.
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No. 13.
Mr. C. Edmunds.
1st April, 1835.

And you are of opinion that if there were a diminished postage, it would increase three or four times the amount?—Yes.

But do you conceive it would be the preferable mode to a three-halfpenny stamp, or two-penny stamp, or three halfpence, or twopence postage, limiting it as I suppose this would be to half an ounce?—I should think the postage would be the most preferable; the reason I think it would be most preferable to me is, that I need not trouble myself about the number I publish once a-week. I should not trouble myself about the number to be stamped. When there is a great change of property there is a greater want of these circulars.

Do you think, if you could, by circulating them at a cheaper rate, this number would double or quadruple?—At least quadruple, because there are so many people interested in the prices, that they are anxious to know how things stand every week, and, as they tell me, they cannot get a correct statement except from me, because I am more particularly engaged in the buying and selling: there are other circulars, but then the parties are not engaged in buying and selling; they don't know the prices so well as I do myself.

Do you think if you had a facility of circulation, that you could afford to publish twice a-week?—There are many of my friends who wish me to publish twice a-week.

Wettenhall's List is published twice a week, is it not?—Yes.

This is much the same?—My list is more particularly for shares, and for the English stocks and Foreign stocks.

Has Wettenhall's a considerable circulation?—Yes, but it would be more considerable, if it could be done cheaper; at the present time there are many people deeply interested in this property; the more my list is circulated, certainly it would tend rather to improve the stamp-revenue, for I suppose I directly or indirectly pay in the things I buy and sell, to the amount of from fifteen to twenty thousand pounds a-year to Government, for stamps.

As rail roads, gas companies, canal shares, joint-stock banks, and other property of joint-stock companies increase, the greater would be the appetite and desire to have Prices current circulated?—Yes, so that there is more doing in that sort of property than there has been for a considerable time.

Are you aware how many Prices current there are of this description published in London?—No my Lord, I am not; but then the numbers would greatly increase if there were a facility given.

Do you think twopence would be a prohibitory price to have them circulated?—No.

They would bear that charge?—They would bear that charge; I should myself cheerfully pay it, because I send to many of the news rooms and pay the postage; some of my friends who live in market towns, say, "Edmonds, there is the Bradford news room, if you were to send a list I dare say it would do you some good round the table, as we wish to see it," and I cheerfully pay the postage because it does me good.

And brings to you business as a broker?—Yes, and of course it would materially benefit the Government.

Either as a stamp duty or as a postage?—Yes; some of the canal shares are very heavy, such as the Trent and Mersey; I have sold three to one gentleman, and two to another. Now the stamp duty on each of those transactions, was twelve pounds.

Do you send any of your papers of prices of shares abroad?—People are directed from France to call upon me, and some of my friends say, "Edmonds, I am going over to France or other places, give me a few of your lists, it would be quite a sight for them in France; and there are people also in France who are interested in property contained in your list."

Any at Hamburg? Do you ever send any of your lists to Hamburg?—Yes, to all parts; people from all parts, even to Russia.

Have you any reason to think that if there were a small postage abroad, the same as you pay for inland postage of two-pence in England, that they could be landed on the Continent for twopence, that then you would have any increased demand for your share lists?—I think a considerable demand. It is astonishing the quantity of circulars, and Prices current, that go to and fro.

How do they go?—They generally go by private hands.

Put up in rolls and not directed?—Yes, and they also send lists to their booksellers in Paternoster-row, and then they put them up in a parcel, and many people in the country say I am liable, and therefore I shall not do it in future.

You are not liable for sending a parcel by the coach of this sort; supposing you were to send a hundred of these not directed, and made up in a parcel, you are not liable to a penalty?—No I am not, but there are a number of people who live in the country who have books sent monthly, and they direct their booksellers to call at Edmonds's in Change Alley, for one of his lists to be sent in their parcels.

Do you distribute these gratis?—Yes, I do it to promote my own benefit, that of making myself known. I have done it for many years, and I was the first who did it.

Do you send any to America?—Yes.

Then the result of your opinion is, that, from the increased number of speculations or works in which capital is embarked, under the different heads contained in your Prices current, there is a great appetite in the public to see the prices of the shares, and that, if such facility is afforded in circulating a paper of this size or dimensions (about half an ounce), that you could sell and distribute a very greatly increased number?—Yes; because there are a number of my friends who are deeply interested: it is not only curiosity, but they are deeply interested. Their property being embarked in these sorts of things, they are of course extremely anxious to know what the prices and fluctuations in them are, and therefore it tends very much to their comfort in every respect. A friend of mine says, "I don't like to pay the postage every week, but you may send to me once a-fortnight." Whereas, if it were

not for the expense of postage, he would have them sent every week, because there is a great alteration in this sort of property, owing to there being an increasing demand, or a decreasing demand. There are considerable fluctuations occasionally; and I am confident that it would materially benefit the stamp duties. What I mean by that is, that it would facilitate in this way the transfer of property contained in those lists; that I should find more buyers and sellers, and consequently, the Government would be benefited by the *ad valorem* duty on those transactions; because when people see things up, they send me orders to sell, and then there would be a stamp duty to Government on the transaction; and if they don't see my list for two or three months, then they are not aware that there is any change.

Examinations.
No. 13.
Mr C. Edmonds.
1st April, 1835.

No. 14.

4th April, 1835.

Mr. G. M. V. Dadelszen was called in and examined, as follows:

You are a merchant in the city?—A general merchant, chiefly in foreign commission business. We receive orders from the continent, ship the goods, and get our returns.

Whether articles of British manufacture or colonial produce?—Yes; anything that they wish to have, manufactured or colonial; chiefly colonial. We have an establishment in Scotland, and another at Liverpool.

Have you a large correspondence?—Yes, a very large correspondence. I believe I get as many foreign letters as any one, and send as many away.

What is your mode of communicating to the Continent the prices of the different articles?—The regular way of doing this is, we write our letter in the morning, and in the course of the day, at two o'clock, we make a statement of the market, send the letter to the printer, and he prints a statement of the market on the other side of the letter. These letters are sent to the Post-office, and the same way we have a great many made up without the letters, which we send to our agents on the Continent, who divide them amongst our friends, or we send them direct to them. It is generally requested that if there is any alteration in the market, we shall send them a circular.

Is that every day?—Twice every week, on Tuesdays and Fridays; and to France more frequently.

Do you forward any of the London Prices current?—Yes; we send three of them every post day to our different agents.

To what countries?—To Hamburg, Prussia, and the Mediterranean.

You send those to the houses of your agents?—Yes.

Do they circulate them?—No; they keep these Prices current for themselves, and give the information to our friends.

Is a Price current paid for as a letter?—Yes; but we send a trade list, or London Price current, to our different agents twice a-week. At times we are obliged to cut off a piece, or they would charge it as a 6s. 8d. letter, so that it is actually disfigured: if the paper is thin, and does not weigh an ounce, it passes for a single letter, and only pays 1s. 8d. postage.

What is this letter now shown to you?—This is the sort of letter we write, informing our correspondents that we have purchased so and so; then we send them to the printer to print the prices upon it, and we are obliged to keep that within the weight, to be only 1s. 8d. postage.

Assuming that the postage were more moderate, that you could send trade lists in this form to the Continent at 2d., or 2½d. a-piece, would the number very much increase?—I have no doubt it would increase very considerably.

Would it not at the same time very much diminish the number of letters?—I do not think it could, for we should not be allowed to send letters as well. The Post-office ought to take care that those letters did not go by the same conveyance. Certainly, it might lead to a good deal of fraud, but that must be prevented.

Do you think five or ten Prices current would go where one letter goes now, if you could forward them at a lower price?—I have no doubt of it.

Do you think that would increase correspondence?—Certainly.

Do you take in the Hamburg Price current?—Similar ones are sent to us every post day.

Have you reason to believe that if the Prices current could go from this country at a rate of postage not exceeding 2d., there would be a great increase?—Yes, I certainly would recommend even 1d. in preference to 2d., on the principle of its giving a stimulus to commerce.

Do you conceive at 1d. on the Price current, the increased number of their circulation would bring as much as if they were charged 2d.?—Yes; I think that the 2d. would be a temptation to a merchant to send them in another way, if an opportunity offered, but 1d. would not.

Is it not your opinion that the circulation of Prices current at 1d. would decrease the number of letters, so as to affect the revenue?—No, it is not.

You think that the free circulation of Prices current would occasion further correspondence?—Yes, now if we send our circulars to the Continent every day, twenty or thirty come back upon us. They will not accept of them unless they are postage free on the Continent. I believe it is the practice to charge only 1d. if there is a cover round it.

Do you believe that a free circulation of information would act as a stimulus to trade?—I have no doubt about it, it would do a great deal of good.

No. 14.
Mr. G. M. V. Dadelszen.
4th April, 1835.

Examinations.
 No. 14.
 Mr. G. M. V. Daelzen.
 4th April, 1835.

You think that it would increase transactions?—Yes, if the manufacturer in the country knew where to get more for his goods, he would send his goods there; now he is in a state of ignorance.

You are acquainted with the practices of the Post-offices in Germany?—I am.

Do the Post-offices in Germany only demand a very moderate charge for the circulation of the Prices current?—It is only about a penny from Berlin to Hamburg, just for the trouble of the man delivering them.

Do you know the charge from Vienna to Hamburg?—I am not able to state that precisely, but I believe it is only the trouble of the man carrying them about; it is not for the postage.

Have you any means of estimating the number of Prices current printed at Hamburg or Amsterdam?—They are enormous; great houses have hundreds every day, I have no doubt; I can only say for our own business, we print from 80 to 100 every foreign post night.

Who is the house you correspond with in Hamburg?—Messrs. J. H. and G. F. Baur, C. H. Donner, and G. W. Arnemann and Son, in Altona, &c.

Do they circulate Prices current to a large extent?—Yes, I have no doubt, 200 each, every day.

Can you form an opinion as it regards England whether there is a desire for Prices current?—Yes, if they can get them cheap; every person likes information if they can get it at a moderate rate; a person sent me some circulars to say that his son had become partner, and requested me to send them to Liverpool and Manchester; he paid eightpence postage to Hamburg, and when the parcel came here it was £1. 11s. 8d.; that man will never send any more circulars; they had a slip of paper round them. I would say that sending circulars in the way I have proposed could certainly lead to a great deal of fraud, but it would be very easily prevented; charge them low but do not allow them to be under cover, but let them be left so open at both ends that the Post-office can see whether there is any writing upon them, with a heavy fine in case of any attempt to deceive the Post-office.

Have you any correspondence with America?—No, very little; our correspondence is chiefly to Hamburg and Holland. I believe the postage does not derive any benefit by their having left off ship letters; they used to charge us half the postage only by the steamers or by ship, notwithstanding the letters went to the Post-office. It was to us a great advantage and used to save me about £400 a-year.

Have you communication with France?—Yes, in France, I believe, printed statements are forwarded but for a trifling charge, say about 1d., but such papers pay a trifling stamp duty which, I believe, has nothing to do with the Post-office. I believe the postage altogether is less in France.

The result of your opinion is, that both going and coming to England, if there were a diminished rate of postage, the revenue would not lose in the end?—No; if means could be found to prevent fraud, the circulation of Prices current at the rate of 1d. would not diminish the income of the Post-office. I believe that they do not now get £1,000 in the course of the year for circulars, but that circulars are sent to a very large extent by private means I have no doubt.

Do you receive Prices current from Glasgow and Liverpool?—Yes; I believe that many are sent by coach now which would be sent by post if they could be received at a small postage.

If there were but a small difference, the Post-office communication would be preferred by the merchants?—Decidedly.

Are the letters ever reprinted at Hamburg?—If a merchant were to find any difficulty in getting them off, he might send one and have it lithographed in Hamburg.

If one Price current were sent, would it be cheaper to have it printed or lithographed in Hamburg?—Certainly, that is done every day; some houses have it done in Hamburg, and the Post-office lose it altogether.

If the rate of postage were cheaper, you think it would be done here?—Yes; I do not think a merchant would dream of asking a friend to take a parcel if it was only a penny, but would send it through the Post-office. We should send copies to each of our agents to places in Germany (of whom we have ten), and they would present them regularly.

No. 15.

28th March, 1835.

Mr. Henry Burgess was called in and examined, as follows:

Examinations.
 No. 15.
 Mr. Henry Burgess.
 28th March, 1835.

You are agent to several country bankers?—I am the secretary to the Committee of Country Bankers.

Does that Committee of Country Bankers print and circulate a Price current?—No; there is a paper called 'A Circular to Bankers,' which is my own property; but that is entirely a private concern, though taken pretty generally by the country bankers.

Have you a copy of it with you?—No; I have not.

Does it give figures only, or are there any comments?—There are two pages of figures and six of comments, on such matters as are of interest to bankers. It occasionally also contains reports of trials bearing upon the banking and commercial interests, extracts of Acts of Parliament, lists of bankrupts, and dissolutions of partnerships.

By what means is that circulated?—By the post, paying the stamp as a newspaper.

What is the amount of the stamp?—Fourpence.

What is the size of it?—It is eight pages, of quarto size.

Are you pretty generally acquainted with the trade of London?—Yes; but more with that of the country. I lived in Yorkshire many years, and at Leicester.

Examinations
 —
 No. 15.
 Mr. Henry Burgess.
 28th March, 1835.

Does it appear to you that it would be beneficial to trade if Prices current could be circulated freely at a small charge, either of postage, or at a lower rate of stamp?—It would be a great convenience. I know many persons who now circulate their own letters at a considerable expense: perhaps one letter is written where forty or fifty circulars would be sent; and I know an instance in Liverpool, where a gentleman gets his corn circulars inserted in a newspaper after the general subscribers of the paper have been served with the number. This gentleman takes some forty or fifty, or one hundred of the newspapers to send to his particular connections; those forty or fifty papers alone containing his circulars.

Then the newspaper pays the stamp for that?—Yes.

He cannot do that for a less charge than the stamp?—Certainly not.

But if he sent letters instead of the newspapers, that would be double?—The postage would probably be 10*d.* or 11*d.*, because they are addressed to different parts of the country.

Does he pay the advertisement duty upon it?—No; it is not an advertisement.

Does it appear to you, from your communication with the country, that there is a desire for Prices current to be more generally distributed?—I know of nothing that exhibits a more decided tendency to increase than Prices current. I could quote an instance in Leeds, where a gentleman who was formerly a partner of mine, would, I have no doubt, if he could send his communications cheaply, send perhaps one hundred every market day, instead of which, perhaps he writes four or five letters every week.

What amount do you imagine a Price current would bear, without impeding its circulation, either in postage or stamp duty?—Decidedly twopence.

Would not Prices current at twopence, from the increase in the number, compensate for any loss of postage by the reduced rate?—I should think the revenue would gain by it fourfold; and therefore it would be much more than a compensation. That is my impression; but I speak only from a general view of the subject. I see there is a great tendency, in all branches of trade, to concentration. For example; wool, instead of being collected in detail at the farmers' houses, by retail dealers in the wool districts, is sent to a commissioner in Leeds, or Liverpool, or Halifax, for sale; and those commissioners want to communicate with their principals cheaply if they can. For the want of this, the principals are often induced to take long journeys to ascertain the state of their property, when perhaps a weekly communication would suffice. That is the case in wool and in corn, and in all trades connected with the leading raw materials of manufacture.

Do you think if Prices current were transmitted at a low charge, by post, that such publications would be increased in the local towns, such as Manchester and Leeds?—Immensely: more in the local towns, relatively speaking, than in London and Bristol, the old emporiums of commerce.

Are not a great many Prices current now published in London, with reference to the different trades, such as the tea trade and the sugar?—Yes; sugar, coffee, cotton, and corn, dry-salteries, and a great many other trades.

Is not their circulation very much limited to London itself?—Limited to London; except such as are sent to a distance in parcels, by coach and steam-boat.

Is it the practice to send parcels of Prices current undirected, by coach, to be distributed by an agent, according to a list which he has in his office?—Yes.

By which means the Post-office loses that charge which they would have had if they had been sent through the Post-office?—Yes; that practice exists.

Do you ever see any Prices current from abroad?—Yes; a great many.

How do they come to this country?—They come in ship letters. They are very common in Lancashire; Prices current, published even at Lima, I have seen.

Are you aware how Prices current are sent abroad?—In the way I last mentioned, in parcels, generally by vessels or steam-boats.

[*A paper was shown to the witness.*]

Do you call that a Price current or a news letter?—It is a market letter, giving a statement of the condition of the market.

Those printed upon a thin piece of paper, you think would bear a tax of twopence?—Certainly; and if sent abroad, a higher tax.

If you had to recommend a course of proceeding as to the manner in which they should pay to the public revenue, would you recommend a postage of so much a sheet, or a stamp duty, and that they should go free; which of the two would be most convenient to the trade and beneficial to the revenue?—That is rather a question for the Post-office to answer. It is a question I am not competent to answer. I do not think it is very material.

Would not there be a danger in the one course, that if they went through the Post-office with a charge of postage, they might not be received by some persons to whom they were addressed?—Yes, that is obvious; but I should imagine that no Prices current would, generally speaking, be sent but to persons who would be desirous to receive them. The senders would know whether they would be acceptable or not.

Are you aware of any of the merchants having lithographic presses in their own houses, in which they write off their letters?—Yes; I understand that there are such. I never saw any in a merchant's office.

Would it not be very inconvenient to such persons to be obliged to keep a provision of stamped paper by them?—Yes; there is no question that the interests of commerce would be better served by the other plan.

Would there be any objection to the limitation of the weight?—I think that all periodical

Examinations.
—
No. 15.
Mr. Henry Burgess.
28th March, 1835.

publications whatever, for which a small tax is levied to facilitate their transmission through the Post-office, ought to be charged according to their weight.

[A paper was shown to the witness.]

Would a Price current of that size communicate nearly all the information that was wanted?—This might do, but it would be rather confining the size too closely to limit it to that. I have seen Prices current more than double the size of that.

Would not the trade accommodate themselves to any regulations of that sort?—Yes, certainly, there would be no difficulty; the limitation of weight could be accomplished very easily, either by the space or the thickness of the paper.

Have you been abroad much?—Not much; I have not been abroad for thirty years.

You are not aware of the facilities given for the transmission of Prices current abroad?—No; I understand that they are much greater than in England.

Are you aware whether it is the practice of any of the publishers of the Prices current to send the parcels to the great towns by coach, and there have them distributed?—I believe it is with several of them.

Do you think that the frequent sight of Prices current would stimulate persons to buy, and so lead to consumption?—All such facilities certainly tend to increase commercial dealings.

Do you think it would be advantageous to have a general Price current, or a variety of Prices current, specifying the prices, and the particular qualities of different articles; for example, in the tea trade there are a hundred different sorts of tea and their prices?—Every trade would have its own Prices current, for they are generally issued by brokers in their respective trades, who do it for the purpose of getting commissions in their business.

Have you any communication that you wish to make respecting the Post-office department?—May I take the liberty of suggesting a regulation which I know would be exceedingly agreeable to the country bankers, and it would be only carrying forward a plan which was adopted some years ago. At present, there is an Act passed 12th April 1824, which empowers bankers to have their country notes, when paid in London, returned through the Post-office at one-fourth the usual postage charge. It recites, that "Packets containing re-issuable cash notes only, issued by country bankers under annual licence, may be received at the General Post-office in London, and sent back, after the notes have been paid by the agent in London, at rates of postage not exceeding one-fourth part of the rates and duties of postage by law established." Now that has been found an exceedingly convenient Act of Parliament, enabling the country bankers to get their notes down without risk, through the Post-office, instead of trusting their notes to parcels in coaches which are often robbed, or by private individuals, who sometimes forget to deliver them punctually; and, in consequence of the convenience felt by them from this Act, I know a great many country bankers would desire to have the same facility extended to the transmission of notes between country towns: for example, a banker at Bury St. Edmond's would like to transmit his notes to Huntingdon, I mean the local notes issued at, payable only at Huntingdon; he would like to have an opportunity of transmitting by post, the notes he receives of any local bank within fifty or a hundred miles. Therefore if your Lordships would think it right to suggest that the old Act of Parliament should be extended to the cross posts, it would be a great convenience to bankers.

Would you think it safe that the notes should be transmitted in that way, if the mail were only to be carried by a boy on horse-back, or a man in a gig during the night?—Wherever the King's mail goes, whether by a gig, or by a horse, or by a boy, the bankers would be glad to send their notes by it, at the prescribed rate of one-fourth the customary postage rate.

Do the Post-office ensure the delivery of the parcel?—They never ensure anything; they never make good any loss.

Then what is the use of sending it by the post, at the expense of one-fourth the postage?—The supposed security of the post compared with the insecurity of sending by private individuals.

Is greater care taken of the letter in consequence of your paying four times the postage?—I must have been in error, or have been mistaken, if I mentioned a quadruple postage. The letters containing the notes are put into the mail bag and sealed by the postmaster; it is a letter paying one-fourth postage.

If the Post-office are not responsible, what advantage has the banker in paying four times the amount, if he does not get any more additional security?—There are several advantages which it would give to country bankers. In the first place the country banker would have the security of the King's mail in transmitting his notes. I think that such a regulation permitting bankers to send their notes payable at each other's offices, only, through the post at a reasonable postage, would very much increase the revenue, and the present mode of getting those notes transmitted to the place where they are payable, is both inconvenient and riskful; a banker is obliged to keep the notes of another country banker a week or ten days, because he has no person that he can trust his property to, going to the particular place where only the notes are payable and another risk is sending by private persons; that which would be better conveyed by the King's mail. This is a subject that has been pressed upon my attention by several bankers, and I have been desired to mention it if I had any opportunity of doing so.

No. 16.

1st April, 1835.

Mr. John Teesdale was called in, and examined as follows :

Where do you live?—In Oxford-court, Cannon-street, in the city.

In what business are you?—I am a tea agent, my Lord.

By being a tea agent, do you mean that you purchase teas for correspondents in the country?—I do, my Lord.

Do you publish any list or paper of the prices of teas and their qualities?—I publish the character and the value of the tea coming forward for sale, and after the sale I give them the result of the sales, with the prices the teas have sold for, so that twice a quarter I send them circulars.

Do you circulate any considerable number?—About four hundred of each, quarterly. I circulate them by subscription. I charge a guinea a-year for them.

In what way are they sent to the subscribers in the country?—I send about fifty of each a quarter by the general post.

What do they weigh?—These weigh very near an ounce, not quite. I send about fifty of each by the twopenny post into the neighbourhood of London; then, out of those four hundred, there are one hundred circulated in London twice a-quarter by boys, and the remainder in coach parcels.

If by printing them upon thinner paper, and thereby reducing their weight, and they could be circulated at two-pence each, would you have an increased demand?—The increase in my case would depend upon the number of subscribers I should get from the supposed merit of it; but still their being delivered at a less expense would increase the circulation, though I do not think upon reflection it would increase above a hundred a-quarter more, because the greater proportion are sent by coach parcels. But I should, in addition to what I now charge a guinea a year for, give away a hundred or two hundred a-quarter more.

Is there any Price current published solely for the tea trade?—Yes; a person of the name of John Nicholson publishes a list, and there is another party, tea agents, George Moffat and Company, who also publish a list similar to mine with a larger circulation, say one thousand a quarter. There are a great many large dealers who send their quarterly circulars also, which are similar to the one you have just seen.

It is a very extensive trade in London, is it not?—It is. I dare say besides those two there are three others who circulate as many. Peake, Brothers, and Company, Sanderson and Co., and Travers and Sons, circulate at least a thousand each.

Have you any estimate of the number of circulars respecting the trade of tea that go forth from London to the country?—I was stating that there are five houses probably that circulate a thousand a-quarter each; and twelve houses, I should imagine, of about five hundred each.

Are they generally circulated by post?—I think the greater part go in coach parcels.

If they could be sent at a small postage, do you think that their numbers would increase?—Very much, undoubtedly; but it is not the wish of the large houses, I have reason to think, in our trade.

It is not their wish to circulate more?—They would rather pay as they are now doing, than that they should go for nothing.

But paying at a moderate price of twopence or threepence, how would that be?—I think it would be a good thing generally, and a great many would be circulated; they would approve of that: but they are also of opinion, and it is my opinion, that it should be paid on the part of the person who sends it.

You mean by stamp?—Either by stamp or postage, whichever should be thought proper.

The most certain mode of insuring that the person who sends it should pay for it, would be by having a stamp on it, would it not?—Yes, my Lord; one view of it is, that if it were not paid by the person who sends it, the consequence would be, that individuals would be inundated with papers that they did not want, and although the postage might be small, it would be a great expense to them.

Have you any suggestion to make as to the facility of the transmission of these papers?—I am not aware that I have. We send every quarter by the coach one hundred single circulars, and we pay twopence booking for each, and therefore we should very cheerfully pay twopence as the postage. I think it would prevent a great deal of annoyance to traders and to private gentlemen in the country, because if the information they want to send is not worth paying the twopence for, it cannot be of much importance to the parties.

No. 17.

4th April, 1835.

Mr. George Moffat was examined as follows :

You are a broker in the city?—A broker for the country buyers, but not for London; not a licensed broker for London, but acting on that principle for the country buyers.

In colonial produce generally?—In colonial produce generally, but more largely in tea than in anything else, but in all articles of the East and West India import.

What is the manner in which you circulate the Prices current?—Our manner of circulating the Prices current differs from that of most of those engaged in the same trade. We publish

Examinations.

No. 16.

Mr. John Teesdale,
1st April, 1835.

No. 17.

Mr. George Moffat,
4th April, 1835.

Examinations.

No. 17.

Mr. George Moffat,
4th April, 1836.

very minute details of the costs of tea, to which we particularly give attention; at the close of every principal auction we publish an exact list and description of the teas sold therein, which we are in the habit of circulating by post.

What do you pay for that by post?—We make a contract for our paper, so that it comes within the ounce, including the printing, consequently it is paid for only as a single letter, though so large a sheet as to be perhaps the fullest document that passes for an ounce; and instances have occurred, where, in consequence of the excess of weight, our customers have been taxed for it as a weight letter, and have rejected it in consequence; it has then gone to the dead-letter office. There are published three tea Prices current giving similar information, one by our firm and two by others; the advantage they have been to the revenue by informing the country of the cost prices, enabling the vendor to buy and sell tea at lower rates, thus increasing the consumption, and revenue derivable therefrom, will be best exemplified in the following statement, to the accuracy of which I stand pledged. Previous to the year 1823, the country buyers were ignorant of the cost prices of tea at the India House; all their knowledge was gathered from the wholesale dealers' prices to them;—the London dealers thus holding a species of monopoly, took especial care to keep the country buyers in the dark, thereby obtaining almost any price they thought proper to impose. Their gains from the trade are said to have been immense; many instances have come within our knowledge of parties having commenced in the wholesale tea trade with very limited capital, and no extraordinary share either of intelligence or experience, who in a few years amassed considerable fortunes; in fact, the tea trade, previous to 1823, had become notorious in the city as a short and rapid road to affluence; this, although individually beneficial, was nationally injurious, high prices debarring the poor from this most healthy luxury, curtailing its use in the middle classes, and severely injuring the revenue, by cramping the consumption. In 1823 a new era occurred in the tea trade; price lists of every auction were published, and circulated throughout the country; these lists were compiled with such detailed accuracy and precision, that the country dealers could immediately discover to a farthing the cost price per lb., paid to the East India Company, of every chest of tea. As might be expected, this information destroyed at once the enormous monopoly profits of the wholesale dealer;—the wealthy provincial buyers immediately employed agents to purchase for them at the India House sales, and turned their attention to supplying the smaller country shopkeepers; this produced immediate competition between them and the wholesale London dealers, by which the smaller shopkeepers obtained a full share of the advantage that this knowledge had given to the extensive provincial dealers; the result of this spread of information was a general reduction in price to the consumer, and a consequent increase in consumption, which has been steadily and rapidly progressing since the beneficial alteration in the trade occurred. We find that in 1823, the total consumption of tea was 27,600,000 lbs., and at that period the high duty on coffee (double the present rate) naturally increased the demand for tea:—in 1834 we find the duty on coffee lowered 50 per cent.; the consumption consequently more than trebled it; and with this presumed drawback upon the demand for tea, the quantity actually consumed in the United Kingdom in 1834, is 34,982,489 lbs., showing an increase of 7,400,000 lbs., nearly 30 per cent. on the quantity consumed in 1823; while the depreciation of the first cost has not exceeded 16 per cent., which, calculating the duty at 2s. per lb., is advantaging the revenue to the extent of £740,000 per annum, and materially increasing the comforts of the lower and middling classes; these benefits are mainly attributable to the widely spread and accurate information given to the country by the Prices current. I make this statement advisedly, and with a thorough conviction of its accuracy, my conclusions being drawn from 13 years' experience, a close observation of the workings of the tea trade, and an extensive acquaintance for the last seven years with the large provincial buyers, with most of whom our firm now corresponds. I do not think that all the advantages of this system have yet been developed, and am decidedly of opinion that the spreading such information more generally by rendering its transit less expensive, would be productive of benefit both to the public and the Revenue. How has the new scale of duties operated?—They have come into operation only since the last six months.

Does your circulation of this paper extend all over England and Scotland?—Yes.

What number of those circulars do you send?—About five years ago we circulated rather more than 2,000 copies quarterly; the sales were then held quarterly; our circulation has been gradually declining from 2,000 to 800 quarterly, while our correspondence is increasing.

What is the cause of that?—There are two other parties in the trade who publish similar circulars: the one a person of the name of Nicholson, who, publishing a newspaper, inserts this information, which being stamped, goes to his correspondents gratis.

Does Mr. Nicholson circulate his newspaper gratis to every one?—No: except to those engaged in the country trade; he affects to charge them for the paper, but the parties inform us that he sends it gratis as an inducement to them to employ him in business. Our own circulars have usually been sent by post, understanding that to be the law of the land, and thinking it a regulation which ought to be adopted; but there is a third party who publishes the like information, and I find his issue, though his concern is insignificant in point of business compared to ours, is about 2,000 to our 800; this discrepancy is only to be accounted for by the manner of circulation; he does not send them by post but by coach parcels to the different places.

There is a stamp on Mr. Nicholson's?—Yes; this third party to whom I refer, says, "I know your circulars are not taken in so largely as they would otherwise be, because the postage is heavy," and therefore he is induced to evade the Post-office regulations. I have petitioned the stamp office to allow ours to be stamped, but have been refused, the stamp office assigning as a reason for the refusal, that the Post-office would not pass them free if stamped, not being newspapers.

Assuming that you could circulate those at a diminished price, at twopence for half an ounce, for instance, would your number very much increase?—Instead of publishing 800 quarterly, I propose, if this boon is granted to the commerce of London, to publish 2,000, which is about the extent of my correspondence, and circulate them monthly, so that instead of publishing 3,000, I should publish 24,000 in the year. Our correspondents would gladly receive the information, but will not pay the 11d. or 1s. for it.

Would it be worth your while to pay the stamp, and to circulate them at your own expense?—It would be well worth our while to do it; it would cost us only about £300 a-year. In a calculation which I have made, I find that, upon the amount received from our own circulation, it would bring an increase to the Revenue of about 40 per cent.

You mentioned that you were generally a colonial agent, but that tea was your principal business; do you publish Prices current of sugar, or coffee, or any other articles?—That information is intended to be included if the proposed alteration be made; we purpose publishing gratis to our correspondents once a-month, giving a review of the transactions in the leading articles of colonial produce, so that it shall be a sort of general guide and standard of reference.

Those you send are entirely confined to tea?—Yes.

How do you circulate your prices of other articles, sugar, coffee, pimento, cinnamon, and so on?—By letter; we hand quarterly advices upon those articles.

If you had this free circulation of the Prices current, would it tend to diminish the number of letters?—On the contrary, I think it would occasion a vast increase; it is difficult to say to what extent, but I think there can be no question that the increase in the number of letters will be closely regulated by the increased number of Prices current circulars; for I do not presume that the benefits of the proposed alteration will be limited to such documents as our Prices current merely, but that the advantages will be extended to all papers recommending new inventions and improvements, in short, any printed documents of a limited weight, which the publishers think fit to go to the expense of stamping: such will be circulated to an immense extent, and of course in many instances there will be replies from the parties to whom they are sent.

The increase would come not from your letters which would be diminished, but from the replies which would be made?—Yes; but I am of opinion that the increased number of replies would far exceed the diminished number of letters, even in our own case, of an established correspondence.

Have you any correspondents abroad?—A few, but we have never sent circulars; we have one or two correspondents along the Mediterranean.

Do you export any tea there?—No; while the East India Company's monopoly existed, tea sold here at prices so much higher than those of the Continent, that England was excluded from those markets, which may probably command attention now.

You are a commission broker, do you buy stocks yourself?—Yes, sometimes.

Do you ever receive any Prices current from abroad?—Yes, we receive them continually from the Mediterranean houses, but the postage is so heavy we have desired not to have them.

Is that the foreign or the English postage?—That I cannot say.

Do you receive any Prices current from India or China?—Yes; and the Post-office regulations upon these are most vexatious. I have been compelled to reject Prices current from China; I was charged £1 odd for six Prices current; I rejected them, and sent one of my clerks to the Post-office; I could get no attention at first, but on my second application they returned them, on my paying a shilling for each Price current.

What is the last day on which you received a Price current from China?—By the 'Eliza Stewart' which arrived about twenty-one to thirty days since. I had none by the vessels which came in yesterday, I expect I shall have some by the 'Berwickshire' on Monday; I do not think that the Post-office insist on 4s. 9d. each Price current, but that they will usually take a less rate than they demand.

Is there any particular point to which you wish to call the attention of the Commissioners?—I mentioned that which I am satisfied has been mainly effected by the circulation of commercial information, the large increase in the consumption of tea; and I feel bound to state my conviction, from observation and inquiries I have made, that a similar increase might be effected in the consumption of many other articles, if some economical method were established, by which the venders could be put in possession of information that would enable them to go to market for the public on more favourable terms.

What is your system of communication with Liverpool—do you receive Prices current from Liverpool?—That I produce is a copy of the Price current circulated in Liverpool; there are only 1,200 of them published.

What number do you think of those could be circulated at twopence?—That the Liverpool people would be very glad to circulate 20,000. I receive that Price current by the post, and pay the postage; but many would reject the information at that charge.

Are there many persons who would pay twopence for it, if they could have it at that rate?—Yes!

Suppose there were a penny stamp, and there were a halfpenny or a penny paid for postage, would there be a very extensive circulation?—Yes, I am keeping that in view when I advance the hypothesis that there must be a tax imposed; the Government ought, in justice to themselves, to impose some small charge to be paid by the publisher, or the mail would be loaded with papers frequently of little or no benefit to trade; if the information is likely to be commercially advantageous, it will bear a tax of a penny or twopence.

It will occasion a great deal of extra weight on the mails?—Yes, but the extension of rail-

Examinations.

No. 18.
Mr. George Moffat,
4th April 1835.

roads in five years will make a great deal of difference in that respect, I apprehend; and the additional weight to each mail can scarcely exceed a few pounds.

Is there a Price current published at Bristol?—No.

Is there any at Manchester?—I cannot say.

Have you correspondents in Hull?—Yes; there is no Price current published there.

From your general knowledge of trade, do you think if these Prices current could be circulated at a moderate rate of postage, they would be printed at those large mercantile towns?—I think there can be no question of it; they would be all anxious that the stocks in their markets should be spread through the country, but the check is the charge for postage; no one will take them in at the expense of a shilling.

How often is the Liverpool Price current published?—Once a-week.

Have you letters of this sort printed at Liverpool with the prices lithographed?—There are many such, and if persons are largely engaged in cotton, they will receive them.

What is that paper before you?—This is Mr. Nicholson's paper containing precisely the same tea information as my own.

Why is this made a newspaper and the other not?—He would not be allowed to circulate it free, unless he received advertisements and put a stamp upon it. There is one point to which I would wish to call the attention of the Commissioners. It is supposed that the country is sufficiently supplied with information by the general Prices current which are printed, but I find, on inquiry, that an impression which always existed in my own mind, is confirmed, viz., that those documents are scarcely ever used. I learn from one of the most extensive news venders, that only about 2,200 copies are struck off altogether, of all the public Prices current; and the country traders do not take them because they say the information is too much generalised to be useful; we see rough quotations of tea from 2s. 10d. to 5s. 6d. a pound, but the quotations and descriptions are not given with that pointed accuracy which is observable in the Prices current of the various agency houses.

What is the class of persons of whom your correspondents consist—are they principally among the grocers, such as at Windsor and Guildford, and moderate-sized towns?—The grocers of all the market towns throughout the kingdom, both England and Scotland. On a rough calculation I made last night, I think I may very fairly say there would be an increase of revenue to the extent of £40,000 per annum, on those issuing from London; I have no question that the out-ports would each circulate Prices current extensively.

Do you take into consideration those that would come from Paris, or Hamburg, or Leghorn?—No; my information is so limited I would not give an opinion upon those. There is no doubt that in all articles of impost, the more information is circulated, the greater the consumption, bringing a corresponding increase to the Revenue: and placed as this country is at present, the least objectionable method of raising Revenue is by means of duties.

What would be the increased expense occasioned by the sorting and delivery, and so on?—Upon that I can give no detailed opinion; but, upon the present Post-office system, the increased expense can be but, trivial, while it is almost impossible to calculate the advantages which may result from the cheap circulation of commercial information: we perceive its beneficial operation in America, an earnest of how advantageously the system would work in this country. With this simple but mighty engine, how powerful an impetus may be given to our commerce, our social institutions, our public undertakings, whether national or local, improvements in harbours, roads, inland navigation, rail-roads, and every species of public enterprise which tends to the improvement of the country, and the advantageous employment of capital!

No. 18.

11th April, 1835.

Mr. Thomas Isaac Dimsdale was called in and examined as follows:

Examinations.

No. 18.
Mr. Thos. I. Dimsdale,
11th April 1835.

Where do you reside?—In the New Corn Exchange.

What is your particular business—are you a corn broker?—I am a corn broker and a publisher of the Prices current which have reference to that trade.

Have you one of your Prices current about you?—Yes.

[It was handed up.]

Is this a publication once or twice a-week?—Once a-week. That is published both stamped and unstamped; the unstamped edition is circulated on the Continent, and the stamped edition passes through the English Post-office free of postage.

Is the price of the circulation high?—Yes! the price of the circulation is high.

What is the price?—Nearly 1s. 6d.—it is three guineas per annum.

Then they are not used except by persons who subscribe for a certain length of time?—They may subscribe for a quarter of a year, but there are other individuals who occasionally purchase them, and they pay 1s. for the unstamped edition, and 1s. 6d. for the stamped edition.

What number of them do you sell?—Our circulation is under three hundred.

On what day is this published?—On Monday.

Is Monday the principal corn-market day?—It is.

But there are other corn-market days, are there not?—Yes; Wednesdays and Fridays.

Is there usually more variation in the prices on a Monday than on any other day?—The greatest extent of business is done on the Monday in London—it is frequently as much as the other two days together—double any one day.

But the sending of this is no cheaper than sending a letter to that distance in the country, is it?—Yes, it is considerably cheaper, because if we were to send it to Ireland in the ordinary way unstamped by the post, the postage would amount to 1s. 3d. or 1s. 4d., whereas by stamping it first, a man receives it for fourpence, the newspaper stamp being only fourpence. But I apprehend that if we were enabled to transmit them through the Post-office without the expense of postage that attaches to ordinary letters, our circulation would probably quadruple or quintuple, or even perhaps more than that.

Examinations.
No. 18.
Mr. Thos. I. Dimsdale.
11th April 1836.

But they go without postage now when they have stamps, do they not?—Yes they do.

Then do you mean that they should be sent without stamps, and without postage too?—I mean the cost of stamps or postage should be reduced, so as not to make it an object to the party receiving it.

Assuming the stamp to be half its present amount, how would that operate?—That would hardly be sufficient reduction; probably if they could be transmitted at the expense of a penny, that might do, because it would then answer my purpose to publish them at one-third of their present cost.

Supposing you were to publish one-half of this—a half-sheet twice a-week—should you increase your number under those circumstances?—I apprehend I should not, because I think that persons would prefer the complete information at once; but they might possibly be induced to receive a publication twice a-week, instead of once a-week, if they could have two publications or three publications for the price they at present pay for one. I have a foreign circulation, which foreign circulation, my agent informs me, would very materially increase, if I could transmit it at a less expense than I now do.

Where is that—is it in the north of Europe?—Entirely so.

Where is it sent to?—It is sent first to Hamburg, and then transmitted to the other parts of the north of Europe.

How are they sent to Hamburg?—They are sent in the packet—the Steam-Navigation Company takes it—it is the unstamped edition.

Are they ever re-printed at Hamburg?—No they are not. I apprehend, with reference to trade generally, that if the merchants had the facility of transmitting their Prices current which have reference to all articles of general merchandize, at a small expense of a penny, or twopence, or threepence per letter, that an immense number would then be sent through the Post-office beyond the present number; in fact, I can hardly calculate what the increase would be; perhaps it would be twenty or thirty, or even forty fold what it now is.

Do you imagine that if such Prices current were transmitted at a low rate of postage, that it would diminish the number of letters sent by the merchants to their correspondents?—It probably would, in a slight degree, but that diminution would bear no proportion to the increase the other way.

Do you conceive that there is a desire and an appetite in the public for Prices current in the state of the markets generally?—Yes I do, if they could receive them at a small cost. To a man in a large way of business, that species of information is extremely valuable, because business at present is conducted on the principle of large operations and small profits, and therefore the nicest fluctuation in the market becomes of consequence.

What in your opinion would be the consequence, if accurate information as to the state of the markets were transmitted at a low rate—would it produce consumption or speculation in the different articles?—I don't know that it would produce consumption, but it would regulate merchant's operations and increase trade.

But it would increase the demand, if it did not increase the consumption, would it not?—It would frequently cause the demand to change from one place to another; there would be a demand at places where at present no demand exists. It could not alter the total relation the quantity of the article bears to the consumption.

But it would probably produce industry, and industry produces demand and consumption?—It would give activity to trade certainly, and that would produce industry.

It would quicken the operations of trade, would it not?—Undoubtedly it would.

Did you say what number you printed?—I think our circulation is under 300.

Are you concerned in any other Prices current?—No, I am not.

Is your business solely confined to the corn trade?—It is entirely confined to corn, seeds, and flour.

Your business is done by a commission which you receive, is it not? you do not buy on your own account?—My principal business is commission, but I do some on my own account. I have been largely concerned as a merchant in corn, and also in other articles. I can hardly conceive a question can possibly arise as to the utility and popularity of a reduction in the present postage duties in reference to Prices current.

What course would you recommend, in order to give Prices current a free circulation at a reduced price, a lower rate of postage or a small stamp?—I do not imagine it would make any difference in what way, whether as a stamp, or whether at a small rate of postage; it is the amount of duty is the question. In the case of a stamp, in all probability, the duty would be paid by the sender, and in the case of a small postage the duty would be paid by the receiver.

Are there any towns in the country that publish similar lists of this sort where there are corn markets, such as the great towns of Liverpool and Bristol?—For the sake of transmitting their information free of postage there are two or three houses at Liverpool that furnish information of the markets to certain newspapers, and I believe it is understood that they have an interest in the proprietorship of such newspapers.

Do you know whether Prices current of the state of the markets are sent thus in news-

Examinations.

No. 18.

Mr. Thos. I. Dimsdale,

11th April 1835.

papers from any of the other large towns?—Only from Liverpool. There may be other towns that publish them, but I am not aware of their existence.

What postage do they pay?—The price of the newspaper, the fourpenny stamp.

Then it is put upon a stamp?—Yes; and the postage from Liverpool being eleven pence or a shilling, the difference is saved.

Then it comes postage free like other newspapers?—Exactly so.

Are there many of those newspapers taken in London?—No, not in London; their principal circulation from Liverpool, as you must be aware, will be those places with which Liverpool stands in connection, such as Ireland and Scotland.

Are there not many persons in the same business as yourself in or about the south of England?—Yes, there are.

Do they take in the newspaper to inform them of the state of the markets?—Some do, and there would be a great many more taken in if it were not for the expense.

So that in your opinion the expense upon the communication between the large trading towns is an impediment to the knowledge and information of what passes there?—Undoubtedly it is. Probably a country merchant would take in ten Prices current where he now takes in only one, if he could do so at a small expense; because if a man at the expense of (we will suppose, for instance) one shilling, or one shilling and sixpence a-week, could receive ten Prices current, it certainly would not be an object to him, and he would, in all probability, do it.

Then you think that if the expenses were reduced, he would have his Prices current from Glasgow, from Liverpool, and other towns, as well as foreign Prices current?—Exactly so.

If you send a parcel by the steam-boat, would not the lowering of the Prices current from abroad affect you in any way?—It would in this way:—I have now a limited circulation, and therefore I must rely upon the amount of the subscriptions to remunerate me, but if I could make a great reduction in the price it would induce a very much larger circulation, and I should be enabled to sell more, both at home and abroad, than at present. For instance, if I could circulate 3,000 instead of 300, the extent of the circulation, at a reduced price, would remunerate me better than the present sale.

What number do you send to Hamburg?—About 40.

You cannot send them cheaper than your present mode of conveyance by the packet, can you?—No, I cannot.

Then from Hamburg they send them to other parts by post, do they?—Yes.

What postage do they charge from Hamburg?—I have not received the account current from my agent yet, but it is a very small sum.

Do you receive Prices current from Dantzic, Rostock, and Amsterdam?—I do not, because my agent receives the advices, consolidates them, and transmits them to me under one postage.

If you could receive the Prices current from those large corn markets in Europe at a small expense, you would be very glad to do it, would you not?—Most undoubtedly I should.

Do you think that the trade generally would take them?—They would whenever there was any trade passing. At present the corn trade is perhaps most singularly situated, because the excess of production of most descriptions of grain in this country for the last two years has rendered foreign aid unnecessary; but in the event of a falling off in the growth, or an indifferent crop, then the foreign corn trade becomes one of the most important branches of our commerce. The position of the corn trade at this precise moment is no fair criterion for the general trade, or for the corn trade in other seasons.

Do you send your Prices current to France?—There is but little business passing between France and England in corn; because we are both large consuming countries.

Upon what grounds do you suppose that your circulation could be extended from 300 to 3,000?—Because a great many men would be very glad to receive an account of the London market, in order to govern their own operations, if they could receive that account at a small expense, who now do not take it in on account of the heavy cost of the publication.

Is it possible that it could be reduced to such an expense as that it would remunerate you and pay the Government for the carriage?—I think it could; because, supposing I had a circulation of 1,000 to 2,000, at about one-fourth the present price, (say 15s. per annum,) I should receive (even if I paid the Government one penny each duty) 10s. per annum net, for every paper, or £500 to £1,000 per annum, besides the carriage of the parcel, which the Government would have, and that would answer my purpose better than the present circulation.

What other countries do you forward your Prices current to, do you to Denmark?—To Denmark, to Prussia, Germany, Holland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Russia, and, occasionally, to the Mediterranean ports.

Is there any large corn market in the Mediterranean?—There is, Leghorn and Odessa; which last is not exactly in the Mediterranean, but connected with the Mediterranean trade.

Is Malta any corn market?—It is a place of depôt, but not a large market. It is admirably situated for a depôt. At present Leghorn is the largest depôt, I believe, in the Mediterranean.

It is entirely a free port, is it not?—It is now. In fact, Leghorn was carrying away the trade so fast from the other Mediterranean ports, that they have been obliged to abate their restrictions. I see also, in my late advices, that mention is made of very important alterations at Genoa and Trieste.

What alterations have there taken place at Genoa?—I cannot remember sufficiently of them to state with accuracy.

Do you take in the general Price current?—I receive it, under cover, from a house here; they receive the letter, and print it here.

What do you mean by under cover?—They receive the letter, and reprint here. Now I should very greatly prefer to have advices direct, because, as it will easily be perceived, great importance attaches to having information; thus, for instance, if you give an order to Genoa, or any other distant port, and your reply to that order, or the information that is to regulate your conduct or instructions in respect to it, comes, under the cover of a letter, to a house here, that house immediately becomes privy to your operations, and it may have an interest opposed to yours, and thus the London correspondents of the house there may completely destroy the success of your speculation, and put the profits into their own pockets instead of yours.

You mean they would have the preference of you in any operation you wished to effect?—Undoubtedly: I have known the thing carried thus far; though I have not been able to prove it, yet I am certain of the fact. I have transmitted a large order to purchase at a distant port, and I have reason to believe, from my other letters, that that order has been executed. The reply has been sent, under cover, to the London agent here who knew that our market had taken a serious turn; the advance has been 50, 60, or, perhaps, 70 per cent. upon the article in the third or fourth week between the sending of the order and receipt of the reply. The agent has come to me with a grave face, and said, "I am extremely sorry, my letters to-day say that my friends abroad regret that your limits have not been sufficient to enable them to execute your order." You understand the market HERE has altered, and he is quite aware, from that circumstance, of the advantage of the purchase, whereas the house abroad could not, when they replied to the order, have been aware of that fact. The consequence has been, that the article I purchased, they have appropriated to their own account; instead of giving me the benefit of it, which I should otherwise have had.

Is this applicable to the corn trade chiefly, or is it general?—I only speak of what comes under my own knowledge. It might of course be applied to any other article, but it now particularly applies to the corn trade, because the fluctuations are so sudden in the corn trade that it will of course affect that more. I have known a cargo of corn bought at one price, shipped immediately, and sold again here at exactly double.

You don't mean on the same day, do you?—No; I have bought a cargo of corn at Dantzic, and have sold it on the arrival of the ship here, a few weeks afterwards, for double what I bought it for.

A shower of rain, at some period of the season, will make a difference, will it not?—Yes; and I have known a wet day to make a difference of 5s. or even 10s. per quarter.

You say that persons object to paying the shilling for the postage of the Prices current, yet I think the result of your opinion is, that they would pay a shilling for the Prices current from various quarters of Europe, that is to say, from Genoa, and Dantzic, and Leghorn; if they had a variety of information, then, they would not object to pay for it?—Undoubtedly they would not.

You consider they do not estimate that the actual Prices current for London alone are worth that sum?—Exactly so.

Do you put in your Prices current the prices in Dantzic and the Mediterranean?—Yes; but at present there is so little passing in foreign countries that it is not thought of much consequence.

Is not Guernsey a good criterion for the markets of Europe?—I should apprehend not.

It is a free open port, is it not?—Yes; but it does not exercise any control upon the markets.

But if it does not exercise a control, is it not a criterion of the price?—No, I do not think it is, because I think it is affected by local as well as other circumstances.

Is there any suggestion you would wish to make to the Commissioners?—Only this, that I have not the slightest doubt that a concession on the part of Government, that would enable us to transmit Prices current at a small rate of postage, or with a small stamp duty, would be a great boon to the merchants, and it would be a great improvement on the present mode, and give an important facility to trade.

Some portion of the trade would be jealous of good information being too general, would it not?—There are some persons with those narrow views, but they bear no proportion to the aggregate number.

No. 19.

11th April 1835.

Joshua Bates, Esq. was called in and examined as follows:

You are in the house of Baring, Brothers, and Company, are you not?—I am.

Then you have a pretty general knowledge of the commercial transactions of the world?—We have a pretty extensive correspondence certainly.

Do you think that it would be beneficial to trade if a quick and ready correspondence as to the state of the markets, and the Prices current, could be obtained at a cheaper rate than at present?—I think it would be beneficial to trade, and from conversing with one or two persons connected in trade with the interior of the kingdom, I should say it would be very convenient to those branches of trade.

Your house has a very extensive correspondence has it not?—We have an extensive corre-

Examinations.

No. 18.

Mr. Thos. I. Dimsdale,
11th April, 1835.

No. 19.

Mr. Joshua Bates,
11th April 1835.

Examinations.

No. 19.
Mr. Joshua Bates,
11th April 1835.

spondence, but our correspondence with the interior of this country is chiefly banking business. That class of merchants who would be chiefly benefited, or who would find it convenient to have this arrangement, are those whose business it is to supply the interior of the country with the different descriptions of merchandize; it is of more importance in my opinion to the internal trade than to the external trade.

Would it not be advantageous to have the state of other branches of trade, in order that those who are dealers in colonial and foreign produce may know the state of the markets in commercial towns, both in Europe and elsewhere?—It would be advantageous undoubtedly, but there are but few great markets to which persons dealing in a large way would look. But the class to which I have referred, for example, a Bordeaux wine merchant, sends out perhaps two or three thousand circulars at different periods of the year,—first with regard to the result of the crop or the productiveness of the vines, then with regard to the quality of his wines of different countries, and their prices; at the present moment I believe he is in the habit of making those circulars up into parcels and sending them to the large cities, and when there they are distributed by a friend.

Are you speaking of England now?—Yes I am.

Now with respect to foreign countries, suppose a merchant writes from abroad a letter to this country, is that as cheap as if he were to send a Price current?—Precisely so.

The more immediate point to which the Commissioners wish to draw your attention is this—whether, if there were the same freedom with respect to the circulation of the Prices current in this country as exists in France, that alteration of the law would not be beneficial to trade?—If it were to apply to inland business I think it would, but I do not think it would be any advantage to be subject to an inundation of foreign Prices current. The number that is issued on the Continent is incredible, and even lottery tickets, and every description of property to be advertised for sale, is so advertised by means of these circulars, and that is because they can travel with but little expense; but so far as the revenue of the Post-office of France, for example, is concerned, I have no doubt that that is greatly benefited by it; but if we are to be subjected to having them thrown in upon us from abroad at a very moderate charge it would be a very great inconvenience, for few of them would be relied on, and it is a general rule with merchants who issue a periodical printed Price current to confine its circulation to his own correspondents; it is printed for convenience, and intended to supply the place of a written communication. The mass of printed statements and advices which circulate on the Continent are mere advertisements.

Would there not be some abroad upon which you could depend?—There would be some no doubt, but the effect of it would be inconsiderable, because a wine establishment in Bordeaux has its agent here, and they make up the state of their market or the state of their vintage, and send it to their agent in London to be printed here; if the agents in this country could have the convenience, at a moderate postage, of distributing them over this country it would unquestionably be very beneficial to trade.

Then applying that observation with respect to Bordeaux to other places, and directing your attention to other matters of merchandise here, such as corn, which comes from Dantzic and Amsterdam,—if corn could be imported, would not there be a great advantage if a facility were given to the circulation of these Prices current?—That is all done in the same way as the wine at Bordeaux. There is an agent here to whom the prices are transmitted, and the printing is generally done here; you can buy corn at Dantzic here in London, because it is the practice for every considerable house on the Continent to have an agent resident in London.

Now with respect to the colonial produce, if the Prices current could go from this country into Germany and elsewhere, would not that bring an advantage to trade?—That might be advantageous: to let printed Prices current and circulars go out at a small charge, more particularly as this country is becoming more and more every year the grand depôt and centre of the commerce of the world; but I doubt the advantage of allowing foreign circulars and Prices current to come in at a moderate charge. All Prices current that are sent forth as advertisements are wanting in precision, and cannot be relied on, owing to the great variation in the quality of almost all kinds of merchandise.

Could it not be mentioned in the Price current the variation that there is in the price?—Suppose it were mentioned that there is a variation in an article of from 60 to 66, would not that be a means by which correspondents would infer that there were different qualities?—That is very true; the quotation “from and to,” would perhaps do very well for the highest and the lowest, but then there is generally a very wide difference between the highest and the lowest, and all the intermediate qualities would be imperfectly quoted, excepting in some articles which can be described.

There is a general desire among all correspondents to know the state of the markets in all great markets, is there not?—Undoubtedly there is.

Do the merchants in their letters describe the different qualities of the articles?—Yes they do describe them, but it is in a different way.

In what manner do you receive the prices of the markets?—There are certain houses who print the Prices current weekly on the continent, and some who print them half weekly, others monthly, and others again give written advices in their letters.

Do those prices come to you in letters?—In letters.

Do you not find the scale upon which the postage in this country is regulated rather burthensome to you?—The postage is certainly high, and, in some particulars, I should say, higher than it need be. With respect to the ship letters, I think that the additional sum put upon ship letters is unnecessarily high; but, in opposition to my opinion, it may be observed that a great portion of the letters passing to and from the Continent to America, the East and West Indies, and Brazil, do come through England notwithstanding.

You mean that England has more ship communication than other countries, do you?—Yes; there is a more direct communication with England, and it is found to be the most rapid and safe channel of communication.

You say the charge upon ship letters in this country is unnecessarily high; now with respect to other countries or cities of commercial importance, say for instance, Hamburg, or Amsterdam, are their regulations upon a cheaper scale than ours?—I cannot speak from my own knowledge.

How is it in America?—In America the charge is six cents upon a letter, in addition to the ordinary postage, six cents being about threepence.

The ship letters are but threepence, and then there is the inland postage?—A single letter from America, at Liverpool, is *1s. 7d.*, that is, *11d.* and *8d.* for the ship charge.

Do you generally send to America by the ordinary conveyance for ship letters, or by the packet?—We send by the packets.

By the American packet you mean?—Yes.

Do you correspond with Falmouth, or the American packet at Liverpool?—Never by Falmouth to the United States.

The American packets are both punctual and fast, are they?—They are more punctual, and they sail faster.

They sail every week, do they not?—Yes.

The Falmouth packet goes only once a month does it?—Yes, and it sails slower, and there is very great uncertainty as to the time of its arrival out.

Do you pay the inland postage in your letters to Liverpool?—No, we do not; we send them by a box, which is by some thought to be illegal, but I believe it is not so; however it would make no difference to the Post-office. I think that we send our letters in that way because a good portion of those letters have already paid the foreign postage from the Continent, so that the Post-office has already got a very great revenue upon them. But I am inclined to think that, unless the postage inward were reduced, it would be impossible to collect the postage outward; the charge would be too heavy. You certainly might make a law for that purpose, but then means would be found to evade it, if it were a high postage outward with the present postage inward.

Does there not exist a high postage outward to Calais, or to Hamburg, or elsewhere?—Yes, there does, and for that reason I have no doubt that the correspondence is diminished materially. I am very confident that a great portion of the letters that are sent to this country from the Continent, to be forwarded by the packets, would not be sent if it were not for the circumstance that they go from London to Liverpool free of charge. There is nothing in the law which prevents a person moving a letter from one part of the country to another, if directed to any person out of it, and it is on that ground that the right is claimed.

Our attention is directed to this Inquiry, and we wish to have your opinion, as a person of experience and knowledge in these matters, more particularly as to the circulation at a small rate of postage, both for England and the Continent, of *Prices current*, whether that would not be desired by the public, and whether it would not give all concerns which had a report of those prices, a stimulus?—I think it would be an advantage to the country certainly, to have the means of conveying *Prices current* at a moderate charge, and it would be productive of a considerable increase of letter postage undoubtedly; because, although a *Price current* so sent may be useful as an advertisement, a correspondence by letter will be requisite to found any transaction of business upon it.

Do you think it would generate correspondence?—Yes, I do. A gentleman with whom I conversed lately, said, he calculated that he saved about £50 a-year, by forwarding these *Prices current* to Glasgow and different places, where they were distributed to his correspondents without the intervention of the Post-office.

Do you not observe that generally abroad, in France and Germany, where they are sent at a small rate of postage, the numbers are very great?—Yes, and that is what makes me fear the consequences, should they be admitted on this side.

But the numbers would not extend so much, unless they were to be found to answer so well in increasing the transactions?—After a time I have no doubt they would diminish till they naturally found their level, but at first I fear that the mails would be overloaded with them, and the principal merchants would not receive them, even at a low charge; the dead-letter office would soon be crowded with them: time is too valuable here to be wasted in reading advertisements, except by those to whose interests the circular may have reference. Foreigners would address them indiscriminately, and thus waste time.

But there is still a readiness to do more business in this country if an opening were afforded, is there not?—That is very true, but the names that are known abroad are few, and generally those are the persons whose time is most occupied. It is incredible what a change has been effected within a few years, by the system of packets sailing to America once a-week; it doubles or nearly trebles the labour of conducting our business, from the necessity of writing by every packet.

Does it increase the business in the same proportion?—I do not attribute the increase to the packets; the business has increased no doubt from various general causes.

The facility of communication with quickness and economy will create more industry, and consequently more demand and consumption will it not?—I have no doubt that it will quicken industry and cause a greater competition, among merchants, whose business will be better attended to from the necessity of almost constant attention to their correspondence, where there is such competition as with packets that sail every week.

Are you aware that a great many *Prices current* go abroad privately?—I have no doubt they do.

Examinations.

No. 19.

Mr. Joshua Bates,
11th April 1835.

Examinations.

No. 19.
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From your knowledge of America, can you inform the Commissioners whether the Prices current go there at a very small rate?—They do; we issue a Price current monthly, and we have been notified from America, that if we fold them in a particular way they would only be subject to a postage of one cent.; but we should not send them in the way they suggested, because our circulars being intended for our own correspondents only, we do not desire any one else to read them, and therefore we do not in fact circulate them in that way in America.

But their own stock between New York and Boston and elsewhere, they circulate very extensively at a small rate, do they not?—Yes, they do.

Do you not think that generally to persons in a moderate line of business and trade, it would be very welcome to the country if this could be done?—I think it would, but probably the merchants, on a large scale, might think it not of much importance, yet I think those by whom the great bulk of the business of the country is done, trade on a small scale, and they would find it a great convenience.

The objection raised by the Post-office is that it would prevent letters being written; what is your opinion as to that?—I think in no instance would it prevent letters being written.

From Trieste and Vienna and Leghorn, do you receive letters or Prices current, or a plain sheet joined with the two?—Letters.

Are there not a considerable number of houses in England, more particularly in London and Liverpool, that would take Prices current if they came alone?—Undoubtedly they would.

But you do not know of any other objection beyond the personal annoyance of some houses having a few more than they want?—I see no other objection, than that because merchants could, and probably would, refuse all printed Prices current I think the Commissioners well observe, that printed letters and Prices current should be divided into two classes. One class where they are addressed to every one, whether known or unknown to the author of the circular (these I denominate advertisements); the other class is where merchants, from the number of their correspondents, finding it impossible to convey to each a written statement of the market by the same packet or post, are compelled to resort to printing; and this class of circulars partakes more of the character of written letters, and would not be sent in greater numbers were the postage less.

No. 20.

Monday the 13th day of April 1835.

Mr. George Byrom Whittaker was called in and examined as follows:

No. 20.
Mr. G. B. Whittaker,
11th April 1835.

You are a bookseller and publisher in an extensive way of business in the city of London, are you not?—I am.

What is it you principally publish?—All descriptions of books.

What is your mode of advertising and of sending information into the country of your new publications and new editions, or other books that you have to dispose of?—I send them by those lists in parcels for them to distribute.

Do you send them by the coaches?—Yes, the parcels go by the coaches.

What is the rate of payment to the coaches for taking a parcel?—It is so much a pound. I believe the large booksellers in the country contract for their parcels, because they are very eavy, weighing, I think, frequently a hundred weight.

Those parcels are the books?—Yes; but it is with the parcels of books that these lists go.

Do you ever send by the coach parcels solely made up of papers of this description?—No.

It is too expensive, is it?—Yes; we send them enclosed to the bookseller, and he distributes them to other booksellers in the town, and they send them to their correspondents and other booksellers in the vicinity of those towns.

Would it be any advantage to you if you could send at a small postage such papers as are sent about the Continent by Galignani?—I think it would, decidedly; and also we should be able to send proof sheets of works printed, which we now send in a variety of ways: some go by the post, but not one in 500 goes by the post now, which would go if there were a small price charged for the sheets, because the authors living in the country it would be the most desirable way of sending them.

What do you suppose is the average weight of a sheet of printing paper?—Half an ounce, perhaps.

What could the booksellers afford to pay postage an ounce for a proof sheet?—I can scarcely say what they could afford to pay.

Would there not be some precaution necessary in order to guard against writing inside?—I should recommend that the proof sheets should go open at the top, and that there should be no wafer at all.

Would not that expose a new work to inspection and render it liable to be pirated?—No, I should think not; we would risk that through the Post-office.

Could the booksellers afford to pay twopence or threepence for that?—Twopence I should say they could.

Do you think that your trade would take considerable advantage if they had the opportunity of that mode of submitting the proof sheets to the author?—Yes, I do, and I will tell you why: if we have engaged for a work in the country, 300 or 400 miles from town, during the progress of the printing of that work I agree to give the author so much, and I generally contrive to make him find some man in London to read the proof sheets, in order to save the expense of postage up and down; in fact, we make it almost an invariable rule to do that.

Do you know what is the practice in other countries with respect to proof sheets; are they

allowed to go so in France?—I don't know what the practice is in France; I rather think they go through the Post-office, but I cannot speak from any positive knowledge that I have.

Would you print such things as this upon thinner paper to be distributed about the country to answer the purpose of advertisements?—Yes.

Do you think that that would be beneficial to the trade?—I should say it would most decidedly, because, in the present state of things, if we send 50 of those to a country bookseller, probably he would not send them to the gentlemen or the schoolmasters in the neighbourhood, but would let them lie and get wasted; whereas, could we send them, through the Post-office, direct to the parties who were likely to be the purchasers of books, such as book societies, schoolmasters, and so on, I should think it would be decidedly an advantage.

What charge do you suppose that would bear?—We could not afford more than twopence. I have been thinking of it, and I think we could pay that; for this reason, because when we print we should be able to do with fewer, and we should then know that they would go direct to the parties, and therefore they would have more effect than they do now, by leaving it to a third party to deliver them.

Are you concerned in any way with Mr. Longman?—No, I am not. Longman's house and our house are the two principal houses; we do nearly all the country trade that is done; we have two travellers out and sometimes three.

There are not many publishers in London, are there?—There are not more than ten or a dozen publishers of new works, though there are a great many persons who pirate our books afterwards, that is, after the copyright is out; but we don't call them publishers.

But still they are persons who would avail themselves of this mode of sending their lists and sheets?—Yes; of course we could not confine it; it must be thrown open to all.

It would necessarily make a very extensive circulation, would it not?—I think it would, and that great advantage would be taken of it; but of course this is only the opinion of an individual.

Would it not very much increase the weight that the mails would have to carry?—It would add some weight to the mails, no doubt.

Do you think that twopence a-list would be a remunerating price to the mail?—I should think so.

Would it not affect advertisements in the newspapers very much?—No, I do not think it would, because we must advertise to a certain extent in the newspapers, although we publish these lists as well; and the reason is, there are many persons who would like to buy the books whom we know nothing of, and consequently could not send our lists to, who would see them in the newspapers.

How would that be with respect to correspondence; would the number of letters written by the trade diminish?—Not in the least.

Would it increase them?—I think it would, because many persons when they see these lists in the country, would write up to town for information.

Or to give orders?—Yes.

Do you send your works into the colonies or any foreign countries; or have you any communication with them?—We have very little communication with foreign countries, and in America we can do nothing at all, because the duty is so great.

Do you do anything with our own colonies?—Yes, we do a good deal with them; but it is not direct from ourselves, it is through the merchants.

You have no correspondents in Jamaica, have you?—We have a correspondence there, but it is done through the merchants here; we make ourselves secure on this side of the water.

Then you don't send these lists at all to the West Indies?—Yes, we do, in parcels always; we take every opportunity of sending them in parcels; we also send to Malta and other places.

But you never send by post?—Never.

Could you afford to send them to Malta at a small postage of twopence or threepence?—Yes, we could afford to send them to any place at a small postage.

Then you think the public revenue would be sufficiently secured by opening the ends?—Yes.

Is there any difficulty or apprehension that your works would be pirated if you were to send your proof sheets open at the ends?—No, I do not think there is.

You think there would not be much danger of that?—No, because a person could not by that means get hold of the whole work; and we in some measure anticipate that, by sending, prior to the publication, a portion to the "Athenæum," and the "Literary Gazette," and the weekly periodicals.

Sometimes it occurs to you that you send more than one proof sheet at a time, does it not?—Sometimes, but then they ought to go in distinct proof sheets, and no advantage should be taken by sending three proof sheets in one.

You mean you would charge the rate of three for it?—Yes.

That is, suppose the charge were to be twopence for an ounce, then if it were three ounces the charge would be sixpence?—Yes; and we must print them accordingly upon thin paper.

Do you think that if you were allowed to send them by the post at twopence a-piece, that it would amount to many thousands a-year with you and the other booksellers?—I think it would.

Would not all the booksellers as well as the publishers take advantage of it?—I should think they would, and also the second-hand booksellers would take advantage of it; they would, after an evening sale, send out their lists, and I should also think that the auctioneers would take advantage of it.

Examinations.

No. 21.
Mr. Matt. Uzielli,
16th April 1835.

No. 21.

16th April 1835.

Mr. *Matthew Uzielli* was called in, and examined as follows:

Are you in the house of Devaux?—I am his partner.

What is your branch of business?—Commission merchants.

Have you extensive correspondence with the Continent?—Particularly with France.

Have the goodness to inform the Commissioners the system adopted by the French Post-office, as to the circulation of Prices current and of news letters?—They generally send them stamped; I have brought one with me (*producing the same*); it is stamped at the Government office, and then taken to the Post-office with a paper round it.

What stamp duty is paid?—Five centimes, about equal to a halfpenny; and the postage ten centimes, about three-halfpence.

Are a great number of those circulated through France?—A very great number, and through Belgium too. It is very inconvenient to us in England to be obliged to pay 2s. 4d., and three-halfpence in France.

2s. 4d. for what distance?—In consequence of having a band upon it, it is considered at the Post-office as double; and we frequently refuse them, and they are sent back.

The paper you produce is not a Price current, but a notification of a change of firm?—That is a news letter; another is the alteration of the market price of brandy at Bordeaux [*producing the same*].

What is that termed in common parlance?—Circulaire en France; it is inconvenient to put a band round them.

Could not you instruct your correspondent to take off the band, and then it could come as a single letter?—They will not receive it in the French Post-office without a band; it would facilitate business if we had something of the same kind in this country.

Have you a very extensive correspondence in England?—Not much in England; we correspond with Liverpool and Manchester, and other towns, principally on French account.

With regard to the circulation of these in France, have you any estimate of the number which proceed from Paris?—It is incredible the number.

Is it 20,000 a-day?—At least; the least alteration in grain, in wine, or brandy, or any branch of French commerce, there is always a circular made.

Do you think it is injurious to the Revenue in preventing letters being written?—I think in some cases it is; because there is a letter there giving the alteration in the price of brandy, a short circular which they get stamped, and send it free almost.

Do you think the larger circulation of Prices current is equal in value to the limited number of letters which would be written?—I think it would injure the Revenue: I think if any plan was adopted in this country, they should be strictly circulars, not printed letters.

What is the postage of a letter from Paris to Bordeaux?—Eighty centimes, about 8d.

What is the distance?—One hundred and twenty leagues; they go in 44 hours.

Is there a scale by 20 leagues?—No, there are rates, but I do not know that it is by a scale.

The postage is on a much higher scale in this country than in France?—Yes; the French merchants cannot understand how we make out the postage so large, and they cannot make it out when we tell them that if they put a small piece of paper into the letter it is double; they will not believe it.

Do you think it would be beneficial to trade if the same system were adopted for the transmission of Prices current in this country, without extending it to circulars and alterations of partnership?—Yes; I would not recommend the extending it to that; it should be strictly Prices current, the prices of goods; there would be more trade between England and France. The French Government are seriously taking into consideration the admission of some English goods; and if the Manchester people could have the advantage of circulating such things in France, it would be very advantageous.

Do you suppose that Prices current are made up and sent privately?—Yes, they send them by boats now, and give 5s. to the stewards who take care of them.

Are they reprinted in France?—I think not.

Do you think many would come to this country from the manufacturing and wine districts of France?—A great number, which are prevented by the postage being 2s. 4d.

Have you a correspondent at Manchester?—Yes, we have many; we send out a Price current ourselves every three months; we find it very expensive.

Have you a communication with Hamburg?—No.

The expense diminishes the frequency of your correspondence?—Yes; we cannot correspond too often; if we had some means of getting the paper stamped, and sending it at two-pence, three-pence, or even sixpence, we should send once a-month.

Which do you think would be preferable, a low postage or a stamp?—A low postage I think would be most convenient, to save our having to resort to the Stamp-office as well as the Post-office.

Would not it, then, be difficult to prevent frauds?—They might be left open at the ends.

Does it occur in France that letters are written with invisible ink or a chemical preparation, only brought out by heat?—I am not aware of any; they would be sent to the galleys if it were found out.

Do you hear that there are frauds in the French Post-office by pricking or marking letters, or writing on the margin?—I have heard of their putting a letter inside a newspaper.

If English Prices current were sent to Paris, could they be stamped there?—They would allow them to be stamped there and circulated all through France.

In point of fact, is that done at all?—Yes, it is done; but there are very few go over, because the postage is so great: if they could be sent without so much expense of postage, there would be an immense number sent. In Belgium it is on the same principle as in France.

What is your business chiefly?—We do principally in silks and satins; all our business is on French account; we receive a great many dollars on French account.

You consider the foreign postage in general higher than is beneficial to trade?—It is a great deal too high.

Are you not charged double for the passage of the letters from Paris to Dover?—Yes.

You are charged for the French and the English steam-boat?—Yes; but the French steam-boat brings them to Dover; at Ostend, the English boat goes and fetches them.

You have to pay for a service which you do not make use of?—Yes; the French say they are our letters, and we deliver them to your coast; they are in our charge till they reach the English coast.

You are charged by the English Post-office 2s. 4d. for a double letter from Calais to London?—Yes; then there is a postage in France which we do not pay, that is franked by the writer in Paris.

The person who franks your letter at Paris pays for it to Dover?—Yes.

You pay sixpence for the passage from Calais to Dover?—Yes, and it is brought by the French boats. I do not think we ought to pay the English Post-office more than the postage from Dover; we paid last year £1,200 for the postage of French letters.

If you paid but sixpence for each letter, what would it reduce your postage?—I should think about a quarter.

Have you received Prices current from Italy?—No, they never come from Italy; I do not think they circulate them there; I never received one. I have paid 1s. 11d. for them.

Did you ever get one like that shown you from Naples?—No; I have got Prices current from Italy, but I have always paid the postage for them.

Do you receive any from China?—No, we have received them from the East Indies.

What are you charged for those?—They always come enclosed in a letter from Colvin and Co.

Do you think it would be beneficial or right to have the Prices current circulated at a small postage from our colonies and eastern possessions?—I think that would do a great deal of good, more especially with the Continent; that it would assist our manufacturers particularly at Manchester.

If you were met by an objection from the Post-office, saying that they think the Prices current would diminish the number of letters, what should you think of that objection?—I think they are wrong, we send over a Price current once a-week to Paris, but then we must write letters also,—we must say that we saw such a broker on 'Change, and he offered such and such goods; we should not have time after 'Change to get circulars printed, there must be letters written in addition to the Prices current.

Is there any suggestion you would make regarding postage?—I think about threepence would not be objected to, and that the Revenue would be considerable gainers by it; but the paying 2s. 4d. is out of the question; we should write just as many letters to our correspondents, and should send them Prices current extra: I speak of my own house.

You would confine it strictly to Prices current?—Yes, and circulars, giving only the prices of goods, I think should be circulated as Prices current, and that we should pay more in postage in consequence.

No. 22.

16th April, 1835.

Mr. Samuel Johnson was examined as follows:

What office do you hold in the Post-office?—I am second president of the Inland office.

Next in authority to Mr. Stow?—Next but one; Mr. Watts is between Mr. Stow and me.

You have been a considerable time in the Post-office?—I am in my fortieth year.

Supposing it were thought advisable to circulate Prices current through the Post-office, subject to a small stamp duty, or at three-halfpence or twopence postage, what do you think would be the effect of that?—I can only say that, as regards the duty, we are so pressed for time that any considerable addition in any way would almost impede our operations. We work against time, and everything is fitted in in such a way as to bring the letters to the Post-office at the last possible moment. Generally, the public has the extreme possible time, and it is difficult, on Saturdays and Mondays, at present, to dispatch the mails by eight o'clock; therefore we certainly look with some degree of anxiety at any increase of duty thrown upon the department.

What is the number of letters on a Saturday and Monday?—The average of the whole week is about 36,000 outwards.

Can you state the number last Saturday?—I cannot.

What is the number on a Monday?—Inwards, about 60,000.

How many outwards?—Sometimes upwards of 50,000, usually from 42,000 to 45,000.

How many sorters have you employed on a Monday?—It is difficult to answer that ques-

F 2

Examinations.

No. 21.

Mr. Matt. Umielli,
16th April, 1835.

No. 22.

Mr. Sam. Johnson,
16th April, 1835.

Examinations.
 No. 22.
 Mr. Sam. Johnson,
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tion. The sorters are not employed the whole of the evening in sorting the letters; there are a great many engaged only partially, being occupied in other portions of the duty at other times.

Can you tell how many more sorters you have on a Monday than on other evenings?—I think we have about six more on the Monday than on other evenings.

If you had 6,000 more letters, how many additional hands would that require?—It is not so much the addition of the letters as the difficulty of disposing of them within a certain time. We stand so crowded already at many of the divisions, that we could hardly put in the assistance of a third person without interruption to the putting the letters into the different boxes, which would endanger their being disposed of correctly.

Is that inconvenience felt on the newspaper side?—Yes, I think it is considerably. The newspaper office is separate, and entirely distinct from the Inland department. The whole of the newspapers are disposed of there, sorted, and put into the bags, and those bags, at a quarter or twenty minutes before eight, are brought into the Inland office, for the letters to put into them, and to be given into the custody of the guards.

In laying out the newspapers on the table, which is first done face up, could not Prices current, if amongst those newspapers, be selected and thrown to another table for other persons to arrange them in the same manner that the newspapers are arranged?—They would be put on one side certainly, but then they must be examined, and it would occupy a considerable portion of time. I hardly know what constitutes a list of Prices current.

That might be settled by the Legislature, supposing it is confined to half an ounce, a newspaper averaging about an ounce?—They average about an ounce and a quarter, but there are double papers that weigh above two ounces.

If the Commissioners think that they have got a latitude beyond the law by putting two ounces under one stamp, if the Legislature should think that Prices current, weighing under half an ounce, should be allowed to be sent under a small stamp, what increased force would it require at the Post-office to give them a circulation to the extent required?—That would in a great measure depend upon the number that was sent.

Suppose the number to be from seven to ten thousand a-day?—It would be a very difficult matter, within our limitation of time, to get through such an accumulation as that. If there were a twopenny stamp, or three-halfpenny stamp on the list, so as not to render it subject to postage, that would simplify it; but if it bears a stamp, it must be examined. It would be decidedly preferable, if they were allowed to go free under any circumstances, that it should be by the means of a stamp, because they could be treated as newspapers, with the exception of their undergoing rigid examination. I beg to point out that the difference between a news-vender and a mercantile house is this. The news-vender sends the paper, and the reference for payment is in London, and he frequently knows nothing of the gentleman to whom the paper is addressed; but with a manufacturing or commercial house it is different; they have an account with their country correspondent, and might be induced to make use of the Prices current to insert some little information, which might be otherwise the subject of a letter.

Would not many be sent by news-venders as well as by merchants?—I cannot say. The way in which I view it is this,—it would possibly bring a great increase of business to the Post-office, but I think it would be prejudicial to the Revenue; inasmuch as a very large portion of the letters, which at present pay the full postage, would be withdrawn, and those lists substituted to convey the same information.

Have you any general acquaintance with trade?—I cannot say that I am entirely ignorant of it.

Do not you think it would generate a great number of letters?—I am not prepared to say that ultimately, perhaps, the operation of it might not be equivalent to the loss of revenue, by bringing the same portion of revenue into the public purse in another shape; but I think another evil would arise; if it went to the extent of covering the revenue, the increase of business would be so considerable, that the difficulty of getting the mails out at the appointed hour of eight o'clock would be very great.

Assuming this, that 8,000 a-day were supplied with the newspapers, how many additional sorters would it require?—Perhaps eight or ten, as far as the sorting is concerned.

What additional labour is there, after they are sorted first into the mails, and after that, to the post towns?—They would get finally into the boxes; but where there is one person to put off the letters to the division, perhaps it would be necessary to have two, and to subdivide; but our subdivision has gone to so great an extent already, that if we carry it much further, we should lose by such an extension what we should gain in the extra assistance. I speak as a practical officer.

If you send out the number you have stated of letters and papers, what addition would you have if you sent out 8,000 of those, in addition to the 120,000, comprising the letters and the newspapers, making 128,000 instead of 120,000?—It would make a great increase of duty. I am not prepared to say that the zeal and application of the heads of the department might not accomplish such a thing; but, in order to do it, we must have much more assistance than we have at present; and even then, I do not think it would be perfectly practicable. We are much pressed for time on the Saturdays and Mondays. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays we get on very well; but it is with the greatest difficulty we can despatch at eight o'clock on the Saturday and Monday evenings.

You think that the Post-office has arrived at its utmost extent, that it cannot increase its business?—Within the last four or five years there has been a wonderful alteration with regard to the accommodation given to the public, which has pressed so much upon the head office at the latter part of the evening, that it has created difficulties we can scarcely surmount.

What are those circumstances?—The later arrival of the letters, caused by the extension of time given to the public.

They are brought up quicker?—Yes; but we receive from Vere-street, Charing-cross, Lombard-street, and the Borough, large parcels of letters at a quarter past seven at night.

At what time are the sorters summoned?—At five o'clock in the evening; and if we could have a sufficient portion of letters to keep them fully employed in the early part of the evening it would be desirable.

Are the morning letters sorted after five o'clock?—No; the country letters are put into the boxes, and charged before the morning duty closes.

The only difficulty in the arrangements would be on the Saturday and Monday?—The great difficulty would be on those days.

As you have a smaller number of newspapers on four days of the week, you do not anticipate any difficulty on those days?—It is on the Saturdays and Mondays we contemplate the great difficulty; on the other days we generally get through our business tolerably easily.

How many sorters have you in the Inland office?—We have the assistance of a great number of letter carriers. They are employed in sorting at different periods of the evening. About 20 of our own officers sort occasionally, and about 12 letter-carriers, from 25 to 35, at various periods of the evening. The first process with the letters is sorting them into districts.

Who are the taxers?—They are the clerks at the divisions. There are about 20 so employed.

If there were seven or eight thousand Prices current, would 12 additional persons, put on at a given time, do you think, cause confusion?—It would cause the duty on the Saturdays and Mondays to be exceedingly severe; and I think it is doubtful whether we could get through it, for I contemplate an examination of those lists.

What proportion of the newspapers are examined?—Just as the circumstances of the duty will permit,—sometimes a greater, and sometimes a smaller number: it is principally done in Mr. Critchett's department. They examine some every night, but not perhaps one-tenth; frequently, not one-twentieth part of the number of newspapers, because time will not permit.

How many inspectors of newspapers are there to see that there is no fraud committed?—It is done under the superintendence of the inspector of the letter-carriers. He employs any letter-carriers that are available to examine the newspapers. I believe sometimes there are as many as six employed; sometimes more, when the nature of their duty and occupations will permit of their being so employed. The quicksightedness and ingenuity of the trading and manufacturing part of the world is so great, I think it will be difficult for the Legislature to frame any Act of Parliament sufficiently close to prevent a great innovation upon the Revenue: that is the impression upon my mind.

You look upon it as a question of revenue?—First, as regards some loss of the revenue, I think it would subtract such a number of letters, paying the full rate of postage at present, that the loss of revenue could not be supplied but by a great circulation of those lists, which, I will not say, would not countervail the other; but then I think that would bring such an additional quantity of duty that we could not get through it within the usual time.

If it diminished the number of letters, according to your supposition, that would relieve you?—If it deprived us of a letter that paid tenpence, and gave us five letters at twopence, there would be an increase of four letters, but an officer could tax several letters in less time than it would occupy to take one of those lists out and examine it to see that it contained nothing written upon it.

There are inspectors purposely for newspapers?—There are inspectors of letters in the morning, and of newspapers in the evening. They do not put any charge upon newspapers. When they become chargeable from any irregularity, they are sent into our office, and charged by our clerks.

How many do you generally charge a-day?—I think sometimes we charge as many as 40, 50, or 60 in London. Lately, since we have been able to institute a more rigid examination of them, we have charged as many as will amount to £100 in London a-week; while the postmasters in the country towns are charging them also.

Do you trace whether you get the postage for them?—Very seldom; for they are charged with a high rate of postage. The parties refuse them; but notwithstanding that, they still continue sending communications by them; sometimes writing with lemon-juice and with chemical ink, so that a fire brings out the one and damp brings out the other.

Supposing the Post-office was to increase its business very much, in what mode would you provide for the circulation of 10,000 more letters a-day?—I am not prepared to say that I could instantly provide for such a number as that. Our increase has been progressive, and we have provided for it as it arose; but we have brought the thing to that state that I doubt whether we could do much more business within a certain time, as our officers crowd so much on one another. Our Inland office at present is about 90 feet by 50, in which the business is performed, and we find we lose much time by the letter-carriers and messengers traversing from one part to another, as they are obliged to do, to collect and dispose of the letters. If we had much more space to go over, we should lose in traversing what we gained by additional assistance.

What difference is there between the number of letters now and in 1826, when your office was in Lombard-street?—I cannot speak to that; but I believe there has been no year since I have been in the Post-office that there has not been an increase.

The revenue does not appear to increase?—Because the accommodation given to the public has reduced the net amount. The acceleration of the town delivery, by the carts which

Examinations.
—
No. 22.
Mr. Sam. Johnson,
16th April 1835.

Examinations.

No. 22.
Mr. Sam. Johnson,
16th April 1835.

convey the letter-carriers, and 60 additional letter-carriers, have caused considerable expense, also the great increase of accommodation in the country. I think there is hardly a village which has not the accommodation of a post.

It appears by the account that the revenue is less, and the expense is greater?—That is in consequence of the increased accommodation given to the public. Great concessions have also been made in respect to double letters. Formerly, a single sheet, if it contained an invoice, or a bill, or anything of that sort, was charged as a double letter. Instead of enclosing the bill for acceptance in a letter to their correspondent in the country, the mercantile houses have now sheets of paper printed with the bill at the top, and fold it up as a letter; that goes for one rate of postage. It is returned accepted, and that passes for a single rate of postage. This formerly was considered as constituting a double letter.

The general principle of the Post-office is charging a single sheet as a single letter?—That is the case now,—a single sheet pays a single rate. Formerly, if it contained an account current, it was subject to a double rate of postage. This concession of the Legislature took away some portion of our revenue.

 No. 23.

Tuesday, 16th April, 1835.

Mr. Benjamin Critchett was called in and examined as follows:

No. 23.
Mr. Benj. Critchett,
16th April, 1835.

You have been a considerable time in the Post-office?—Forty years.

You are inspector of the letter-carriers?—Yes.

Have you anything to do with the sorting?—Yes.

Do the persons in your department sort the newspapers?—They do.

How many persons are employed in sorting them?—In the various processes in despatching the newspapers we have about 120 to 130.

How many newspapers do you send out on an average?—About 45,000; on Mondays upwards of 60,000, and on Saturdays about 60,000, and other days about 37,000, or 38,000.

How many persons have you employed in sorting the newspapers on a Monday?—About 200 altogether; on the Mondays we get in all the help we can from the letter-carriers after they have done ringing their bells.

How many in other days?—About 120 on the light days.

Does it take 70 people to sort the additional 15,000?—We cannot get the services of those men that we call in to assist very early; they do not attend till after six o'clock, having their bells to ring.

How many newspapers will a person sort in an hour?—There are two or three processes, the first to face all the directions one way so that they all lie before the clerk, that is the first operation; they are faced up in that manner by a great number of junior hands who do not understand the art of sorting; then they are carried to the sorting table and sorted by the sorter into the coaches or lines of road; all the papers for Dovor would be placed up to the alphabet Dovor, and the second would be Hastings and Brighton, the two together.

When they are sorted into a Dovor coach, for instance, is there a third operation for sorting them into the post towns on that road?—Yes, there is; after they are sorted into the line of coaches, according to the number of coaches, into 24 parts, we take all which we put up in the Dovor alphabet to what we call the road; all the boxes are fixed up against the wall, labelled with the post towns for that coach; then they are divided again.

How many post towns are there on the roads?—Between 30 and 40 on some roads. I should think there are about 30 on the Dovor road.

Are the newspapers made up in separate bags for the different post towns?—Yes.

How long does that take in arranging?—We commence the business of sorting newspapers at half-past five, and we make them up into the bags at a quarter before eight; the same bags to receive the letters for the same post towns; it would be very bulky to have a double set of bags for each place.

It occupies about two hours and a quarter?—Yes, on Saturday and Monday we commence at five o'clock with about 180 to 200.

Are all the sorters of the newspapers letter-carriers?—Yes.

How many letter-carriers have you now?—280.

What is the process in the morning; the number is not so great in the morning?—No, they are very few compared to the evening; the number is about five or six thousand, on the Monday, perhaps they amount to 10,000; it depends upon the date of publication of the provincial papers—they will average about five or six thousand.

The mails do not load upwards so heavy as they do downwards?—No, by no means.

What is the weight of a newspaper?—A dry newspaper does not weigh more than an ounce, but an immense number of them are in a damp state; the evening papers generally come in wet: some of the double sheet newspapers, when they are wet, will weigh four ounces; the Despatch and the Atlas, for instance. I have weighed them and found them weigh four ounces.

Do not a large proportion of the evening newspapers come to the Post-office directly from the publishers?—No, very few; they come from the dealers in the papers; they bring them in large sacks to the Post-office.

They bring them just fresh from the printers?—Yes.

Then they might bring them earlier than five o'clock in general?—Yes, but the dealer in newspapers looks to the saving of expenses; he will not send twice if they come within the time when they are allowed to be put in free.

Up to what time is that?—Six o'clock.

How many are put in afterwards?—That depends upon whether there is any particular news arrives after the time of their first going to press.

Do the large news-venders deliver most of their newspapers before six o'clock?—Yes, from a quarter to six; in a quarter of an hour we frequently receive 30,000 papers in the window in bags.

You have an hour and three quarters to sort them?—Yes, but then we have been previously at work, sorting the various newspapers put in at the receiving houses, which we get in by half-past five; that keeps us employed up to six o'clock, the time when the bulk of the papers are brought in by the news-dealers, which lightens the work of course.

Do you know what the aggregate of the newspapers that go out daily is?—I do not, but I believe there has been an account taken recently of the weight of newspapers and the letters altogether, after the bags were sealed.

They are divided into 24 mails?—Yes.

That would be about a hundred and a half, and the weight of a passenger in each mail coach?—Yes, I suppose it would.

Can you speak to the number of letters which go by the mail?—I do not immediately call it to recollection, but I think it is somewhat less than the number of newspapers.

Who sorts the shipping lists?—They are sorted with the letters.

Do the Inland office sort them?—Yes.

Do the Inland office sort any newspapers now?—No, they are all sorted in the newspaper-office, except a few commercial lists and Prices current that are paid for not as letters: there is a contract made with the Postmaster-General for allowing them to go free; they are what were sent under the privilege of the clerks of the roads formerly; they are not numerous, some few hundreds.

How do they pay?—Those that were published daily pay a guinea a-year for each paper sent through the Post-office, that is something less than one penny.

Where are the newspapers which come from France sorted?—In the Inland office; they are considered as letters, and charged with postage.

Assuming that there are six or seven thousand Prices current to be circulated by the Post-office daily, what additional charge would there be to the establishment in consequence of the number of hands required to sort them?—Very little.

The difficulty is increased in sorting according to the bulk?—Yes; the newspapers are not so easy to sort as the letters, for there is a sort of rotundity about them that causes them to slip about.

Would not three or four additional sorters be able to sort them?—Yes; that would be the outside.

Do you know how many of those Prices current a box of 12 inches long, 12 inches wide, by six inches deep, would contain?—It would hold a very considerable number. I think it would hold 300 certainly.

Are the newspapers tied up in the bag, or put in loose?—Put in loose.

Would they not go into a smaller compass if they were tied up?—No, it would hardly be so convenient a bulk in the bag, if they were tied up in bundles; when they are put into the bag they are pressed down as tight as we can press them to the bottom of the sack before we put the letters in, then the letters are pressed down upon them, and the bag is tied down as closely as it can be tied, to prevent friction.

Which is your heaviest mail?—I think the Edinburgh is as heavy as any of them.

Which is the next?—The Glasgow, I think; the Birmingham is very heavy: there are very great sacks of papers, on Saturday and Monday, to Liverpool and Manchester also.

The Devonport?—That is heavy, but not so heavy as the northern mails.

How is the Dover?—That is not so heavy; the northern mails are the heaviest.

Is the Bristol heavy?—Not extraordinarily heavy.

Is not the Ipswich heavy?—Yes, there are a great many papers for that neighbourhood; there are a great many weekly papers go down that road; there is a Norwich or Ipswich paper printed in London, and sent down.

Which would be the most convenient for the Post-office, assuming that the state should gain the same revenue, that the Prices current should go into the country on a twopenny stamp, or that the charge should be made at the Post-office?—The twopenny stamp would be the most simple operation; then we should have nothing to do but to examine whether the stamp was upon it: if the postage was charged, that would be attended with a considerable degree of trouble; if it has a stamp, it would be sorted like the newspapers.

It would be better for the Revenue, because the money would be paid in advance, and nothing would be lost but the trouble of carrying them?—Just so.

Have you not a plan going forward now for a separate bag to take newspapers to the different post towns?—No; it has often been talked of, but the bulk of the bags is a serious objection to it.

Have you not a plan for boxes for newspapers, to be placed before the guards?—No; if there is any plan of that kind, that must be with the contractors carrying them as parcels; and that they do now to a very considerable extent, both morning and evening papers, some thousands.

Do you know how many papers go in your heaviest mail in one day, the Edinburgh for instance?—Upwards of 3,000.

Examinations.

No. 23.

Mr. Benj. Critchett,
18th April 1834.

Examinations.
 No. 23.
 Mr. Benj. Critchett,
 16th April 1835.

What is the smallest number that goes in one mail?—Fifteen hundred, I should think.

Do any of the London letters or newspapers to Edinburgh proceed by the Glasgow or the Manchester mail, then being forwarded to Edinburgh?—They are forwarded on from Carlisle. I would beg to suggest, with regard to the Prices current, if they are stamped, whether it would not lead to a number of things being considered as Prices current, besides what we have all along considered as Prices current.

If they paid twopence to the Revenue, and did not exceed half an ounce, would it not be beneficial to the Revenue?—There are so many of the trades that would like to issue their circulars upon a small stamp; the bookselling trade, for instance, have attempted to send their catalogues under a twopenny stamp; it would be an immense circulation if it was to extend to all trades; the bookselling trade alone, I apprehend, would send in twenty or thirty thousand of them in a day, and a question might arise, whether our means are adequate to it without considerable addition of expense. I know that the booksellers, if they could print their catalogues upon a twopenny stamp, would then forward an immense number; for, on the publication of any new book, I recollect Mr. Bentley said, if you would allow them to go for twopence I should perhaps send you three or four thousand, announcing the publication of one book.

What would be the weight of it?—That was not mentioned; he printed his catalogue, and put a twopenny stamp upon it.

Do you think they would publish a great many things of that kind?—(*A hand-bill being shewn to the witness.*) Yes; this would not weigh half an ounce, or a quarter of an ounce this used to come into this country under the privilege of the clerks of the Foreign Post-office: in the same manner our Prices current used to be sent to the Continent under the same privilege, but those now sent to the Continent are charged with the full rate of postage.

Do any particular trades now send their circulars by post?—The tea trade send now an immense number of circulars announcing the prices of tea.

Are they sent by the post?—I believe that trade alone pays us above £3,000 a-year, and they pay the postage down, on putting them in.

You would lose upon those?—Yes, we should.

What is the most extensive trade?—That is one of the most extensive at present; but I think that the bookselling trade would become the most extensive in circulating their catalogue.

Would it signify for trade which circulated most, if you limited them to half an ounce, and charged them twopence?—Not at all; the question is, whether we should not have more than we could possibly do with our present establishment.

If there were 24,000, how many additional sorters would you require; would it be more than 25 or 30?—The persons to sort them would be, I think, a very small part of the expense; the present bags would not contain the whole of them and the letters.

What would it cost the Post-office to buy off an outside passenger to Liverpool?—I do not recollect the fare; it is not exactly the weight, but the bulk.

The bulk of 24,000, distributed over all the mails of the country, could not give more than 3,000 half-ounces?—The additional weight could not be of great consequence, but it would operate against the revenue arising from the postage of letters.

It is stated by witnesses, that those Prices current being before their eyes, would lead to more correspondence, orders being sent in consequence, and so on?—I cannot speak to that.

Supposing twopence put on a quarter of an ounce, a great many could be carried without a perceptible difference of weight?—Yes; the foreign one, which has been shown to me, does not weigh a quarter of an ounce.

You think that the circulars of booksellers would be passed as Prices current?—Yes, I have no doubt they would.

Do you know how they send their circulars now?—Wherever they can, to the large towns, they send them in parcels; they get them circulated through their agents in the different provincial towns; sometimes they send them as letters.

Do not you think it would be a great profit to the Post-office if they carried those things now sent in parcels?—We should like the postage of those which are now sent in parcels.

Do not you think the booksellers, in putting themselves to that expense in circulating their catalogues, look for written orders in answer?—Yes; but then these come through their agents in the country in the provincial towns, and they write weekly or monthly to the London booksellers; some of the booksellers have a large receipt of letters from £1 to £2 or £3 a-day.

Do many of the booksellers pay a postage to the amount of £3 a-day?—Yes; Longman, and Whittaker.

Do you know what the gauge of the mail-box is?—No, I do not.

Have you made any calculation as to what difference would arise to the Revenue if Prices current were sent at a small rate of postage?—No; that would depend altogether upon what were to be considered as Prices current; until that was defined, the effect of that could not be seen at present; a very limited number are transmitted at a small per-centage.

Are you aware that in all other parts of Europe Prices current are allowed to go at a small rate of postage?—I have understood so.

Have you heard that the Post-offices abroad incur any great inconvenience or loss of revenue in consequence?—I have no means of knowing at present; we have but five or six articles which have been treated as Prices current; but if a list of prices is to be considered as falling within it, that would extend to the tea trade, and all the traders who are in the habit of sending circulars announcing the prices of articles: then I think it would operate very considerably upon the tea trade alone; I think it would cause a diminution of postage to the amount of above £2,000 a-year.

Do the tea trade now send large statements of their prices?—No, it is printed on a sheet so as to go as a single letter.

How much do their sheets weigh?—They are all under an ounce; that will take in a large sheet of paper; besides the list of prices they print, they write on the blank page a letter.

Then they must pay for a letter at any rate?—Yes.

If the Prices current went for twopence, and they had anything to state by way of explanation, they must pay for that besides?—There can be no blank allowed for them to do anything, or it would be ruinous to the revenue of the Post-office; for everybody would be availing himself of it if they could send a letter to Liverpool for twopence.

Do you sometimes discover that frauds are committed by marking certain words in newspapers?—Every day.

How many newspapers do you examine every day?—A thousand, sometimes 2,000 or 3,000, as we have opportunities; we charge postage upon them to the amount of nearly £100 a-week upon those that we examine.

In consequence of the frauds intended?—Yes, in consequence of the correspondence in the margin, or some marks of letters; and by pricking the letters with a pin, I have seen a whole letter formed, and also some liquid that cannot be discovered without applying heat to it; and another process, where it requires wet to read that which is written; but when they are dry it is concealed again.

Are those processes worth their while?—They are resorted to by individuals who have little to do; we never find those frauds among the agents who deal in newspapers.

And have never found them in considerable houses?—No.

You probably reckon that you lose annually £100 a-week, or more?—Yes, £300 or £400 I should think; it is not altogether lost, for there would not be letters to that amount; they are not obliged to take the paper, consequently they do not pay the penalty.

Are the papers often rejected?—Yes, I think 19 out of 20 are rejected, and come back to the dead-letter office; then they lose the paper; it checks the evil: if there was not an examination of that kind, it would become a serious loss to the Revenue.

Would any Price current be open to the commission of the same fraud?—Yes; the more papers are circulated through the Post-office under the privilege of a stamp, the more it is exposed to fraud.

Is not the Post-office exposed to considerable loss by those Prices current being sent in parcels and by steam-boats to different places on the Continent?—They always did go in that way as parcels, there being no objection to it.

Would it not add more to the Revenue of the state if they were to go by post?—Then it entails all that difficulty sending them by post under a small stamp; it militates against the revenue of the postage from letters, and exposes to more frauds.

The examination of a newspaper takes up a good deal of time, does not it?—It does; it must be examined very nicely to discover the writing or the marks made to convey some intelligence.

What mode should you propose for the improvement of the Revenue? would it be to put a postage on newspapers to protect them against frauds, such as writing in newspapers?—If a postage is put upon them, and their going by coach as an article of trade and commerce was not prohibited, there would be very little to do in them that would be done in all the large towns; all the direct communications with London would be carried on by means of parcels: if even a penny was put on, 100 papers would come to 8s. 4d., that might be sent by parcel to Liverpool for 2s.; they would not resort to the Post-office if they were not prevented sending by coach.

A great many newspapers do go to Liverpool, for instance, by the early coaches?—Yes; all the morning papers are 100 miles from London by the time the mail leaves London. I know one agent who sends 1,500 papers by the morning coaches, principally in parcels, and they get them in the afternoon; it is a great relief to the Post-office; that kind of business is increasing with the news-dealers.

Have the newspapers by the mail coaches increased?—Not much lately.

Have they increased within the last seven years?—No, I do not think they have, or very little.

The number of newspapers was stated in the year 1828 at 42,000 per day?—I am not sure whether that includes the privilege which the clerks of the road had at that time.

No. 24.

Monday, 21st March 1836.

Charles Pressley, Esq., was called in, and examined as follows:

You are the secretary of the Stamp-office, are you not?—I am.

You are aware that the attention of the Commissioners has been called to the propriety of allowing Prices current to be circulated post free through the country upon a low stamp?—I am.

Will you have the goodness to state to the Commission whether you conceive there would be any difficulty, as far as regards the Stamp-office, in effecting such an arrangement?—As far as regards the Stamp-office, none whatever.

For instance, should you have any difficulty in allowing Prices current to have a halfpenny

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Examinations.

No. 23.
Mr. Benj. Critchett,
16th April, 1835.

No. 24.
Chas. Pressley, Esq.
21st March 1836.

Examinations.

stamp, if newspapers had a stamp of a penny upon them?—None whatever, provided every copy were stamped.

No. 24.
Chas. Pressley, Esq.
21st March 1836.

You mean every copy for town circulation, as well as every copy for country circulation?—Exactly so.

Do you apprehend there would be much difficulty in allowing those that were intended for country circulation to circulate with a stamp of a halfpenny upon them, while those that were intended for town circulation, should remain as they are at present, subject to no stamp duty whatever?—It is certainly contrary to all the principles of the present imposition of stamp duty, that a stamp should be placed upon a certain number of documents, and that copies of that document should issue upon unstamped paper. It appears to me that such an arrangement would be attended with some difficulty, but it is a difficulty which, I dare say, may be got over.

Perhaps you will have the goodness to turn your attention to the subject, and, on some future occasion, to suggest to the Commission anything that may appear to you to be likely to effect the object which has been mentioned?—I will do so.

No. 25.

Friday, 25th March 1836.

Charles Pressley, Esq. was called in and further examined as follows:

No. 25.
Chas. Pressley, Esq.
25th March 1836.

Have you considered the question respecting the transmission of Prices current, which the Commissioners put to you at your last examination?—I have.

Will you have the kindness to state what is the result of the further consideration which you have given to that subject?—It still appears to me that it would be exceedingly inconvenient to impose a tax of a halfpenny upon an instrument, and to make the same liable to such duty by some act to be afterwards done, namely the putting it into the Post-office. I have spoken with the solicitor of the Stamp-office upon the subject, and he agrees with me that the imposition of the tax in such a manner would be contrary to every principle upon which the stamp duties are at present imposed; because in case of the non-payment of the duty there could be no penalty, as the liability does not take place until some act afterwards to be performed, namely the sending it through the Post-office.

You saw the other day upon the table, a publication called the "Mercantile Journal," did you not?—I did.

Some copies of which are unstamped for the circulation in London, and other copies of which are stamped for transmission through the Post-office; does not that prove that there would be no great practical difficulty in allowing Prices current to go through the Post-office with a stamp of a halfpenny, although they were circulated without a stamp in the places where they are published?—The difficulty appears to me to be, the imposition of a halfpenny upon a paper, which is to be liable only to such duty, in the event of the same being sent by post: fourpence is not imposed on the "Mercantile Journal;" the "Mercantile Journal" is a paper containing matter wholly of a commercial nature, and is exempt from the newspaper duty; the Postmaster-General determines it to be a newspaper for the purpose of postage, and I apprehend he governs himself by there doing a fourpenny stamp upon it.

Why should not the Postmaster-General do precisely the same with respect to Prices current, and say these Prices current need not to be taxed for the purpose of circulating in London, but if they go through the Post-office they shall be taxed?—You must impose the duty, in the first instance, upon something; if you impose it upon Prices current, there will be some offence if it is printed without being stamped.

In the case of the "Mercantile Journal," there would be no offence, surely, in the editor or the publisher of that journal publishing it without a stamp, inasmuch as it is not a newspaper?—Certainly not. But it is the Postmaster-General who determines it to be a newspaper, not the stamp law.

And he is enabled to send it free through the Post-office when they put the fourpenny stamp upon it?—Yes, because the Postmaster-General determines it to be a newspaper, and not the Stamp-office; if the "Mercantile Journal" were a newspaper, the Stamp-office might prosecute for the unstamped copies,—not so, if you put the duty of a halfpenny upon a Price current, the liability to which depends upon its being put into the Post-office.

How did Mr. Cobbett, for instance, manage his paper?—Mr. Cobbett's paper was not a newspaper; but Mr. Cobbett printed upon the fourpenny stamp for country circulation; and the Postmaster-General, I apprehend, did with Mr. Cobbett's as he has done with the "Mercantile Journal," he allowed it to be a newspaper, for the purpose of passing it through the Post-office; but that did not constitute it a newspaper.

Why might not the same thing arise with respect to the halfpenny stamp, as is the case with the fourpenny stamp?—It appears to me that the two cases are totally different; a fourpenny stamp attaches to every newspaper, and you do not propose to put a halfpenny stamp upon every Price current, but only upon such Prices current as shall ultimately pass through the Post-office, which, in fact, is making the Stamp-office collect one halfpenny postage upon a Price current sent by post only.

Supposing it should be enacted that newspapers not weighing more than half an ounce each should go post free at one halfpenny stamp; would that meet the difficulty of the case—of course the Postmaster-General, in the supposed case, allowing Prices current to go as

newspapers, in case there is a halfpenny stamp upon the paper?—Undoubtedly it would, provided the halfpenny was imposed upon every Price current, that is upon every copy.

You have stated that the imposition of a stamp duty for Prices current to be circulated through the Post-office, while the stamp was not imposed upon Prices current that did not go through the Post-office, would introduce an entirely new principle in the Stamp-office?—Undoubtedly it would.

Do you conceive there would be any danger in the introduction of that principle?—There would be no danger, certainly.

Do you imagine there would be material practical difficulty in introducing it?—There would be practical difficulty as regards the Stamp-office, because there would be no penalty if a man printed upon unstamped paper.

Would the difficulty to which you have alluded be in any way obviated if, instead of introducing the proposed change into the Stamp Act, it was introduced into the Post-office Act?—The Stamp-office would have no difficulty in putting a halfpenny stamp upon any sheet of paper that might be brought to it, whereon it is intended to print a Price current; the Post-office declaring that a sheet of paper when stamped with a halfpenny stamp, and containing a Price current, may pass free of postage; but it would be optional with a party whether he paid the stamp or not; there could be no penalty for printing on unstamped paper.

No. 26.

Monday, 28th March 1836.

Mark B. Peacock, Esq. was examined as follows:

Have you read Mr. Pressley's evidence upon the subject of Prices Current?—I have heard it read by Mr. Gardiner.

You are aware of the object which the Commissioners have in view?—I understand it is to allow Prices current to pass free of postage on a small stamp duty being paid.

You are aware that Mr. Pressley has expressed an opinion that there would be great difficulty in accomplishing that object by a Stamp Act, and that it would be more easy to do it by a Post-office Act?—Yes, I am aware Mr. Pressley has so stated.

In your opinion, would there be any difficulty in accomplishing it by a Post-office Act?—The difficulty would be that there is no Post-office Act at present authorizing the Postmaster-General to put a stamp upon any newspaper; and in the first instance the Postmaster-General must be authorized to put on a stamp. I think the proper course would be to authorize the Commissioners of Stamps to put a stamp upon Prices current to enable them to go post free.

The object of the Commissioners is not to impose a stamp duty upon all Prices current, but that those that have a stamp upon them should go postage free: what, in your opinion, would be the most simple and best manner of arriving at that object?—Merely by a clause empowering the Commissioners of Stamps to impose a duty upon such Prices current as are brought to them to a certain amount; merely an empowering clause, and not imposing any penalty upon the public for issuing them without such a stamp upon them.

You conceive there would be no difficulty in making such a regulation?—I really cannot conceive any. It would be a very different thing if the public were to be restrained generally from publishing Prices current without such a stamp; but if it is merely an empowering clause, enabling them to have a stamp imposed upon those they wish to go by post, I do not conceive there can be any difficulty in it.

If the Commissioners were to say that Prices current should go free of postage, the Postmaster-General having the power to define what are Prices current, and of imposing a stamp duty of a halfpenny to entitle them to go free, do you think that that would be a desirable mode of accomplishing the object?—I think that the Commissioners of Stamps should be authorized to impose a stamp duty upon them, and then giving a power to the Postmaster-General to allow them to go free of postage, upon the payment of that duty.

Could such power be given to the Postmaster-General without an Act of Parliament — No: there was a clause introduced into an Act of Parliament last year, with respect to newspapers, to enable the Postmaster-General to determine what is a newspaper.

Do Prices current at present go free through the Post-office under the twopenny stamp?—Not as Prices current; there may be papers called Prices current, that pass through the Post-office on the duty of 4d.; but they must contain some articles of public intelligence.

The Commissioners have seen a description of publication which contains nothing but mercantile intelligence, which circulates in this town without a stamp, but which goes postage free throughout the country with a stamp; are you not aware of that?—I understand there are a few that are entitled to go free of postage, under a clause of the Act abolishing the privilege of franking formerly exercised by several clerks in the office. 'Nicholson's Prices current, pass in that way.

Those that go by that privilege are unstamped, but those that go with stamps go postage free?—I know the objection has often been taken that they could not be allowed to go, because they were not stamped; it is known that the Commissioners of Stamps will let Prices current be stamped, and that they are stamped in blank, but the Postmaster-General is allowed to forward newspapers only.

Are there not publications that are called newspapers at the Post-office, but which are not so called at the Stamp-office?—There is a power to determine what are newspapers, but it has not been acted upon.

Examinations.

No. 25.

Chas. Pressley, Esq.
25th March 1836.

No. 26.

M. B. Peacock, Esq.
28th March 1836.

Examinations.

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No. 26.M. B. Peacock, Esq.
28th March 1836.

How do you account for what we saw upon this table, namely two copies of a precisely similar publication, called the "Mercantile Journal," one of which was not stamped, which was intended for circulation in this town, and the other one which was stamped, was intended for circulation through the Post-office?—I believe that journal has been made the subject of discussion between the Postmaster-General and the Commissioners of Stamps; I think an objection has been taken at the Post-office, that it is not a publication entitled to a stamp, and therefore is not entitled to pass through the Post-office; that has been referred to the Commissioners of Stamps; I am of opinion it is not a newspaper. There are other papers which contain a single article of intelligence; that is the case with the "Literary Journal;" those that are circulated in London pay no stamp duty, but if they are to go by post, they contain an article of public intelligence to make them newspapers, and entitle them to a stamp, to enable them to go free of postage.

Without that being done, the Postmaster-General has power to let them go?—He has power to determine what is a newspaper; but if it is intended to authorize any printed paper to go by post, clearly not a newspaper, it would require some further clause to enable the Postmaster-General to determine upon that.

Do you think the allowing Prices current to go free of postage would lead to much fraud?—Yes, in the present state of our establishment. There are about 40,000 newspapers sent from London every night by the mails; of that number, with our present force, we are able only to examine from 500 to 1,000 each night, so that 39,000 escape examination every night. One person is only able to examine fifty in an hour. I have brought some specimens with me. [*The witness produced several newspapers exhibiting the mode in which frauds were attempted to be practised.*] But I think if the public generally had the right of sending Prices current by the post, the number of frauds would be increased very considerably, unless the number of our force were also considerably increased.

Do you think there is room in the Post-office for that increase of force?—There is sufficient space to enlarge the different offices, unquestionably.

Should you find any difficulty in drawing up a clause that would accomplish the object of the Commissioners with respect to the Prices current?—I think not, if I understand the intention of the Commissioners.

The wish of the Commissioners is to limit the privilege strictly to Prices current, to confine the weight to some low amount, say half an ounce, and to allow them to circulate post free under a low stamp duty, say a halfpenny?—There would be no difficulty in framing a clause of that description. The Commissioners would wish of course that nothing should be in the Prices current but the names of the articles and their prices, and not any printed statement, otherwise we should have every tradesman publishing Prices current, with a statement at the bottom of it. We have had this brought to us as Prices current, with a regular letter attached to it. [*Handing in a letter.*] If the Postmaster-General had the power of determining in cases of that kind, that would guard the public against such frauds?—Certainly.

It would not take long to detect those things?—Not if we had force sufficient to examine them.

Are many foreign Prices current now sent by post in this country?—Yes, as letters.

Do many come?—I am not able to answer that question. I could procure the information.

They are charged as double letters?—Yes, there is generally a piece of paper upon them, which renders them liable to the double rate of postage.