

THE BRITISH POST OFFICE

A Grave Scandal

A PLEA FOR FAIRPLAY

AN APPEAL to the Members of the
British House of Commons; to the
Free Press of Great Britain and Ireland;
and to all Fair-minded, English-born Men.

Vos, ceteri tribuni, oramus, ut primum
omnium cogitetis, potestatem istam ad
singulorum auxilium . . . comparatam
esse. *Liv. III., 9.*

LONDON, 1912

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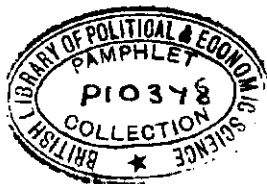
Dedicated

TO THE

RIGHT HON. REGINALD McKENNA, M.P.
(HOME SECRETARY)

AND TO THE

RIGHT HON. HERBERT LOUIS SAMUEL, M.A., M.P.
(POSTMASTER-GENERAL).



A PLEA FOR FAIRPLAY.

"Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipp'd them not."

—*All's Well.*

WE Englishmen are fond of talking about fair-play, of boasting of our perfectly fair and square way of doing things, of our large and manifold liberties.

In the mouth of the poorest Briton that lives, the proud words of Mucius Scaevola to the Etruscan king, Porsenna, *Romanus civis sum*—which to-day mean "I am of British race"—are words of legitimate vaunt and ominous menace.

"Fairplay" is our watchword. When at school a dispute took place amongst us lads, and talk was not enough, we threw off our coats—there was no scuffling, no *crêpage de chignons*—a ring was quickly formed, and the bigger lads stood round to see fairplay. The boy that hit below the belt was disqualified. No scratching, biting, kicking, or other unsportsmanlike tricks were tolerated.

The school-habits of our boyhood cling to us through life. The principles we practised then we love to preach in years of maturity. But we are not always so fair as when boys, fear of each other and vested interests often lead us to play the hypocrite, although we dearly love

"to assume a virtue, if we have it not."

We are not as other nations are. Oh, dear no! We are quite different in many respects, and far superior indeed in all essential things.

RUSSIAN METHODS.

The Russians, for instance, those "damnable, cut-throat Russians," with their ugly massacres of defenceless Jews; their horrid pogroms, torturing of men and whipping of helpless women in far-away Siberian prisons; their terrible administrative system, whose rule is despotic, sentence arbitrary and execution merciless!

Ah, how we hate it all! How far above it all are we!

Then, there's the French, "the gay, delightful French"; so charmingly illogical in their very inconsequence. Once they were this and that, and even worse still, but since the *entente cordiale* we know them better. They have put on the garment of virtue, and are now clothed with a variety of wonderful qualities our poor eyes had previously failed to perceive. We remember vaguely against them now, with a pitying smile, that they once had the impudence to stand against our troops at a place called "Waterloo," but, of course, we quite forget the peculiar chances that gained us the victory. We have also some shadow of a recollection of Egypt and Fachoda, but as they made way before us we generously forgave their temerity.

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"Tell men of high condition
That rule affairs of state,
Their purpose is ambition,
Their practice only hate.
And if they once reply,
Then give them all the lie."

SIR WALTER RALEIGH, 1552-1618.

One thing the French did we were, however, never able properly to "stomach," although it happened, in

truth, amongst themselves, and was—like the Dreyfus affair—somewhat of a family matter ; we remember their instituting the detestable

CABINET NOIR.

It took place, we believe, in the days of Louis Philippe, and consisted of a snug little corner in their Head Post Office, where letters used cleverly to be opened, careful note made of correspondence, and copies taken of letters by political parties for the better smashing of their enemies when occasion came.

Now, *that* we have never forgotten. "*Le Cabinet noir*," even to this day, signifies a thing of evil omen that we hate as we hate the Inquisition ; as we hate the Russian methods ; as we hate Chinese torture ; as our forefathers hated the infamous Star Chamber and the High Commission, and the cruel judgments of "bloody Judge Jeffreys."

Certain interested folk tried to get the *Cabinet noir* officially instituted in the British Post Office some years ago. The Mazzini affair is still well remembered. The matter was thrashed out in Parliament, and there was an outburst of indignation. Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General, of glorious renown, would not be a party to the opening of any letters, and the proposition was very rightly squashed.

We are, after all, for fairplay. The six hundred high-minded gentlemen that represent the mind of the British people at Westminster kicked out the vile suggestion, and repudiated the hateful business with healthy contempt.

But are we so sure of our boasted "Fairplay" ? Is it certain that *Le Cabinet noir* system does not exist in our midst ? Are we not playing the hypocritical part of the Pharisee in crying, "Lord, Lord, we thank Thee that we are not as other men are" ?

"Non ego te vidi Damonis, pessime, caprum excipere insidiis, multum latrante Lysisca? Et cum clamarem: Quo nunc se propripit ille? Tityre, coge pecus: tu post carecta latebas."—*Virg. Eclog. III.*

In the following pages it is intended to set forth in detail

A RECENT SCANDALOUS CASE,

and to show that letters addressed to a private citizen from all parts of the Empire, are waylaid, pounced upon, and detained at St. Martin's-le-Grand, by order of no less a person than the Right Honourable Herbert Samuel, M.P., Postmaster-General, lord and proprietor, it would seem, of all the closed letters that pass through his hands.

Le Cabinet noir, then, does exist at the G.P.O., London; and the fact that many of the letters thus tampered with and detained contain Monies, *i.e.*, Cheques and Postal Orders for which Mr. Herbert Samuel has received *value in coin of the realm*, makes the case all the more grave and scandalous.

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CARRINGTON, THE BOOKSELLER.

To make the matter clear, it is necessary to present the person who appeals against the high-handed methods of the Postmaster-General. He is a bookseller, of Brussels, Belgium, where he does business in the name of Charles Carrington.

It appears that Mr. Carrington has been responsible for the translation into English of certain famous French, Latin, and Italian works, which it is considered correct to regard as classical in their respective original languages, but which become "improper," "indecent," "obscene" even, immediately they are garbed in an English dress.

The chief works he is responsible for, and which fall under this reproach are, we believe, *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles of Louis XI. (of France)*; *Les Dames galantes* de Pierre Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantome; *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*; *The Satyricon of Petronius*; *Le piacevolissime Notti* of Straparola; and two or three translations from the Arabic language of the 14th Century, which, like *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, translated by both Sir Richard F. Burton and Mr. John Payne, do not hesitate to "call a spade a spade." Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists did the same. Mr. Carrington's editions possess the redeeming features of being issued in extremely limited numbers and at high and prohibitive prices.

For these things the former Home Secretary, Mr. Churchill, acting undoubtedly under a false or imperfect conception of the real facts, granted a warrant to the Postmaster-General empowering him to detain all closed letters, telegrams, and even cash remittances, addressed to Mr. Carrington from Great Britain, and such letters are lying in sufferance at the G.P.O., London.

An infamous assassin, a criminal who had stolen millions from the National Treasury, a felon accused of high treason, could scarcely be treated worse, and, probably, would not be handled in a worse manner.

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FACTS OF THE CASE.

About the middle of February last, 1911, Mr. Carrington became aware that postcards, letters, and, in fact, general correspondence were failing to reach him. He began to suspect that the cause was to be found in the dishonesty of postmen, or of some person in his service, and made an investigation, but he was soon convinced that some other cause should be looked for,

and he took the matter up with the Belgian Postal Authorities. They instituted enquiries and, after several weeks' delay, were officially informed by a letter from the British Postal Service that a number of letters had been detained at the G.P.O., London, giving as a reason that Mr. Carrington was "a dealer in improper books."

On learning this, he at once wrote to the Postmaster-General, London, but although he repeated his letter several times, they seemed to consider that the matter was unworthy of their attention, for he received no reply. He therefore, decided to put the matter into the hands of Messrs. Roberts, Seyd & Co., Solicitors, of 312, Regent Street, London, W., and, being unwilling to incur the expenses of an action at law, he asked them first of all to make personal application to the Postmaster-General for the return of the detained letters and demand the reason of his high-handed proceeding.

Mr. Carrington's solicitors, after writing several letters and waiting several weeks for an answer, made a personal visit to the Post Office and were finally referred to the Home Office. The solicitors thereupon wrote to the Home Office for an explanation, but were again met with the same mutism, and finally it was resolved, being unable to obtain the slightest satisfaction, to make an Appeal to the Law.

The matter was first of all submitted to learned counsel, who gave it as his opinion that the Solicitor-General was acting illegally.

An action for the unlawful detention of the letters and the stoppage of Carrington's correspondence, was therefore commenced against Mr. Herbert Samuel, the Postmaster-General. Immediately the summons was issued, the solicitors to the Post Office applied for a counter-summons to set Carrington's case aside, on the pretence that an Officer of the Crown could not be proceeded against.

Carrington's solicitors went on appeal before Mr. Justice Darling, and the appeal was granted. The Post Office's Solicitors thereupon demanded a *judicatum solvi*, or in plain English, a Bond of One Hundred Pounds sterling to be paid into Court, as plaintiff was living outside English jurisdiction. Not being able to find so much ready money at once, and also experiencing some difficulty in getting a friend to become bondsman, the case was suspended, as no further progress could be made until this money was paid into court.

In the meantime, his solicitors—acting upon the advice of their friend, Mr. W. Greig, M.P.—wrote a further letter to the Home Office, desiring to settle the matter amicably, but the Home Office (after keeping them waiting a considerable time before replying to their letter) refused to consent to any arrangement.

Thereupon, Carrington instructed Messrs. Roberts, Seyd & Co., to proceed with the action, but the solicitors in their letter, dated Dec. 4th last, pointed out to him that the case would cost him at least something like Four Hundred Pounds sterling. They stated that the G.P.O. would undoubtedly employ the services of the Attorney-General and that the fee of such a great man would be necessarily very high. In consequence, Carrington's adversaries would demand a heavy caution to be paid into court beforehand, to cover their costs and expenses, and that on the other hand, Carrington would be obliged to employ counsel almost as eminent to oppose to theirs, and that naturally the expenses of such counsel would be also considerable.

Now, Mr. Carrington is relatively a poor, obscure, and struggling bookseller, working and fighting day by day to earn bread for himself and family, and therefore, the great expenses involved in a case of this kind are absolutely beyond his means.

The highest legal talent and genius of all England was to be arrayed against him to cover the crime of the

Postmaster-General, and he saw that it would be folly to think of continuing the attack—although feeling perfectly sure of his rights—as the action would cost him far more money than he possesses.

He therefore informed his solicitors that he could not go on with the case, and that he must find some other means of obtaining justice.

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It is not by means of the Law that a private individual can attack Government, since Government is above Law.

Axiom.

TO RESUME, HE WOULD POINT OUT:

- (1) That letters addressed to him from various points in the British Isles and Dependencies have been stopped and detained since about the middle of February, 1911, up to the present time, January, 1912, and that this illegal purloining is still going on.
- (2) That many of these letters contain Postal Orders, for which the Postmaster-General *has received value in coin of the realm*, and that a most flagrant injustice is committed in detaining these monies, pretty much as if a tradesman who, having sold, and been paid for his goods, should cause them to be seized again before they left his warehouse. It is obvious that the retaining of such letters is unjust and illegal, as the Postmaster-General is bound—by his own regulations—either to forward such letters to destination or return them to senders. His perpetual retaining of the letters constitutes an illegality, but which Carrington is unable to fight out in a Court of Law, owing to want of means.

- (3) That his business, which consists of general bookselling, both new and second-hand, has been, to a large extent, ruined through the high-handed proceedings of the Post Office.
- (4) That the majority of the detained letters contain orders for second-hand works of an historical and scientific nature, and correspondence, in fact, relating generally to books of an antiquarian character, and is, therefore, on perfectly legitimate business with honourable firms and private citizens of high standing and good repute.
- (5) It should be pointed out that the Postal Orders contained in the letters will presently become valueless, owing to the lapse of time, because, according to the Rule marked on the back of Postal Orders, "they should be presented within three months from the last day of the month of issue, or pay commission"; and, further, Orders "may not be paid after the expiration of six months from the last day of the month of issue, until reference has been made to the Chief Office in London."

The Postmaster-General is acting *ultra vires*, or in plain English, *beyond his powers*, according to the Post Office Act of 1908 (8 Edward VII., 48, Section 17), and finally, it is submitted that it is a short-sighted policy and a most grievous wrong for those in authority to do aught that may impair the confidence of the public in the security of the British Postal System.

The seizing and detaining of private, closed, and sealed letters addressed to Carrington is an outrage, because tending to make of him—a poor and obscure bookseller—a sort of modern Ishmael, for no other reason than that of having supplied from time to time, on demand, a few books that may be deemed "indecent" in England, but are not so considered in other countries,

irrespective of the fact that he does an extensive trade in second-hand, scientific and historical books of an indisputable character.

For all these reasons Mr. Charles Carrington begs and prays that honourable Members of Parliament will enquire into the truth of his statements, and intervene with the High Powers and Authorities, whose good and undoubted faith have been most certainly surprised and misled in the lamentable circumstances described.

BRUSSELS:
10 RUE DE LA TRIBUNE.

February, 1912.

Issued by CHARLES CARRINGTON, Bookseller.