

Elihu Burritt and Friends

THE Library at Friends House has received during the past year or two gifts of letters written by Elihu Burritt to Friends whilst he was engaged upon his Peace and Brotherhood mission in England during the middle years of last century. The donors of these very welcome additions to the Library have been James Edmund Clark of Street, Harriet Alexander of Worthing and Charlotte Lyndon of Hindhead. The last named had received from her mother, Anna Mary Ransom (*née* Southall) of Hitchin, over eighty letters written to A. M. Southall by Elihu Burritt during the years 1850-56. It was my happy privilege to suggest to Charlotte Lyndon that this valuable collection of letters should find a permanent home at Friends House.

We learn from these Burritt-Southall letters that it was due to Joseph Crosfield of Manchester that Burritt first came to England in 1848. He found an open door among Friends everywhere. His unassuming manner and persuasive methods of propaganda appealed to the quiet orderly life of Friends. He adopted two principal ways of working. One through the establishment of Olive Leaf Circles among women and, secondly, through a journal which he edited entitled *The Bond of Brotherhood*. He also gained a considerable following among liberal-minded business men by his advocacy of what he called "Ocean Penny Postage". This proposal appealed to many as the logical development of Rowland Hill's introduction of Uniform Penny Postage for the United Kingdom in 1840.¹

¹ James Edmund Clark of Street has permitted me to see an interesting note made by the late William S. Clark, in which he recalls a visit paid by Elihu Burritt to Street when he was a boy. Although W. S. Clark was too young to remember the incident himself, he relates that he often heard his father speak of it, and especially of the fact that it was whilst Burritt was staying with them that the idea of Ocean Penny Postage first suggested itself to him. He adds, "it seemed as if for days it took entire possession of his mind. He would walk up and down the garden talking to himself about all that might result from it, in knitting different nations together, and especially England and America. He was so absorbed in the idea that it seemed impossible to attract his attention for anything else. It was even most difficult to get him to join the family at meals."



ELIHU BURRITT
From a plaster medallion at Friends House.

Blocks kindly lent by Samuel Graveson

[face p. 26.]



(Per Guinand Steamer from Boston)

Miss Anna Mary Southwell

Wellington Road
Birmingham
England

All ports are open where ever she goes
Friends hail her welcome and she has no fire

Printed & Published by Bradshaw & Blacklock, Birmingham, England, 1857

“OCEAN PENNY POSTAGE” PROPAGANDA ENVELOPE
Bradshaw and Blacklock design, addressed by Elihu Burritt himself.

Anna Mary Southall,¹ the recipient of the letters given by Charlotte Lyndon, was one of Elihu Burritt's most faithful and industrious helpers in the work of the Olive Leaf Missions. Living in Birmingham at the time, she was a member of a circle that included "good Joseph Sturge", as Burritt loved to describe him. Joseph Crosfield, George Bradshaw, and Charles Gilpin were three of Burritt's closest friends and most loyal supporters in other parts of the country. Both Bradshaw and Gilpin were printers and publishers and they used their presses for the production of much of the Peace literature which Burritt circulated, including the pictorial envelopes to further the cause of Ocean Penny Postage.

In the course of a succession of tours to all parts of the country Burritt met with, and was entertained by, many members of the Society of Friends. Over one hundred Olive Leaf Circles were formed, mostly in towns where there was a Friends Meeting. Occasionally he met with a rebuff from those who held the conventional belief that no good thing could come out of America! In the letters under review Burritt writes very freely of his experiences and never expresses an unkind thought about those who would not help in his mission. The spirit of brotherhood permeates the whole of the correspondence. His enterprise took him to Hamburgh and other cities in Germany and at one time he had hopes that it would be possible to extend the work to Russia and Spain.

The death of Joseph Crosfield in 1854 was a severe blow to Elihu Burritt. Again and again he refers to his loss in the letters he wrote A. M. Southall. A little later he records the tragic death of his friend and helper George Bradshaw² from cholera whilst on a visit to Norway.

It was not bereavements only that brought a measure of discouragement to Elihu Burritt. Like many another pioneer of Peace his efforts were frustrated by the outbreak of another war. In this case it was the war that John Bright so vigorously denounced, that on the side of Turkey against Russia in the Crimea. As the smoke of munition factories

¹ Anna Mary Ransom, in 1880, contributed to the *Friends Quarterly Examiner* an article on Elihu Burritt, in which she recalled many incidents of his work for Peace and Brotherhood.

² George Bradshaw, the first publisher of *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*.

spread over England the Olive Leaf Circles contracted and then faded out. Ocean Penny Postage was no longer considered a matter of practical politics.¹

On his return to his home in America Elihu Burritt turned his mind to give support to the movement for Free Labour in the Slave States. He settled on a small farm near his native town of New Britain, Connecticut, and it is from there that the last letters he wrote A. M. Southall are addressed. Included in the eighty letters now in the Friends Reference Library there is an interesting account of a visit Burritt paid to Ackworth School in 1851 and a most vivid description of what he saw and heard at a meeting for worship he attended during Yearly Meeting in London in 1852.

S. GRAVESON

¹ In the pamphlet which Burritt issued on this proposal, a copy of which is in the Library at Friends House, he is careful to explain that what the advocates of Ocean Penny Postage desired was a reform of the postage rates for letters going abroad to enable people to send a letter to any part of the world for threepence—one penny for postage in the home country, one penny for crossing the ocean, and one penny for delivery on the other side. Rowland Hill's great reform of the British postage system had not affected the foreign postage rates, which continued prohibitively high. The idea of a penny for ocean postage was probably suggested by the practice of the British Post Office in paying captains of private ships one penny per letter on all letters they handed over to the Post Office on arrival in England. That the campaign for Ocean Penny Postage did bear fruit is shown by the reduction of rates on foreign letters introduced shortly after the Crimean War.