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Digitised images notes and captions by Edward Wakeling

F - Post Office Correspondence

Introductory notes:

On 1 June 1891, Dodgson wrote in his diary: "Got answer, about my Postal Problem, from Judge Denman and Sir Richard Harington, differing from each other and from Giffard (who is a Q.C.)! Sent MS. for a set of sixteen questions on it, to be printed, to be filled in by friends. It is a very curious verbal puzzle." For some days Dodgson had been in contact with the General Post Office in London concerning the payment of commission on overdue postal orders. He appears to have spotted an ambiguity in the rules from the *Post Office Guide*.

Christ Church has some draft letters and proof copies of the documents that emerged as a result of Dodgson's enquiry into his *Postal Problem*. The Postmaster General, Henry Cecil Raikes (1838-1891), was a distant cousin of Dodgson.

Carroll-F1_01_r

A Post-Office Curiosity - draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891. The letter is transcribed below with corrections and amendments added:

[Christ Church, Oxford]
May 23, 1891

A Post-Office Curiosity

Sir,

I lately chanced upon a curious anomaly in the wording of the Rules about Postal Orders, as published in the *Postal Guide*. It may, I think, interest your readers as a mere curiosity in legislative blundering, but there is a greater curiosity to follow.

The Rule I refer to is as follows (the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, being inserted myself):

"After the expiration of three months from the last day of the month of issue, a Postal Order will be payable only on payment of (*a*) a Commission, equal to the amount of the original poundage, (*b*) with the addition (if more than three months have elapsed since the said expiration) of the amount of the original poundage for every further period of three months which has so elapsed, and (*c*) for every portion of such period of three months over and above every complete period.

A minute's consideration will inform your readers that the Commission (*a*) on an order issued (say) in January begins to be chargeable on May 1, and, since *one* "complete period" has now expired, chargeable till July 31; that the Extra-Commission (*b*) begins to be chargeable on August 1 (since *two* "complete periods" has now elapsed); and that the Extra-Commission (*c*) begins to be chargeable on

August 2 (since a "portion" of a period of three months over and above these two "complete periods," has now expired, and continues to be chargeable till November 1, the day after which things go on normally, with a rise of a fresh Extra-Commission every three months.

The anomalous result (which no doubt our legislators did not foresee) is that there are three consecutive days (they are, in this case, July 31, August 1 and August 2) on which there are three different charges instead of (what they no doubt intended) the extra-charge rising only once in every three months.

In making this extraordinary Rule, our legislators probably believed that they were acting in accordance with the principle of Cab-Fares, by which an extra sixpence is due for every additional mile, or fraction of a mile: overlooking the fact that this charge for a fractional distance occurs in the very *first* distance. If you drive a single yard, it counts as a fraction of the first two miles, and is charged a shilling. But, in the present case, the charge for a fractional period only occurs after two complete periods have elapsed. Hence comes the startling result.

The "greater curiosity," which I promised, consists of the correspondence I have had with the Officials of the G. P. O.

In answer to my first letter, pointing out the above anomaly, I received a letter containing the following words. "The Applicant would appear to have assumed that the Commission on an overdue Postal Order is renewable for each day that the Order is overdue. Such, however, is not the case." He then copies out the Rule I have already quoted, and adds "Example. £1 Postal Order. Date of issue, January 6. Date of payment, September 6. Extra Commission payable 3*d.*" (This was a mistake: the charge would be 4½*d.*, being 3 Extra-Commissions for 2 "complete periods" of 3 months and a "portion" consisting of a month and 6 days, over and above the 2 "complete periods").

I wrote again, explaining all this, and inviting my correspondent to give the dates at which the 3 successive Commissions would begin, and cease, to be chargeable, on a £1 order issued January 31.

In answer to this I received a letter containing the following words.

"The Example given" (in his previous letter) "has been examined and found to be correct. The Extra Commission, payable on a £1 Postal Order issued on any day in January and presented for payment on any day between August 1 and October 31 would be 3*d.*" He then fills in the dates, as I had invited him to do, as follows. "The 1½*d.* charge would begin on May 1" (right), "and cease on July 31" (right). "The 3*d.* charge would begin on August 1" (right), "and cease on October 31" (wrong, should be August 1 again). "The 4½*d.* charge would begin on November 1" (wrong: should be August 2), "and cease on January 31" (wrong: should be November 1). He concludes thus. "You will observe that the period, during which the extra-charge would be 3*d.*, is stated as August 1 to October 31, and that it is not limited to August 1, as shown in the example given in your letter. The point is that the Commission does not increase until after the expiration of each period of three complete calendar months, and therefore cannot increase twice within any three consecutive months." (Thus he entirely ignores clause (c) in the Rule I have quoted).

Permit me to add that the Officials of the G. P. O. have shown themselves, in all communications I have had with them, prompt, painstaking, and courteous. In fact,

if only they understood the Rules of the Department to which they belong, they would leave nothing to be desired.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Charles L. Dodgson,
Student of Christ Church, Oxford.

Dodgson originally intended to send the letter signed by his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll, but finally chose to use his real name.

Carroll-F1_01_v

Verso is blank

Carroll-F1_02_r

Continuation of draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891.

Carroll-F1_02_v

Additional notes for the draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891.

Carroll-F1_03_r

Continuation of draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891.

Carroll-F1_03_v

Verso is blank

Carroll-F1_04_r

Continuation of draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891.

Carroll-F1_04_v

Verso is blank

Carroll-F1_05_r

Final part of draft letter to the Editor of the *Daily News* dated 23 May 1891.

Carroll-F1_05_v

Verso is blank

Carroll-F2_r

Draft letter to the Post Office dated 8 May 1891 with correspondence number 74242. The letter is transcribed below together with the response from the G. P. O.:

Christ Church, Oxford,
May 8, 1891

Mr. C. L. Dodgson is much obliged for the "Memorandum" dated May 2.

Mr. Dodgson had *not* assumed that the Commission on an overdue Postal Order is renewable for each day that the order is overdue"; but merely that a series of *three* consecutive days can be found on which the charges for an overdue Postal Order for 20/- would be $1\frac{1}{2}d.$, $3d.$, $4\frac{1}{2}d.$

The "Memorandum" gives, as an example, a £1 Postal Order, issued on Jan. 6 /90, and paid Sep. 6 /90; and *states that the extra Commission would be 3d.* This is a mistake. The time elapsed is 8 months, and contains the following portions:

- (1) a complete 3 months and 26 days original charge $1\frac{1}{2}d.$
- (2) a second ditto $1\frac{1}{2}d.$
- (3) a portion of 3 months extra Commission $1\frac{1}{2}d.$
total $4\frac{1}{2}d.$

The choice of "Jan. 6" and "Sep. 6" looks as if the writer thought the first 3 months would be reckoned from Jan. 6 to Ap. 6. This also would be a mistake. It would be reckoned from Jan. 31 to Ap. 30.

If the writer will fill in the dates in the table given over leaf, the result will perhaps surprise him.

Date of issue or Order for 20/-		Jan. 31
Period during which the extra charge would be $1\frac{1}{2}d.$	first day	May 1
	last day	July 31
Period during which the extra charge would be $3d.$	first day	Aug. 1
	last day	Oct. 31
Period during which the extra charge would be $4\frac{1}{2}d.$	first day	Nov. 1
	last day	Jan. 31

Memorandum No. 2 (not in Dodgson's hand)

The figures have been filled in as suggested. The example given in Memorandum No. 1 has been examined and found to be correct. The extra Commission payable on

a 20/- Postal Order issued on any day in January and presented for payment on any day between 1st August and the 31st of October would be 3*d*.

General Post Office
19 May 1891

Carroll-F2_v

Continuation of draft letter to the Post Office dated 8 May 1891 with correspondence number 74242

Carroll-F3_1_r

A draft manuscript version of A Postal Problem dated 1 June 1891 with correspondence number 74440

A POSTAL PROBLEM

June 1891

The Rule, for Commissions chargeable on overdue Postal Orders, is given in the "Post Office Guide," in these words (it is here divided, for convenience of reference, into 3 clauses):-

"(a) After the expiration of 3 months from the last day of the month of issue, a Postal Order will be payable only on payment of a Commission, equal to the amount of the original poundage

"(b) with the addition (if more than 3 months have elapsed since the said expiration) of the amount of the original poundage for every further period of 3 months which has so elapsed

"(c) and for every portion of any such period of 3 months over and above every complete period."

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You are requested to answer the following questions, in reference to a Postal Order for 10/. (on which the 'original poundage' would be 1*d*.) issued during the month of January, so that the 1st 'period' would consist of the months February, March, April; the 2nd of the months May, June, July; and the 3rd of the months August, September, October.

(1) Supposing the Rule to consist of clause (a) only, on what day would a 'Commission' begin to be chargeable? []

(2) What would be its amount? []

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(3) Supposing the Rule to consist of clauses (a) and (b), on what day would the lowest 'Commission' begin to be chargeable? []

(4) What would be its amount? []

(5) On what day would a larger 'Commission' (being the sum of 2 'Commissions') begin to be chargeable? []

(6) What would be its amount? []
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(7) On what day would a yet larger 'Commission' begin to be chargeable?
[]

(8) What would be its amount? []
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(9) Taking the Rule as consisting of all 3 clauses, in *which* of the above-named 3 'periods' does clause (c) first begin to take effect? []

(10) *Which* day, of any 'period,' is the earliest on which it can be said that a 'portion' of the 'period' has elapsed? []

(11) On what day would the lowest 'Commission' begin to be chargeable?
[]

(12) What would be its amount? []

(13) On what day would a larger 'Commission' begin to be chargeable?
[]

(14) What would be its amount? []

(15) On what day would a yet larger 'Commission' begin to be chargeable?
[]

(16) What would be its amount? []

Signature _____

Date _____

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Carroll-F3_1_v

The verso is blank

Carroll-F3_2_r

Continuation of draft manuscript version of A Postal Problem dated 1 June 1891 with correspondence number 74440

Carroll-F3_2_v

The verso is blank

Carroll-F4_r

Manuscript questionnaire on the Postal Problem with answers completed by George Denman (1819-1896), judge of the High Court, and signed by him. The original questionnaire had Dodgson's correspondence number 74426 and was dated 30 May

1891. Denman's response had Dodgson's correspondence number 74436 and was dated 1 June 1891. A transcript is given below:

(a) After the expiration of 3 months from the last day of the monthly issue, a Postal Order will be payable only on payment of a Commission, equal to the amount of the original poundage

(b) with the addition (if *more* than 3 months have elapsed since the said expiration) of the amount of the original poundage for every *further* period of 3 months which has so elapsed

(c) and for every portion of any such period of 3 months over and above every complete period.

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Questions on above.

(1) A Postal Order, on which the original poundage is 1*d.*, is issued in January, and presented in September. Supposing the Rule consisted of *clause (a) only*, what would the presenter have to pay? []

(2) Supposing it consisted of clauses (a) and (b), what would he have to pay? []

(3) Supposing it consisted of all 3 clauses, what would he have to pay? []

(4) Supposing it consisted of all 3 clauses, on what day would the lowest charge begin to be chargeable? []

(5) On what day would the first *rise* in charges occur? []

(6) On what day would the second rise in charges occur? []

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Signature _____

Denman's answers to the six questions were:

(1) 1*d.* (2) 2*d.* (3) 3*d.* (4) 1st May (5) 1st August (6) on presentation after the 1st August

Carroll-F4_v

Verso shows Dodgson's correspondence number 74436 in bottom right corner (Denman's response)

Carroll-F6_01_r

Answers to "Postal Problem" dated 5 June 1891

Analysis of the sixteen responses to Dodgson's questionnaire from six correspondents (not named but listed only by Greek letters). Not all the questions were answered, and there is variation in the responses, confirming the ambiguity suggested by Dodgson.

Carroll-F6_01_v

Verso is blank

Carroll-F6_02_r

A code for the correspondents sending responses to Dodgson's questionnaire on the Postal Problem, together with some assigned correspondence numbers. The first two Greek letters are for Dodgson and the General Post Office. The others are:

Henry Alexander Giffard (1838-1927) QC - 74396

William Warner (1851-1921) Senior Student of Christ Church - 74489

Thomas Banks Strong (1861-1944) Tutor and Student of Christ Church - 74499

William Baillie Skene (1838-1911) Student and Treasurer of Christ Church - 74501

John Cook Wilson (1849-1915) Professor of Logic at Oxford - 74503

Carroll-F6_02_v

"A Postal Problem - Schedule and answers - 2 leaves" not in Dodgson's hand