

# AN EXAMINATION

OF THE

## PROBABLE EFFECT OF THE REDUCTION OF POSTAGE:

*As proposed to be made by the Bill introduced into the Senate of the United States by the Hon. Mr. Merrick, of Maryland.*

The public mind has been so much excited on the subject of "Post Office Reforms" and "cheap postage," by the incessant efforts of the newspaper press in the Northern cities, especially in New York, that I have been induced to turn aside from a pressure of laborious duties to examine how far the complaints which we hear, of the unreasonable postage now imposed by law, are well founded, and how far the reforms so loudly called for are practicable. That a tax upon the transportation of letters and newspapers may be burdensome, I will not deny; but so is every other species of tax for the support of Government. The true consideration is, is the tax in the one case or the other, necessary for the well being of the community? And is the amount of the tax greater than the unavoidable expenses of the establishment require? We have seen that for a series of years the income of the Post Office Department has been barely equal to, and in several instances it has fallen greatly below the expenses incident to the support of the establishment. If any feasible plan for lessening the expenses, so as not to impair the efficiency of the Post Office, were proposed, I should be one of the last to object to a proportionable reduction of the rates of postage; but I cannot consent, nor do I believe that a majority of the people or of their representatives, will ever assent to such a reduction of the rates of postage, as will either deprive a very large portion of the country from any participation in the benefits of the system, or make the expense of conveying the public

mails a charge upon the Treasury Department. To show, I think conclusively, that one or other either of these results must follow the adoption of Senator Merrick's bill, or of any of the schemes proposed by the New York editors, is the object of this article.

It appears by the report of the Postmaster General at the opening of the present session of Congress, that the whole expense of the Department for the year ending 30th June, 1843, was \$1,374,713 75, and the whole revenue \$1,295,925 43. It cannot be expected that the expenses can hereafter be materially lessened; but on the contrary, while our settlements are perpetually widening and extending over the vast territories of the West, new villages, towns and cities springing up in every part of our still sparsely settled country, it is absolutely certain that those expenses must be constantly augmenting, unless it becomes the policy of the Government to cut off from all share in the benefits of the mail establishment, every post route which does not carry on a sufficient correspondence to defray the expense of transporting the mail. Whether such a policy can ever be resorted to by Congress, or whether, if resorted to, it will ever be tolerated by the people, remains to be seen. At all events, then, it may be taken as certain that no material reduction of the expenses of mail transportation is to be looked for. Let us see what chance there is for an augmentation of revenue by a large reduction of the rates of postage.

With a view to lay before Congress such facts as might enable that body to arrive at a right understanding of the subject, and test the practicability of maintaining the establishment by adopting the favored scheme of a large reduction of the rates of postage, the Postmaster General has collected the actual number of letters and newspapers, &c., received at every post office in the United States in October last. By comparing the aggregate amount of postage collected in that month with the gross revenue for the year, an

stated in the annual report, it will be seen that it falls short of the average, but it is sufficiently accurate for a due investigation of the subject. I shall only use so much of the returns for October as relates to letter postage, an extension of my examination into the amount accruing on newspapers and pamphlets would make this essay too cumbrous, and my calculations too complex to be generally understood.

It appears that during the month of October, there were received at all the post offices of the United States 2,036,640 letters upon which the postage charged amounted to \$295,756 10½ being a fraction more than 14½ cents for each letter. Of these, the proportions were as follows:

Rates.	Number.	Amount.
6	346,330 (not over 30 miles)	\$20,779 80
10	466,110 " 80 "	46,611 00
12½	395,350 " 150 "	49,419 87½
18½	450,637 " 400 "	84,494 43½
25	378,204 (over 400 "	94,551 00
2,036,640 amounting to		\$295,856 10½
12 which, multiplied by		12
24,439,680 amounting to		\$3,550,273 23

Charged by the rates proposed by Senator Merrick's bill, viz. 5 cents for 100 miles and under, and 10 cents for all greater distances, the postage on the same number of letters would be about, - - - - - 1,877,432 40  
or a fraction over 7½ cents a letter  
Showing a deficiency in the annual revenue of - - - - - \$1,672,840 83

This comparative statement is obtained by adding together the whole number of letters actually received, rated with 6 cents and 10 cents, and one-third of those received at 12½ cents, and classing them as at 5 cents, the rate proposed, and rating all the rest at 10 cents. Thus:

Rates.	Number.	Amount
5	944,226	47,211 30
10	1,092,414	109,241 40

Rec'd in one mo. 2,036,640 letters prod'ng 156,452 70  
Which, multiplied by 12  
Being, for 1 year 24,439,680 letters, pro- ducing \$1,877,432 40

The next question is, how is this large deficiency of \$1,672,840 83 to be supplied? This question requires a careful examination, and such an one I will endeavor to give it.

The principal dependence of Senator Merrick, and the other advocates of "cheap postage," appears to be upon the supposed increase in correspondence.—That there will be some increase in the number of letters mailed, is very probable; but that that increase will reach the amount of the deficiency, as now shown, no man, who examines the subject, can be made to believe. I know that I shall be met with a repetition of the oft exhibited results of the experiment in England; but I am prepared to prove that the English experiment has utterly failed to realize the anticipations of its projectors, and utterly falsified their predictions. And here I am mainly indebted to the industry of the Postmaster General, who has embodied all that is material upon this subject, in his last masterly Annual Report.

First, as to the anticipations of the Committee of the H. of Commons, in their report recommending the reduction of postage. They there say "that they believe, at no distant period, it will improve the Post Office revenue itself." This is the prediction—let us see its fulfilment:

The gross revenue for the year 1839, before the penny postage was established, was \$11,475,662 00  
The gross revenue for the year 1841, two years after the penny postage was established, was - - - - - 7,178,592 00  
Being a reduction of - - - - - \$4,297,070 00

It should be borne in mind that even this amount of \$7,178,592 was not wholly derived from the penny postage system, a very considerable portion of it consisting of postage collected on foreign letters and newspapers, which are charged at the old rates, and upon colonial letters, which have not been reduced in the same proportion as inland letters. This is manifested by a calculation of the postage accruing on the whole number of letters, as estimated, in the year 1841, viz. There were posted in England in 1841, about 204,334,676 letters, the postage on which, at a penny each, would amount to £851,394 9s. 8d., or \$4,086,693, showing that the postage collected on letters and newspapers from foreign countries amounted, in 1841, to \$3,091,899: being more than three-sevenths of the whole Post Office revenue for the year. Now, if the example of the British Government is to be followed, let it be followed out in all its details. Let a postage of 46 cents, as in England, be charged on every single letter brought to our ports in every ship that arrives from foreign countries, and let the collection of that postage be enforced, as in England, by ample penalties, rigorously exacted. In none of the representations made in this country, of the success of the British experiment, have I seen this large item of the foreign letters noticed, and I do not believe that those who have been so active in their efforts to bring down postage, were aware of the fact I have stated.

Secondly. Were it even true that the British experiment had been completely successful, I am prepared to show, conclusively, that a similar experiment in this country must utterly fail. Wisdom would dictate to statesmen, that the laws of different countries must vary according to the circumstances of those countries. What might be very wise and proper for England, might be very unwise and absurd in other countries. This we see in almost every feature of the two countries. The one has a king, lords, and privileged classes—in the other, all men are on a footing of perfect civil equality. Large standing armies are indispensable to the public safety there; while here, every man considers himself able, as he is willing, to become a soldier to protect the common liberties and the established laws. We find England teeming with an active commercial and manufacturing people—with a population greater than that of the United States—crowded into a space scarcely larger than one of our largest States—certainly on less territory than is comprised in our six New England States. She has a commercial correspondence with every part of the world, perhaps larger than the commercial correspondence of all the rest of Europe combined; whilst the great bulk of the population of the United States is agricultural, whose occasion for the use of the mails bears no comparison with that of even one of the smallest Euro-

pean States. The English Post Office establishment conveyed 77,500,000 letters in 1839, subject to the heaviest postage in the world; in comparison to which the so much complained of American postage was but a mite—and yet under our comparatively “cheap postage,” with a population of 17,000,000, the official returns show that our mails transported but about 24,500,000 letters in the year 1843. It is not denied that a very great increase in the number of letters posted followed the reduction of postage in England; but that increase arose from causes which do not and cannot arise in this country. Before the reduction of postage in England, the rates charged there, as I have before stated, were enormous and burdensome in the extreme; merchants and manufacturers, therefore, were obliged to advertise their stocks of goods, with the prices, quality, &c. in the newspapers, and send those newspapers by mail to their distant customers, upon which newspapers no postage was charged. After the reduction, they were enabled to avail themselves of the cheaper mode of transmitting the same kind of intelligence by lithographed circular letters, which cost themselves very little, and their correspondents but one penny. Millions of letters were therefore sent by the mail, which never would have been put in the Post Office had the old rates continued. Does any man suppose that the same thing would be done here, while the postage remains so high as five or ten cents? It is very certain that if they should be put in the mail they never would be taken out of the Post Office. To effect a similar result here, it would be necessary to make a much greater reduction than proposed by Senator Merrick. Instead of reducing postage to five and ten cents, it would be absolutely indispensable to reduce it to two cents—the rate now chargeable in England on inland letters.

*Thirdly.* In 1838, before the adoption of the penny postage system in England, the gross income of the Post Office is stated to have been \$11,421,907; while the whole expenses of the establishment were but \$8,353,434—thus yielding a surplus revenue of \$8,068,473. In 1843, the gross revenue of the Post Office of the United States is stated to have been \$4,295,925, and the whole expenses amounted to \$4,374,713, showing a deficit of \$78,788. In England, therefore, however it might affect the interests of the Treasury, the experiment might be ventured upon without any danger of disturbing the efficiency of the Department, while a similar attempt in this country must inevitably end in an entire overthrow of the Post Office establishment; unless, indeed, Congress is prepared to appropriate \$1,500,000 out of the national Treasury, to enable the Postmaster General to keep the mails in operation.

I think I have said enough to satisfy every thinking man that the condition of England is so dissimilar to that of the United States, that it would be the merest folly in this Government to make their example the basis of any legislative action on this subject. I will now proceed to present other views, which may not be without their value in the consideration of this subject.

I have before shown that, supposing Senator Merrick's bill were to become a law, and supposing the number of letters posted were not to be increased thereby, the annual deficiency which would occur in the Post Office revenue would amount to \$1,672,840 83. I have shown, also, that, great as has been the increase of correspondence in England, and the great

amount derived from foreign correspondence, the revenue there, after two years' trial, still fell short of the sum collected in 1839 in the enormous sum of \$4,297,070. I have shown too, I think, that no such increase in correspondence can be anticipated in the United States, and that all estimates founded on the actual or supposed success of the British experiment will prove to be fallacious, and must result in utter disappointment. It is easy to ascertain with tolerable certainty the amount of the additional correspondence required, at the proposed new rates, to supply the deficiency of \$1,672,840 83 before stated, as thus:—by dividing the sum of this ascertained deficiency by  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , the average rate by Senator Merrick's bill, the result will show that 22,304,544 letters will be required to bring up the annual revenue to the amount of the income for 1843, as stated in the Postmaster General's report, being an increase of near 100 per cent. on the present correspondence.

To supply this deficiency, Senator Merrick seems to rely upon the curtailment of the franking privilege, and seems to think that the postage to be charged on the multitude of letters which now pass through the mails as *free* will be amply sufficient to effect the object. This hope I think I can show to be utterly fallacious, and no calculations based on such a supposition are to be relied upon. The official report states the whole number of free letters in October, 1843, to be 234,661, which would show for the whole year 2,515,932. Were all these to be charged with postage at the average rate proposed by Senator Merrick's bill, they would, if single letters, produce the annual sum of \$188,694 90; but, as many of them were heavy packages, it may be fair to compute them as being on an average equal to triple letters, the full amount of their postage, therefore, may be set down at \$566,084 70, leaving still a deficiency in the Post Office revenue of \$1,106,756 13 to be supplied in some other way. But in fact Senator Merrick does not design to make all these free letters hereafter chargeable with postage. The bill proposes a very insignificant curtailment of the franking privilege. It proposes still to leave that privilege to the heads of all the Executive Departments, and to all Postmasters on official business, and to members of Congress, the privilege of receiving their letters, under two ounces in weight, free, as heretofore. Now the number of letters annually franked and received by Postmasters has been officially shown to be about 1,568,928, at least five-sixths of which are upon business relating to their official duties; but, to be clearly under the mark, let us estimate them at three-fourths only; the number of private letters to and from Postmasters then would be 392,232. The whole number annually franked and received by “other officers, State and National,” is stated to be 1,024,068. As the privilege is proposed to be continued to the Secretaries of the Departments and the Postmaster General, it will be conceded that not more than one-half of these will be chargeable with postage; we will therefore set these down at 512,034, and supposing them to be on an average equal to triple letters, the number paying single postage will be 1,536,102; the whole number annually franked and received by members of Congress is stated to be 222,696. As their privilege is scarcely touched by the bill, we may estimate the number of these hereafter to be charged at not more than one-sixth of the whole number, or 37,116. Now let us see the result in figures:

Postmasters' letters to be charged with postage,	392,232
Officers of Government,	1,536,102
Members of Congress, (rating them equal to triple letters,)	111,348

Whole number to lose the franking privilege, 2,039,682

Which, at the average postage of 7½ cents, will amount to \$152,976 15; leaving, after all the advantages promised by the bill, a deficiency of \$1,529,864 68! But a little reflection will satisfy every intelligent man, that even this calculation cannot be realized. The whole calculation is based upon the presumption that the same number of letters will continue to be mailed after the franking privilege is curtailed; but this cannot be; vast numbers of letters are now written by and to privileged persons because they are franked; subject the same persons to postage, and they will cease to write any but such as business or duty requires. Men do not write letters for the pleasure of paying postage, however small it may be, and I take for granted that business letters will be written whether the postage be 5 or 25 cents; comparatively few others would be written, were the postage reduced to three cents. I think I have clearly established the fact that, by all the postage to be collected on these now mailed free, under the tariff proposed by the bill, only one-sixteenth of the demonstrated deficiency can be supplied, and that the Department will still be minus more than a million and a half of dollars. How is that necessary sum to be met? This is a question which I cannot solve. I leave its solution, therefore, to the projectors of the "cheap postage" policy. I know that neither Congress nor the people will tolerate the scheme of saddling this large deficiency upon the Treasury, especially when the legitimate and unavoidable annual expenses for the support of Government are officially stated to exceed by millions the annual receipts from all sources of revenue.

I have, so far, given Senator Merrick's bill every advantage which could be derived from the presumption that single letters, by his bill, mean the same thing as single letters under the present system, but this is far otherwise. Letters are now rated as single, when they consist of only one piece of paper; when they consist of more, they are rated as double, triple, &c., as the case may be, without regard to weight until they reach an ounce, and then they are charged according to weight. By the bill, every letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight is to be deemed a single letter, no matter of how many pieces composed. I have before me a sheet of thin French letter paper of the usual quarto post size, at least six of which will not weigh more than ½ an ounce. Is it not clearly seen that this quality of paper will generally be used by letter writers for the express purpose of evading the payment of postage? He who has occasion to write five or six letters to the same place, at the same time, will enclose five of them in one, to one of his correspondents, to be delivered by that correspondent to the others; in this way the number of letters paying postage will, in all probability, be diminished, instead of being increased, and the revenue be more seriously affected, than it could be without this clause. For example—it is proposed to charge six letters sent from New York to Boston, a postage of 60 cents; but if these six letters be en-

closed in one, the whole postage to be collected will be but ten cents, being an average of one cent and two-thirds a letter. This inevitable consequence, I presume, has not been foreseen by Senator Merrick.

I have seen many complaints in the newspapers, and have heard those complaints reiterated on the floor of Congress, of the enormous disproportion of the cost of conveying letters and merchandise. An honorable member from New York is reported to have said that "the cost of conveying a barrel of flour from Buffalo to Albany was 1½ cents less than is charged for the conveyance of a single letter the same distance." This may be, and yet the cost of conveying the letter may be proper and reasonable. Reduce the postage of letters to the lowest possible rate, and the disparity will still be very great, and the same *ad captandum* argument may be used with the same force. To produce a perfect equality, the Government must undertake to transport two hundred pounds of letters for seventeen cents, and agree to take the same time and the same mode of transportation. Until this can be required, all such arguments are perfectly idle and inconsequent. But this leads me to examine the necessary and unavoidable expense of conveying the mails. At no period, and in no country, has it ever been expected that the public mails could be carried as cheaply as merchandise, and much the less so since the establishment of railroads and steamboats. Regularity, security, certainty and celerity, to the greatest possible perfection, are the great qualities of the Post Office system, and the objects of its establishment.—For these, people are generally willing to pay—without them the mails would be comparatively valueless. To accomplish them, a most expensive, extensive, and somewhat cumbersome machinery, and numerous agents are requisite. The expense of this machinery, and the compensation of these agents, must be paid, and revenue to meet it must be raised in some mode. The question is, Shall it be raised by a tax upon those who derive direct advantages from the system, or shall it be paid out of the general Treasury, and thus compel those who never write a letter to share the expense with those who use it every day of their lives? Reason and common justice will say, let every man pay in proportion to the use he makes of the establishment. But, to return to the matter of expense. It is a fact that, since the establishment of railroads, and the introduction of steamboats, the cost of transporting the mails has been greatly increased—on some roads enormously increased. I will cite a single case, with which I am familiar. By the last separate contract made by the Department, before the opening of the railroad, for carrying the mail from Washington to Baltimore, in four horse post coaches, the sum of \$2,800 per annum was paid. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company receives for the same service \$12,000 per annum. Upon examination it will be found that this is a fair specimen of the increased cost on every railroad in the Union. How is this imposition to be cured? Neither by the power of the Postmaster General nor of Congress. Were the Postmaster General to withdraw the mails from the railroads, and send them, as formerly, in coaches or wagons, the whole country would join in outcry against him for not using the quickest and safest mode of transportation. The country would never tolerate the cheap policy of preferring a road which requires six hours for transmission, while another was open to them which would accomplish the same service in two. It is idle to talk, then, of the cheapness of carrying a



barrel of flour, and the dearness of carrying a letter. The difference consists in the quality of the article.—The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad will convey a ton of merchandise from Washington to Baltimore for \$184—which, for every day in the year, would amount to \$671 60—while they exact from the Department for carrying the mails, which do not exceed an average of a ton a day, the enormous sum of \$12,000 per annum. Now as it requires eleven barrels of flour to make a ton, it appears that 4,015 barrels of flour costs \$671 60, while the same weight of letters and newspapers costs nearly eighteen times as much!

Much stress has been laid upon the fact that private companies can and do carry letters from one large town to another, that is from Boston to New York, from New York to Philadelphia, &c., for a cost not exceeding one third that charged by the Post Office. But are the circumstances of these private companies considered in comparison with those of the Department? Doubtless the United States could, were the sphere of operation limited to the great thoroughfares through the populous and commercial parts of the country, and were they dealt with by railroad and steamboat companies upon the same terms as are individuals and associations, effect as much and more. But it is far otherwise. It is the care as well as the duty of the Post Office Department, to provide proper mail facilities for every section of the country, whether thinly settled or densely peopled. The infant settlements on the Arkansas, the Upper Missouri, and other remote sections of the Union, demand and are as well entitled to the benefits of the establishment as are the crowded cities of the Northern States; and those thin settlements contribute their full proportion towards the cost of transporting the mails. The Department, too, must provide for the unlimited transmission of newspapers and periodicals, which causes an immense increase of the cost of transporting the mails, whilst they do not augment the revenue to one fiftieth part of that cost. The duty which devolves upon the Postmaster General of availing himself of the most expeditious modes of conveyance, subjects the Department to the mercy of railroad companies, while an individual may travel back and forth, every day in the year, with his trunk packed with letters, subject to no expense but the payment of his personal fare, and with no person to question him as to the contents of his trunk. But granting all that is asserted of the ability of the eastern cities to carry on their correspondence with each other at a rate vastly lower than is charged by the Post Office laws, what effect would follow a general license to take the mails between those cities into private hands? And this effect, I presume, has not been fully considered by the "reformers." If all such mail communications should be given up to private enterprise, the whole revenue derived from those sources must, of course, enure to the benefit of those who perform the work. The large amount of postage now collected in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other commercial cities, must be lost to the Department. Only such portions of the country as require vast labor and expense, and directly yield but a small portion of the revenue, would be left to the care and management of the national authorities. Does any man in his senses believe that the hundreds of mail routes, and the thousands of post offices, in the vast section of the United States, called the Valley of the Mississippi, could be kept in operation, with the fraction of revenue which would be left to the Depart-

ment? It might gratify the local vanity of New York editors, to concede that that city, principally, and the other Atlantic cities, secondarily, supply the means of keeping up the establishment, and to grant them the privilege of maintaining a mail establishment for themselves, independent of all connection with a system which provides equally and fairly for the whole country. But the truth is, those cities no more pay the large amount of postage collected there than they pay the large amount of the duties collected at their several custom-houses. Every town, village and hamlet that deals and corresponds with those cities, pay quite as large a proportionate share of the Post Office revenue as do the merchants whose customers and correspondents they are. Even more than that—for the consumer in Missouri, Michigan, Illinois, or Indiana, actually refunds to the merchant in New York all the postage he pays, in the consequent enhanced price of the merchandise he uses. Cut off all post routes, in the country, except such as are upon railroads and steamboat lines, and how many letters would reach New York from the interior? And how long would that city remain the great commercial emporium of the Union? No men are more directly interested in preserving and improving the post office establishment, in the greatest possible perfection, and at any and all cost, than the merchants and newspaper publishers of the great cities; and yet it would seem that some of these very persons, who are most deeply interested in its preservation, have entered into a combination to break up an establishment of such vast utility, by withdrawing from it the only means by which it can be kept in operation.—The course recently pursued by merchants and editors in New York and elsewhere irresistibly recalls *Æsop's* fable of "the Belly and the Members." They seem to think that all the world of mails are carried to their cities upon their great railroads, perfectly ignorant that the letters which fill those great mails, are drawn from thousands of little roads which penetrate to every nook and corner of this vast Republic. One New York editor, who is said to be a *professing* member of a Christian church of the straightest sect, not long since openly chuckled over the fact that a passenger in some steamboat or railroad cheated the Government of *thirteen dollars* in one day by *smuggling* letters to that amount in his trunk in defiance of law. Another, with a shameless disregard of all decency, stigmatized the present able, vigilant, and most faithful Post Master General as "*a fool*," because he was not faithless to his duty, and not "*fool*" enough to stand by and permit that editor and his compeers to carry on their work of destruction against the Department which he had sworn to administer, without an effort to defend it.

I have said that the publishers of newspapers have a deep personal interest in the preservation of the mail establishment. I proceed to demonstrate that proposition. It has been the policy of the Govern-

\* This remark applies with equal force to the interior of all the States, West and South of the Hudson. Even where the mail routes would not be altogether discontinued, the Department would, of necessity, have to fall back to the primitive weekly saddle-bag mails, instead of providing for their conveyance two or three times a week in coaches; and that part of Maryland in which Mr. Merrick resides would be amongst the very first to be subjected to this evil and inconvenience.

ment, not the Post Office Department only, to spread the ramifications of the system, over the whole country, and penetrate into the most remote settlements. Indeed it has been impossible to keep pace with the incessant and never ending demands for new post-routes. At this moment the tables of Congress groan with petitions for more. These demands cannot be satisfied without setting aside an adequate revenue to defray the expenses. These remote settlements in time grow to be large and populous, but while so growing, the postage accruing there, is vastly inadequate to the expense of supplying their wants. But must those wants therefore be disregarded? It would be a miserable policy truly, to cut them off from all chance of corresponding with their friends and with merchants in the Atlantic cities. Every such settlement, from the beginning, furnishes subscribers for newspapers printed in the East; abolish the post offices there, and you deprive those newspapers of hundreds of their best patrons. What compensation would it be to the *National Intelligencer*, or the *Globe*, or the *Madisonian*, after abolishing every mail route that could not defray its expenses, and thus expunging from their subscription lists at least two-thirds of their patrons, to carry the residue free, or at  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cent postage. It would be very much like an expectation of seeing the Potomac kept full of water after drying up the Shenandoah, South Branch, and its other tributary streams.

An editorial article in the *New York Evening Post* of the 29th January, which just comes to me, argues that these mail routes can be kept up and better managed by private enterprise than by the Post Office Department, because—

"In some part of the Territory of Wisconsin application was made to the Department, not long since, for a post road and post offices. It was objected, that it was too soon to give a post route to so thinly settled a region—that it would cost the Government too much, and that it was a rule with the administration of the Post Office to keep its expenses within its income.—'Give us the postages on the letters and papers,' was the reply of those who made the application, 'and we will defray the expense of transporting them.' The terms were accepted, and the matter being thus left to private enterprise, a mail is now running three times a week through that region."

Another case is cited, where the mail is carried once a week to and from the "county seat," to some other settlement in the same way. What a pity it is that those who so often essay to enlighten the public mind should themselves be so utterly ignorant of the matter on which they write as is the author of the above extract. In the first place, there is no such "rule with the administration of the Post Office" as that spoken of. It is the province of Congress to establish post roads, and the Post Office Department has no more authority in the case than the editor of the *Evening Post*. Therefore, if such a private route exists anywhere, it is simply by the silent acquiescence of the Department; and furthermore, it is not supported by the postage accruing on the route from the county seat to the settlement. The private undertakers take all the postage collected at their settlement as a compensation for their trouble and expense. The postage does not accrue upon the correspondence between those two points only, but upon all letters received there from any and every part of the U. States. For example—a letter from N. York to this said county seat

is charged with twenty-five cents postage, from the county seat to the settlement the postage would be six cents, but the private mail carrier takes the *twenty-five cents*, and not *six*. Six of such letters, at each trip, would pay the carrier well for his trouble, while the Department would be loser to the whole amount of carrying the mail were it to undertake the same service; the postage from New York to the "settlement" being no more than it would be by being stopped at the "county seat." So that if the case cited by the *Evening Post* prove anything, it proves the necessity of still further extending the mail accommodations by public authority.

I think I have thus demonstrated that the Post Office cannot be carried on if any considerable reduction of its income be made; that the charge of carrying on the system cannot, with any propriety, be thrown upon the general Treasury; that the lopping off what are called unproductive routes, would derange all the business relations of the large commercial emporiums with the interior; that it would prove destructive to the press, by effectually preventing the circulation of newspapers; and lastly, I have, I think, satisfactorily shown that the reduction of postage on letters, as proposed by Mr. Merrick, not to speak of that on newspapers, which (as no such coin as *half cents* are in circulation any where, and no cents are circulated in the Western States) perhaps is quite as objectionable, would produce all those evils. I will now present a view of another branch of the subject, nearly, if not quite, as important as any other.

I maintain that, should Mr. Merrick's bill pass in its present shape, thousands of post offices must be discontinued, for want of postmasters, at least of such postmasters as are *trustworthy*.

There are in all about 14,000 postmasters, the majority of whom do not receive a compensation of more than one hundred dollars per annum; a very few derive more than five hundred dollars, and a great number are paid less than fifty dollars; and many of these last do not receive an average of more than ten dollars a year.

This last class are generally, almost universally, induced to undertake the charge of the post office solely for the advantage which the laws now extend to them of receiving their letters and newspapers free. Take away this inducement, and thousands of such post offices will be immediately vacated. No man of *character* could be persuaded to assume the trouble and inconvenience of receiving, opening and dispatching the public mails, for the paltry consideration of ten or even fifty dollars a year, to say nothing of the heavy *responsibility* which the office brings with it to the incumbents. We know that in many parts of the country, post offices, to use a common phrase, "on a begging," not simply on account of the inadequacy of the compensation, but because every valuable letter that is lost in the mail, subjects every postmaster on the whole line to the most injurious suspicions. Take away, then, this poor boon of the *franking privilege*, and, at most post offices, postmasters could not be obtained "for love nor money." And this is another evil which would fall heavily on the press. A very large number of the country subscribers of the city newspapers being postmasters who become subscribers because their papers come to them exempt from postage. But it is not this class of postmasters only who would be driven from office by the operation of the proposed law—There are many important towns throughout the country, to whose business a well regulated post office

is at all times indispensable; and yet the amount of postage collected at them does not afford more than a bare support to the postmaster and a clerk, at the very smallest salary. I select, at random, Lynchburg, Va, as a specimen of that class, to show the compensation the postmaster now receives in contrast with that which he would receive under the proposed law. By the returns for October last, it appears that there were received at that office during the month, 3,464 letters, which produced a postage of \$527 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ , being an average of 15 cts. a letter; this for three months would amount to \$1,581 54 $\frac{1}{2}$ . On this sum the commissions amount to \$342 30 a quarter or \$1,369 20 per annum. Out of this sum the post-master must pay for clerk hire, say a moderate salary - - - \$400 office rent, stationery, candles and fuel, say 200

making - - - - - \$600

and the postmaster's commission on letters, with about \$100 on newspapers, leaves for a compensation for his labor and responsibility \$869 20 per annum. It will be recollected that Lynchburg is a populous, busy, thriving town in the heart of Virginia, which requires the post office to be kept open every day and all hours in the day, and it will not be said that this compensation is too large. Let us see what the same post master would be paid under the bill, provided there should be no augmentation of the correspondence at that place: The same 3464 letters will produce, at 5 and 10 cents postage, in three months, \$853,50; on which the post-master's commissions will be \$216,70 per quarter, or \$866,80 per annum, add \$100 commissions on newspapers and we have the whole annual commissions \$966 80

Clerk hire, as before \$400  
Office rent, stationery, candles and fuel 200 6 0 00

and there will be left - - - - - \$366 80 to pay the postmaster, for his trouble and labor, night as well day, risk and anxiety. I need not ask Senator Merrick whether he would be willing to extort from a poor man, such labor, and responsibility for such a miserable pittance or for even double that sum. I know his generous and honorable nature too well to intimate such a question. But he may reply—let Postmasters be paid an adequate compensation for their services in the form of salary. Then, in proportion as you do this, you still further and further increase the great amount of the deficiency in the revenue. I do not say that no person would accept the Post Office upon the terms of the bill; but I do say that no honest man, who has the capacity to perform the duty, would accept of it, unless driven to it by downright poverty and distress. All that I have said in relation to Lynchburg applies with equal force to a very large class of cases, particularly in the new States, and, with the exception of some half-dozen of the largest offices, applies to the whole, and except those very small ones which have been taken solely with reference to the franking privilege.

Were I to give all my objections to the proposed change, this essay, already too long I fear for the public, would be swelled to a most unreasonable and unreadable length—I therefore hasten to a conclusion. But I cannot forbear to make an observation or two on the encouragement which private companies, for the transportation of letters, have met with in the large commercial cities. The newspapers have been for some time filled with the advertisements of Harnden & Co, Adams & Co., Pomeroy & Co., and lastly, The United States Letter Company, offering to convey letters on established mail roads at prices greatly below those fixed by law for the public mails. Editors of newspapers have enlisted on the side of "the opposition line;" praised their performances, and invited the people to withdraw their correspondence from the public mails, and turn over their business to those very patriotic gentlemen who have volunteered to break up the usefulness of the Post Office Department: I know not in what school of patriotism and morality those gentlemen editors have been educated; but I do know that in former, and, perhaps, the better days of the Republic, it was considered immoral and unpatriotic to violate, covertly or openly, the known laws of the land. The same Constitution which gives Congress the power to lay and collect duties on imports and establish custom-houses, gives to it the power to establish post-roads and post-offices. If the power is exclusive in the one case, it is equally so in the other. Congress has exercised the power in both cases, and the violation of the one law is as criminal as the violation of the other. All honorable men consider smuggling as infamous, because it is a defrauding of the public revenue. Can it be more infamous to defraud the public Treasury, by smuggling in goods from foreign countries, than to defraud the Post Office Department of its just and legal revenue, by 'setting up' an opposition line of mail transportation? Surely not. And if such lawless "enterprises" are much longer tolerated, I shall not be surprised if the "Free-traders"—I mean smugglers, for by that title they designate each other—should before long throw off all concealment, and "set up" custom-houses in opposition to those of the Government, where ships and vessels, with their cargoes, may be entered and cleared "at reduced rates," thus to prove to all nations that in this favored land the "largest liberty" is the common inheritance of the People.

I am aware that this essay might be made more clear and methodical; but it has been thrown together in such moments as I could hastily snatch from duties which do not admit of postponement. Whatever its imperfections may be, I trust that it will be found sufficiently clear in its statements to satisfy members of Congress and some portion of the thinking public, that any considerable reduction at this time of the existing rates of postage, will be productive of immense evils to the community, and loud general complaints amongst the people. If it shall do so, I shall consider myself well paid for the trouble I have taken.

FRANKLIN.