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Sunday Mails.

Letter from the Postmaster General to the Post Office Committee of the House of Representatives.

Post Office Department 10 Jan. 1879.

Sir: My attention has been directed to your communication of the 1st inst., and all the investigations and the pressing nature of my duty will admit. In answer to your first inquiry, whether or not a suspension of the mails on the Sabbath is a question of expediency, I have the honor to state that daily mails are established on all the principal lines of communication on the Atlantic coast from Maine to Georgia, connecting in this entire range, places of commercial importance. From New York City, by the way of Albany, Utica, and Rochester, to Buffalo, daily mails are conveyed, and also on several lines connecting with the principal route.

Daily mails are also transported from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington to the Western country, including Pittsburg, Wheeling and other towns situated on the northern routes, as Cincinnati and Louisville, and six weekly trips to Nashville.

On these various routes, there is received daily, for private use, the sum of five hundred and thirty-four thousand four hundred and forty-three dollars and seventy-one cents, and there is paid for the transportation of the mail on them, the sum of two hundred and thirty-four thousand eight hundred and eighty dollars and sixty-two cents.

A discontinuance of the seventh mail, it is believed, would not materially lessen the expense of transportation. On many of the above routes, the mail is increasing in size, and now often amounts to from fifteen to twenty-five hundred parcels. When a failure occurs, and thereby two mails are sent, they are sent as large, and some routes still exclude all passengers from the mail coach. To run six trips weekly, requires as many teams as are necessary for a daily mail, and, in many instances, the contractors prefer running their stages daily to six trips weekly at the same price.

If all travel in private carriages and stage lines on the Sabbath could be suspended, and private expressmen prevented, the revenue of the Department would not be much impaired by the discontinuance of the Sabbath mails. But if lines of stages for the conveyance of passengers continue to run on the principal routes, and private expressmen are used, the revenue would probably be lessened between fifty and hundred thousand dollars annually.

You inquire, secondly, "Whether such prohibition would have the effect to impede the progress and expedition of the mails on the other six days of the week; and, if so, to what probable extent?"

The discontinuance of the Sabbath mail, besides reducing the number of weekly mails to six, will produce in receiving intelligence from this city, a delay of one day in every sixth mail to Philadelphia; two mails out of six to New York, will each be delayed a day; three of the six to Boston, will each be delayed a day; four at Portland, and five at Augusta, Maine. These delays will be taken from Washington City for Philadelphia on Saturday, Sunday will intervene before delivery at Philadelphia. The mail taken on Friday for New York, will be delayed on the Sabbath, before it can be delivered at that city, as well as the Saturday mail, which will make, as above stated, a delay of two mails, each a day, out of six, between Washington and New York. The Boston mail, which is taken from Washington on Thursday, will be delayed as above, making a delay of three mails, each one day out of six. Between Washington and Portland, the mail taken on Wednesday, from other places, must rest on the Sabbath, making a delay of one day each, to four mails in the week. A similar delay of four mails out of six, will take place between Augusta and Washington.

From Washington City, one mail will be delayed a day, in being con-

veyed to Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia; three to Fayetteville, North Carolina; five to Charleston, South Carolina; and every mail received at Savannah, from Washington, will be delayed one day.

From New York City to Albany, one mail in six will be delayed a day; to Buffalo, four mails in six, and five in winter, out of six, will each be delayed a day. Between Wheeling and this city, there will be a delay of one day each, to two mails out of six, to Zanesville, three, and four to Cincinnati and Louisville. From Philadelphia to Philadelphia, two mails out of six will each be delayed one day.

The mails from this city to New Orleans will be delayed two mails out of three, each three days, and the third mail two days.

It may be difficult at first to comprehend the above delays; but they have been ascertained, by arranging a schedule of six weekly mails. The Sabbath, it must be recollected, will occur at different points on each route, and constantly vary, in the progress of mails, the places of departure.

In your third inquiry, you ask whether a discontinuance of the present practice of distributing letters, &c. from the several post-offices on the Sabbath, for a day or two, would tend to improve the revenue of the Department; and, if so, to what probable amount? It is believed that the revenue of the Department would not be lessened by any considerable amount, if no letters or newspapers, &c. were delivered at the different post-offices on the Sabbath.

By the fourth inquiry, I am requested to state "whether a change of the present mode of daily conveyance and distribution of mails would effect the commercial interests of the country; and if so, in what manner?"

It has been considered of great importance to the commercial and agricultural interests of the country, to convey through the mails, into every part of the Union, speedy intelligence of the state of the market at home and in foreign countries. To accomplish this desirable object, and afford the utmost facilities to all commercial transactions, great interest is attached to the mails, and it is, in fact, one of the most important lines of communication.

Some years since, on a sudden rise in the price of cotton, private expressmen were despatched to the south from New York, and other places, in advance of the mail, and immense speculations were made, in the purchase of that article. At that time mail contractors were not prohibited from forwarding such express; and having re-wards of horses on every route, they were frequently employed in this service at a high rate of compensation. Since that time, the contracts have been changed, so as to subject any contractor to a forfeiture of his contract, if he engage, either directly or indirectly, in the transmission of commercial information, with a view to speculation, more rapidly than the mail is conveyed.

This provision, with the increased expedition which has been given, has rendered it extremely difficult, if not impracticable, for expressmen, on the more important routes, to travel more rapidly than the mail is conveyed.

An attempt was recently made to send an express between New York and Philadelphia, in advance of the mail, but the intervening contractor on that route, delivered it at the latter place before the express arrived. On this line, the mail is transported twelve miles an hour when necessary to prevent a failure, or any other emergency require it.

A suspension of the mail on the Sabbath would subject it to the delays before stated, and enable persons in our large cities, or elsewhere, on the receipt of intelligence of a change in the price of our great staples, to send express without much effort and speculate on the holders of much property.

In some of our large cities a failure of the mail, or a delay of a few hours in its delivery, has been of serious consequence to persons extensively engaged in commercial operations.

It is before suggested, private express-

men and all stages for the conveyance of passengers were suspended on the Sabbath, the discontinuance of the mail on that day would effect, less seriously, the commercial and other interests of the country.

A daily mail has been in operation on some routes, almost ever since the organization of this Department, under the Federal Government. Frequent inefficient applications have been made to Congress to discontinue this mail. It has been viewed by many persons, of great intelligence and piety, as an evil, but no proposal for its abolition has been adopted.

The result of the applications for its discontinuance, in the policy of the Department, which I have considered controlling any disposition to exercise on the subject. It cannot act on the moral principle, unless he apply it to every daily mail in the Union. This would involve a responsibility which any individual can exercise with impunity, and could be in opposition to the implied sanction of the national Legislature.

It has been, however, the practice of the Department, on each route, where a daily mail is not established, to regulate the conveyance, where practicable, as to make the Sabbath a day of rest.

By the 11th section of the Post Office law, every Postmaster is required, "at his residence, on every day of the week, to deliver on demand, by letter, paper, or packet to the person entitled, or authorized to receive the same."

Before this law was enacted, no general instructions were given by the Department to deliver letters on the Sabbath, and if Congress, in pursuance of the strong expression of public opinion, shall think proper to repeal this section, I shall consider it to be my duty to recede the instruction which has been given under it.

At present, a Postmaster is only required to keep his office open one hour on the Sabbath, for the delivery of letters and newspapers. It is believed that the delivery of letters, as well as newspapers, on the Sabbath, would be a great relief to the people, and would be a great benefit to the country. The presence of the mail stage through a village or town on Sunday, if Postmasters were not required to distribute letters and newspapers, would excite still less attention as that of any other vehicle.

With great respect, I am, Your obedient servant,
JOHN McKEAN,
Hon. Samuel McKean,
Chairman of the Com. on the P. Office and P. Roads.

Mr. McKean from the committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, presented the following report on the transportation and opening of the mail on the Sabbath day.

REPORT.

Of the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, to whom was referred certain memorials against the transportation of the mail on the Sabbath, and the delivery of letters, &c. from Post Offices on that day.

The memorials on this subject, on account of the numerous sources from which they have been received, the number and respectability of the signatures, as well as the intrinsic importance of the question involved, require from the committee and the legislature the most deliberate and respectful consideration. It is believed that the history of legislation in this country affords no instance, in which a stronger expression has been made, if regard be had to the numbers, the wealth, or the intelligence of the petitioners.

They present a subject not entirely clear of difficulty, but one in which they feel a deep interest, and which in their opinion, intimately concerns the moral character of the country.

It is not considered to be the duty of the committee, nor does it comport with its inclination to enter at large into the origin of the Sabbath, or the sanctity which belongs to it.

In all the Christian countries, it is considered not only a day of rest from secular employment, but one that should be set apart for religious observances. So intimately is it interwoven with the doctrines of Christianity, that it forms an important part of the creed of every Christian denomination. They agree in the principle, though some of

them differ as to the day.

The committee believe that proper observance of the Sabbath is calculated to elevate the moral condition of society. In accordance with the recognized example of the Creator of the Universe, and endorsed by Scripture precept, one day in seven should be dedicated to ordinary business, and devoted to moral and religious exercises. Wherever these duties have been regarded in the true spirit of Christianity, a moral influence has imposed salutary restraints on the licentious propensities of man. It has made them better citizens, and better men, in all the relations of society, both public and private.

The institution of the Sabbath is recognized in various constitutions of our government. In the halls of legislation, the Courts of Justice, and the Executive departments, except under peculiar emergencies, business is suspended, not by legal provision, but by force of public opinion. Restraints imposed on the consciences of individuals by human laws, made men more virtuous instead of better. Under such exercise of power, Christianity degenerates into an instrument of oppression, and loses all its beauty and moral excellence. It flourishes most modestly by the secular arm.

The committee, therefore, as citizens and legislators, would be ready to repel any attempt to bring the consciences of men under legislative control in this country. A disposition to do so can never proceed from the pure principles of Christianity.

The standard of moral obligation should remain in the scriptures and all acts which do not interfere with the rights of others, should rest between the individual, his conscience, and his God.

The Federal Government was formed for civil and not religious purposes. The functions which belong to it will have been discharged within the sphere of its operation, in regulating the civil concerns of the nation. It is very properly prohibited from establishing a religious test, or in any manner interfering with the right of conscience.

But it has been deemed necessary and proper, on many occasions to regulate an individual, for the execution of a civil trust, or to elicit the truth in evidence, and to act in a similar capacity in the many cases, in which religious recognition, by official acts, the duties and obligations of religion, the national government has acted in conformity to public opinion, and as was believed, within the legitimate boundaries of its powers.

The committee entertain no doubt that the numerous petitioners for the discontinuance of the Sabbath Mail, and the delivery of letters &c. from the Post Offices, have generally acted from pure motives, and with a reference to what they may consider the best interest of the country.

They do not ask Congress to impose certain duties on any portion of citizens which may interfere with their religious opinions, but to relieve from the performance of such duties.

The transportation of the mail is a great governmental operation, and the petitioners believe it should be suspended on the Sabbath, and the Post Offices closed out of respect to the day, as well as the business of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of the government. They did not, probably, consider that greater difficulty could arise in designating the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, for this purpose than had been incurred in the instance referred to. It is not considered, by the committee, that the petitioners ask the introduction of any new principle into our laws, but the extension of one which has been already recognized. In the policy of the measure desired, the committee believe the petitioners are mistaken, but they do not consider the attempt made by them as tending to form the justly odious combination of Church and State.

In the operations of the mail, every part of the Union has a deep interest; our agricultural, commercial, manufacturing and political concerns, are all dependent, more or less on this branch of the government. It is considered an object of primary importance to distribute intelligence through the mail in less time than it can be disseminated in any other manner. From the letter of the Postmaster General, annexed to this report, it will be seen that he has steadily

pursued this policy.

On the important lines of communication daily mails are established, and great expedition is required. The improvements which have been made in this respect, the general operations and entire condition of the Department, now it was placed under its present head, have elevated its character, and greatly extended its usefulness. By an unexampled letter it will be seen, that the importance of the Sabbath will not only deprive our important commercial towns of the services of the mail, but the great delay in the delivery of the mail, by mail, will be made. The injurious consequences of these delays are easily seen.

If at New York, for instance, intelligence be received on Saturday evening of a great increase of price in Louisiana, elsewhere, of flour, cotton, or any other staples of the country, the mail will not convey this intelligence to the South or West until Monday morning, after a lapse of more than twenty-four hours from the time it was received; and under the most favorable circumstances, every one of the six mails must be delayed a day on a route of a few hundred miles, by the intervention of the Sabbath.

It is to be believed that men of enterprise and capital, under such circumstances, wait the tardy movement of the mail? Expresses will be sent in every direction, and speculations to an unlimited amount will be made in the produce of the country. Here is a great evil: the Government has failed to afford the means of information to the honest holders of this property, and they become a prey to the speculator, who takes the property for perhaps one-half of its true value. By the express, the Sabbath is violated, and many citizens injured. The committee believe, that such are the fluctuations of prices in many articles of commerce, in some parts of the country, that a greater number of persons as expressmen would often be employed on the Sabbath, than are now engaged in the transportation of the mail. It is impossible to correct, the cause of morality would not be promoted by the suspension of the mail on the Sabbath. But when, in addition to this consideration, the committee consider that the first duty of the Government is to protect its citizens in their property (and under no circumstances can protection be more needed than in the case above stated) and the injurious consequences experienced by the citizen whose property is sacrificed, they cannot hesitate in coming to the conclusion, that the suspension of the mail on Sunday would be deeply injurious to the important interests of the country, and that the measures would probably produce a greater amount of moral evil than the present system.

As suggested by the Postmaster General, all travel on the Sabbath, in accommodation stages or expresses were prohibited, to suspend the Sunday mail would produce an injury of a more limited extent, but such a regulation will not probably be adopted by the States, and, if adopted, could not be enforced against public opinion.

The reduction in the revenue of the Department, is viewed, by the committee, as the smallest injury, that would be likely to result from the change. It would, however, paralyze the operations of the Department, and render more uncertain the attainment of the primary objects for which it was established.

A well regulated mail establishment is an indispensable requisite to a free Government, and to the commercial, agricultural, and manufacturing interest of an enterprising and growing people. Every buyer and seller should be informed of the state of the market, at home and abroad, with the greatest possible certainty and expedition. This can only be accomplished through the operations of the mail, regulated and directed by a discriminating mind, intimately acquainted with the local interests of the country. Every part must harmonize like a well regulated machine, which, though complicated in its structure, has no disorder in its movements.

On the other branch of the case, that of Postmasters being compelled, by law, to keep open their offices and deliver letters, newspapers, &c. on the Sabbath, this, the committee believe, is not absolutely necessary for the successful prosecution of any branch of business. The merchant or manufacturer could call at the Post-office on Monday morn-

