

THE STAMP DUTY.

THIS stamp, which Government required to be impressed upon every newspaper, varied in price from its first imposition, as also the legal maximum size of each newspaper varied in the succeeding enactments. The tax, with its rigid conditions and penalties, handicapped all newspapers even more seriously than the Advertisement and Paper Duties.

The imposition of the stamp began on the 1st August, 1712, when a penny was charged upon each small sheet. From 1d. the tax went up by stages to 4d. in 1815. The legal size then was made 704 square inches ($32'' \times 22''$), and the price of the paper to buyers was 7d. That size was about half the size of our *Evening Times*, and its price is—½d. After much Parliamentary conflict the 4d. stamp was reduced on 15th Sept., 1836, to 1d. The Irish papers, however, got a further reduction of 25 per cent., “for,” as the Act stated, “prompt payment;” and yet this slur upon Ireland was silently endured! The English and Scottish papers had, however, to pay their stamps before they got them delivered, without 25 or any other discount. The Government also kept the whip hand over them by enacting at the same time that the officials might stop the supply of stamps, and thus stop the paper whose proprietor omitted or delayed to pay the Advertisement Duty.

PROS AND CONS.—The one advantage which the stamp afforded was the right given to the newspaper publisher or the buyer of the paper to post and re-post it during seven days after publication. That was somewhat counterbalanced, however, by the disadvantage to the publisher, that if the stamped paper was not posted or sold he had to bear the loss. The stamp also caused an additional loss by bad debts, and expense was involved in having all the paper made for newspapers from the paper mills sent to and from the Government Stamp Offices in either Edinburgh, London, Dublin, or, I think, Manchester. That necessity involved extra carriage, and the papermaker’s

interest upon his account for stamps, and other outlays. That roundabout process sometimes caused critical delays in the delivery of the stamped paper, and left an unprepared publisher so short in his supplies that in the emergency he was constrained to quietly borrow from a neighbour, but this was forbidden under a penalty of £50. A copy of each edition of every paper had to be sent to the Stamp Office free, with the signature of the proprietor or printer across the stamp, as another guarantee that he took the responsibility for the contents. Besides the 1d. stamp on each sheet there was a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. stamp upon each supplement, which some leading papers issued on occasions of extra pressure, as during the year of the Railway mania. During the latter part of that year (1845) I well remember the anxious cogitations in our office, when through the great pressure of prospectuses of railways, and other such matters, there was scanty space left for news about them or on any other subject. At the same time not only did the issue of a supplement involve a heavy outlay for paper and for the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. stamp, but there was also the difficulty of getting it out in time by our one slow printing press, so that the issue of the main sheet might not be blocked. Supplements of two pages, however, were published in October and November of that year—an unprecedented effort, which our readers greatly appreciated.

ITS REPEAL.—After a prolonged agitation in and out of Parliament, monthly publications were exempted from the obligatory use of the stamp in August, 1853, and *on 1st July, 1855, the compulsory stamp on all newspapers ceased*, leaving its use optional for postal purposes. In the months of July and August of the previous year, 1854, there were 19,115,000 newspaper stamps issued; in the same parallel months of 1855, after their use was made optional, 6,870,000 were sold, but even that option for postal purposes ceased also on 3rd October, 1870. Here ended the last semblance of a tax which prevented many newspapers coming into life and killed many prematurely, while the most of

those which managed to live had only a stunted and struggling life ; it limited the range of thought and checked mental stimulus, and stood in the way of both national and international intercourse.

THE STAMPS AND CIRCULATIONS.—Previous to the year when the compulsory stamp ceased, Parliament sometimes published the number of stamps supplied to each paper, and thereby revealed its circulation. It was a compulsory honesty which many did not like, and it was said that in some rare cases publishers tried to get over the difficulty by taking out more stamped paper near the end of the year than they needed, in order to swell their numbers in the Parliamentary Return ; but I never heard of such a case in Glasgow. That plan, as might have been foreseen, resulted in reduced numbers the following year, or in their being out of pocket for what they could not utilise. There was one advantage to advertisers by the publication of these official returns in giving authoritatively the actual circulation of every newspaper in the United Kingdom. But now few publishers care to do this themselves, because they know that truthful statements are liable to be compared with exaggerations in other cases.

After exhausting all likely means of getting correct information as to the stamps issued to the newspapers of these early years and thereby of their circulations, I have been fortunate in securing by my friend Mr. Bernard F. Bussy, the *Glasgow Herald* Parliament lobby correspondent, through Sir John Leng (of the *Dundee Advertiser*), and other M.P.'s, the following facts from the House of Commons Blue Books. Besides the Stamp Returns for the newspapers which were published in 1845 in Glasgow and in Edinburgh, and the London *daily papers*, I give their average issue.

It may be premised that the *N.B. Advertiser* and the *National Advertiser* were issued free with advertisements only, and were not newspapers, nor is the *Weekly Citizen* such now, as it contains almost only literary and similar matter ; while the *Edinburgh Gazette*, without news, remains the official organ of Scotland.

STAMPS ISSUED TO THE GLASGOW NEWSPAPERS EXISTING IN 1845,
AND THEIR DAYS OF PUBLICATION:—

	STAMPS.	AVERAGE.
The Glasgow Herald (Mon. and Fri.), -	380,000	3654
„ Saturday Post (Saturday), - -	207,250	3986
„ National Advertiser (Saturday, free),	175,000	3365
„ Courier (Tues., Thurs., and Sat.), -	140,000	897
„ Scotch Reformers' Gazette (Sat.), -	140,000	2692
„ Examiner (Saturday), - -	114,000	2192
„ Scottish Guardian (Tues. and Fri.),	100,000	962
„ Constitutional (Wed. and Sat.), -	98,000	942
„ Citizen (Saturday), - - -	81,000	1558
„ Argus (Monday and Friday), -	66,000	635
„ Chronicle (Wednesday), - -	56,000	1077
„ Railway and Shipping Journal (Sat.),	13,000	250

THE EDINBURGH NEWSPAPERS OF 1845:—

	STAMPS.	AVERAGE.
The North British Advertiser (weekly, free),	608,500	11,702
„ Witness (Wednesday and Saturday),	270,000	2596
„ Scotsman (Wednesday and Saturday),	248,025	2385
„ Courant (Mon., Thur., and Sat.), -	253,000	1621
„ Advertiser (Tuesday and Friday), -	143,000	1375
„ Chronicle (Saturday), - - -	138,000	2654
„ Mercury (Monday and Thursday),	101,000	971
„ Journal (Wednesday), - - -	41,000	791
„ Gazette, official (Tuesday and Friday),	15,000	144

THE LONDON DAILY NEWSPAPERS OF 1845:—

	STAMPS.	AVERAGE.
The Times, - - - - -	8,100,000	25,878
„ Morning Chronicle, - - - -	1,628,000	5201
„ Morning Herald, - - - -	1,608,070	5137
„ Morning Advertiser, - - - -	1,415,000	4520
„ Morning Post, - - - -	1,002,000	3201
„ Standard, - - - -	846,000	2702

It is remarkable that out of all the newspapers issued in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1845 only the *Glasgow Herald* and

the *Scotsman* continue to live, and with all the evidences of prolonged life.

Of the London dailies it need only be stated that the *Morning Herald*, which has disappeared, was practically amalgamated with the *Standard* under stronger management, and that the *Morning Chronicle* of 1845 *went down*, although the name, in the *Daily Chronicle*, has again recently come to the front. The circulations then of these newspapers still living and their circulations now form a laughable contrast, and at the same time a striking evidence of the advantages of unshackled trade.

LAST CENTURY PAPERS STILL LIVING.—When naming so many contemporaries, it may be well to add here a list of the oldest newspapers which exist now as dailies, with the years of origin in order:—The *Leeds Mercury*, 1718; the *Belfast News-Letter*, 1737; the *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, 1763; the *Bristol Daily Times and Mirror*, 1773; the *Morning Post*, 1772; the *Glasgow Herald*, 1782; the *Times*, 1788; the *Morning Advertiser*, 1794.

AFTER THE STAMP—FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?—Before the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp, there was considerable fear expressed that, should it take place, there would be a swarm of low-class papers started over the country, which would be filled with sedition, lewdness, scandal, and other forms of wickedness. These forecasts have had little fulfilment, the evils being much less prevalent since then than during the existence of the restrictive stamp. It is curious now to read the following arguments of a memorial sent by newspaper proprietors to members of Parliament against the repeal of the stamp, and which formed a sample of memorials to the same effect from London and different parts of the country:—“I. That the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp, and the removal of existing legal securities, are calculated to lower the character and injure the usefulness of the Press. II. That the term ‘Taxes on Knowledge,’ as applied to the Newspaper Stamp, is delusive and untrue. III. That the privilege of free transmission by post is an ample equivalent to

the stamp charge, and tends to the equal distribution of intelligence throughout remote and poor districts, as well as in populous and wealthy localities. IV. That, in the opinion of this meeting, a continuance of the present system is desired by the great mass of the community."

The compiler of these resolutions, I know, lived to acknowledge that what he and others feared as a calamity turned out to be a change which he had no reason to regret. Instead of lowering the character of newspapers when freed from the stamp, as the memorialists feared, those of the present day, in comparison with old times, are remarkably free of the objectionable features prophesied,—barring their rather minute reports of the Divorce Courts, &c.

BETTING, AND ITS REMEDY.—But the chief blot upon newspapers of the present time is that of being parties to the practice of Betting on Horse Races, which has greatly developed amongst all classes. Mr. Gladstone, in writing to the author of "The Ethics of Gambling," characterises the practice as the "false, destructive, and, shall I say, impious principle on which the vice of gambling is radically founded." Mr. Arthur J. Balfour, M.P., when speaking at the last annual meeting of the Newspaper Press Society, referred to the same subject, as follows:—"The Press of Great Britain had made such progress that every citizen might be proud of it as an example of skill and enterprise. They must add to the telegraph and the railway the Press as a great invention of the epoch. What interested him most was a little-noticed point—that was, in estimating the Press as a great social machine and stimulus. What had always struck him as most singular, looked at from an abstract and philosophic point of view, was the manner in which newspapers promoted for commercial purposes subsidised opinion from which they totally dissented. Some papers, for example, recently condemned gambling on the turf, while they gave as news all the odds upon the races. That was a case where the Press subsidised opinions which they thoroughly detested."

Yes, almost all proprietors and editors are “exercised” regarding this blot of the gambling evil attending the publication of the betting news, and they generally would gladly be quit of the whole thing. The difficulties in doing so include that of the irreconcileable competition which prevails, and the lesson gained by the experience some years ago of the Manchester daily papers, which showed not only that the withholding of such matter might end in the stranding of some papers and reducing the circulation of others, but in bringing into the field some sporting papers which minister to the lowest type of sporting men. One of the best of the English provincial papers bravely refused to give sporting news for many years, but suffered almost to extremity, and had to succumb at length, and give sporting also. The remedy against betting lies in the hands of Mr. Balfour himself and other legislators: they may practically stop the evil he refers to by making it penal to publish by newspaper, circular, or otherwise, these forecasts, odds, &c., and by preventing their telegraphic transmission. This would take the heart out of almost all the betting in the country, stop such an education of our youth, and allow the spirit of the evil to die out by starvation.

THE JOCKEY CLUB.—A bold attack is now before the law courts against the stronghold of horse-racing—the Newmarket Jockey Club—on the ground of the betting which goes on in its connection, and from which the leading “tips” for newspapers, &c., are drawn. The Newmarket magistrates, before whom the case first came, have decided that there was no evidence of gambling; but against this the Anti-Gambling League—the prosecutors—have resolved to appeal to the High Court of Justice. Regarding this local decision the *Times* says:—“It is gambling made easy and accessible to all comers. If it were true that betting, as it now goes on, were a necessary concomitant of horse-racing, and if they must stand or fall together, we should be well content that they should fall; but since the worst we have to fear is that the bookmaker and his clients will disappear, and that horse-racing will

continue without their support, the prospect is far from terrible. Application was made to state a case, but refused. It is not likely, however, that the business will be allowed to rest at the stage now reached. In so important a matter it is well, for every reason, that some final authoritative judgment should be pronounced." Many other papers also ridicule the defence and the judgment.

A recent correspondent on the betting mania has analysed the "Sporting Selections" of the *Liverpool Daily Post* during 1894. His analysis may be fairly taken as a sample of what might be got from other daily papers. He shows that the outcome of 1918 prophecies was that "the selected horse is first once in about four and a half guesses, it obtains a place in less than half of the prophet's selections (935 out of 1918), while in more than half of his selections (981 times out of 1918) it either comes in later than third or does not run at all. If readers, therefore, wish a safe tip, let them bet against every selection throughout the year, and the balance will be in their favour at the end." But it may be said of these devotees of the goddess of Fortune:—"Though thou should'st bray a fool in a mortar with a pestle amongst bruised corn, yet will not his foolishness depart from him!"

This matter seems irrelevant to the subject of the Newspaper Stamp, but it bears on the early question, whether the repeal of that tax was in all respects for the better or the worse. Anyone who is old enough to compare, will, I think, admit that the present is better.

THE STAMPS THEMSELVES.—Annexed are facsimiles of seven of the newspaper stamps referred to, from the year 1778 until the compulsory use of them ceased in 1855. The dates indicate the year of the paper from which the copies were made and the period when they were current, but not the date when each began. The first, taken from a newspaper in 1778 when it cost $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., and the price of the paper, including the stamp, was 3d.; that of 1790 cost 2d.; that of 1805 was $3\frac{1}{2}$ d., and the paper 6d.; that of 1814 was $3\frac{1}{2}$ d., and the paper $6\frac{1}{2}$ d. The stamp of 1817 reached the

maximum of 4d., and was imposed in 1815, the price of the newspaper also reaching its maximum price of 7d. a copy. The duty was reduced from 4d. to 1d. in 1836, as shown by the copy of the stamp in use during 1845, and until it was abolished. At this period the name of each newspaper was placed on the stamped paper used by it. I cannot tell why discounts are marked on the margins of the three preceding stamps, as there is only mention of discount to Irish papers in the Acts, but I know that while 25 per cent. was continued to them to the end, the English and Scottish papers paid the full penny. It may be observed that the repetition of the word halfpenny in the three first cases forms a primitive way of counting out the total cost of the taxes. The last stamp is a copy of that now used by the *Times*—the only newspaper in the United Kingdom which still does so.

Although formerly no newspaper could be issued unless it had passed through official hands to receive the Government stamp, a curious exception to the rigidity of the rule was made in the case of the *Times*. For some reason it was allowed to use a special stamp, printed along with the letterpress of the paper in black ink. How the usually scrupulous officials of Somerset House reckoned their exact due for the stamps issued in that way was not well known. But whatever mystery there may have been, I learn now that the *Times* continues the use of the printed “stamp” for postal purposes; the Post Office authorities, if not satisfied with the statement of its proprietors, may find the sum due from the newspaper books, or from the locked mechanical indicator of the printing press set apart for the work. This method saves labour and time to both parties: the one in not requiring to affix the usual label, and the other in not obliterating it; while it also suits the *Times*, seeing that probably a greater proportion of their circulation goes by post to distant subscribers than that of any other newspaper in the United Kingdom. It will be noticed that the first three stamps have the motto *Semper eadem*, while the others have the better-known legend *Dieu et*

mon droit. The latter might be taken to mean, God and my right to tax ; but *Semper eadem* is inexplicable, unless it was a burlesque

1805.

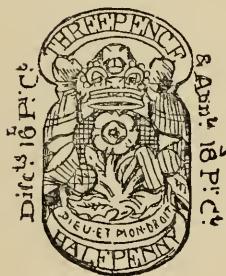
1778.



1790.



1814.



1817.



1845.



1895.



upon the frequent changes in the upward charges for the stamps ! Perhaps some "Humanity" scholar or antiquarian can explain

it. Another difference appeared, in that the last century stamps contain only the emblems of the rose and the thistle, while the last three have the rose, thistle, and shamrock,—no doubt because the union with Ireland was formed in 1800.

THE PAPER DUTY, AND PAPER.

REPEAL OF THE TAX.—No class of the community uses paper to the same extent as newspaper proprietors, so that they are specially affected by whatever influences its price; and this all the more because the price of newspapers is now almost everywhere fixed at a penny or a halfpenny. After the abolition of the stamp in 1855 there was a decided movement all over the United Kingdom for cheaper papers, and more of them than formerly; but as the price of white paper then ruled about 7d. per lb., including the Government tax of 1½d. per lb., the two things desired were not easily adjusted. The removal of that burden on paper was generally expected, and the forces which had done their work in getting the two “Taxes on Knowledge”—the Advertisement and Stamp Duties—repealed, continued to operate until the end was gained in the freeing of paper from all taxation. Mr. Gladstone, in his Budget of 1861, proposed and carried through the House of Commons the abolition of the 1½d. duty on all paper; but that was negatived by the House of Lords. It was a crisis between the two Houses, but, led by Mr. Gladstone, the Commons withheld this interference of the Peers in financial matters, and again presented the clause, which the Upper House then passed; so that not only was the 1½d. abolished, but the prerogative of the House of Commons in financial matters was more decidedly confirmed. The tax ceased on 1st October, 1861.

THE PRECURSORS OF PAPER.—The earliest known records show that “the pleasing hope, the fond desire, the longing after immor-