



CONGRESS.

PHILADELPHIA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
FRIDAY, December 23.

IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE.  
On the Post-Office Bill.

The 8th section, which had been postponed, and which regulates the rates of postage, was taken into consideration.

MR. FITZSIMONS offered a sketch of rates of postage, by way of amendment, different from that reported in the bill, and the rates now paid—his plan was a general reduction of the rates.

Mr. Goodhue said, he did not believe that the revenue from the post-office, any more than that from the impost, would be increased by establishing an high rate of postage.

He was pleased with the sketch offered—and wished it might be agreed to as an amendment—he had no doubt of its encreasing the revenue of the department.

Mr. Livermore was in favor of the original rates reported in the bill—he conceived that the reduced rates would be so low, as materially to injure the income of the department. He said, that he did not conceive why the rate of postage for 100 miles, in one part of the United States, should be greater than for 100 miles in another part—he referred to the diminished rates for great distances.

Mr. Williamson was in favor of reducing the rates—He observed, that though our experience in this business was not great, yet it was sufficient to shew that a reduction of the rates of postage tended to increase the income of the department. And the experience of European countries was incontrovertibly in favor of the idea of a reduction.

Mr. Baldwin replied to Mr. Livermore, and observed that the amendment recognized the same principle in respect to great distances, which is contained in the bill as reported.

On motion of Mr. Williamson, the amendment was altered, so that the rate of postage for a single letter to the greatest distance, should not exceed 25 cents.

Mr. Fitzsimons' amendment was then adopted.

The section which makes it death for persons employed in the post-office department to rob the mail, occasioned considerable debate—the words, "shall suffer death," were struck out, and it was then moved to insert imprisonment for life, or for a term which the court may think proper—This motion occasioned further debate, on its being moved to amend it, by striking out imprisonment for life—

Mr. Murray entered into a general consideration of the subject—He was clearly of opinion that if the punishment was not loss of life, it ought to be the next in point of severity—He enlarged on the enormity of the crime, and inferred that a person who was so depraved as to be guilty of it, ought to be forever deprived of the power of injuring society again—He adverted to the principles advanced by Montesquieu, Beccaria, and others, who had wrote so ably on crimes and punishments; but with all their refinements, he said, they were obliged to acknowledge that as there were grades in guilt, so there should be degrees of punishment. He adverted to the regulations of Pennsylvania, he said their goal was more properly a school of morality, than a place of punishment—It may reform, but it will never deter the abandoned from the perpetration of crimes—It might answer, he observed, the present state of society in the commonwealth, but he doubted whether it would not invite to the commission of crimes, and accelerate the period when they must have recourse to a more severe system of jurisprudence. He concluded by saying, that as imprisonment for life was the next severest punishment to loss of life, he should vote against the last amendment.

Mr. Hartley defended the system of punishment and reformation adopted by Pennsylvania—He said, experience was in its favor—The gentleman has carried our ideas to European countries, but he thought that examples from our own country were more in point—He objected generally to sanguinary punishments; and the punishment now proposed he thought would be too severe, if generally incurred for the crime under consideration.

MONDAY, December 26.

Debate on the Post-Office Bill continued.

On the subject of newspapers, Mr. Williamson suggested the propriety of their being so packed that they may be easily inspected by the Post-

masters—that there should be separate accounts, and a separate mail or portmanteau for them—and that the rate of postage should be in proportion to the distance they are carried—those sent 100 and not exceeding 200 miles,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent—those above 200 and not exceeding 300 miles, 1 cent—those above 350 miles,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cent. He moved to strike out the 23d section, and to insert the above as a substitute.

Mr. Clark proposed to amend the clause by a proviso—that the papers shall be dried.

Mr. Fitzsimons doubted whether it would be proper to agree to the amendment—he was of opinion that the consequence would be, very few papers would be sent by the mail. He enquired who is to pay the postage?—The Printers will not pay it—they are sufficiently out of pocket by distant subscribers. Is it to be defrayed by the subscribers weekly?—there is no coin of the description mentioned. He observed that difficulties would result from the mode which is necessarily adopted for great part of the year of sending the mail on horseback. Should the papers encrease, as is supposed, it would be impossible to send them. There were difficulties in the business; the Printers had been called on to declare what would be convenient and agreeable to them—but there was so little concert among them that they had not given any intimation to the department of what would please them.

Mr. Williamson replied to Mr. Fitzsimons, and obviated some of the difficulties he suggested.—He observed that a certain weight ought to be specified, which the Postmaster ought not to exceed when the mail is sent on horseback.

Mr. Clark said he thought the most eligible method would be to make the Printers accountable for the postage—this, he said, had been proposed by a Printer, who, he said, printed a larger number of papers than any other Printer in the United States. This, he thought, would simplify the business, and prevent trouble in the different post-offices.

Mr. Bourne objected to different rates of postage for newspapers. He believed it was not customary with the post-riders. He observed that newspapers contained general information, and ought to come to the subscribers in all parts of the Union on the same terms—the  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent would indemnify for the charge. He moved that such parts of the motion as proposes a different rate, should be struck out.

Mr. Boudinot said that he believed the gentleman was mistaken in respect to expence of carriage to a great distance.—He further observed, that the rates being the same to all parts of the Union, would operate as a bounty to the Printers at the seat of government; for it was well known that the Printers at the southward could not afford to sell their papers at the same rate with those at the northward.

Mr. Williamson enlarged on these ideas.

Mr. Steele said that the amendment of his colleague, instead of giving facility to the circulation of newspapers, tended only to give a discouragement to the Printers of particular states. He could have wished that the privilege of franking had been struck out, and the supposed amount thereof applied to defray the expence of transporting the newspapers—it would conduce to opening a larger channel of information, and would in an easy way bring intelligence to the door of every citizen in the United States. He preferred the bill without the amendment, as more competent to the great object.

Mr. Parker observed that every law ought to be founded on a principle of equality—and on this idea, supposed the postage ought to be augmented in some proportion according to the distance.

Mr. Hillhouse advocated an increase of the postage. He said the rates proposed were not competent to discharging the expence.

Mr. Williamson said that the half cent for a great distance would not defray the expence—he had authority for the assertion—and if the rate is reduced, it will operate to discourage the private stages, and all communication on those roads supported by private subscriptions, will be cut off.

Mr. Hartley was in favor of one rate—He observed that the rates demanded by private posts was so high, as to amount to an interdiction of the papers almost entirely.

Mr. Barnwell was in favor of Mr. Williamson's motion; an half cent, he said, would not be sufficient to defray the expences.—He enlarged on the bad policy of giving a monopoly to the printers at the seat of government—country papers are important on many accounts, and ought to be encouraged. He said it was the opinion of the post-master general, that a half cent was not a sufficient postage.

Mr. Bourne's motion for striking out was negatived.

On motion of Mr. Hillhouse, the postage for 100 miles was raised from an half to a whole cent, and one cent and an half for any greater distance.

Mr. Clark moved to add this clause, "to be paid by the printers sending the same, at the ex-

piration of every three months"—this was not carried. The section was further amended by saying that the newspapers shall be under cover opened at one end—the post-masters to receive 50 per cent of the postage.

The residue of Mr. Williamson's amendment was agreed to.

Mr. Livermore moved that the proviso, which empowers the contractors to carry newspapers, should be struck out.

Mr. Page observed, that in disposing of this business, the utmost caution ought to be used, lest some infringement of the liberty of the press should be the consequence.—We have subjected the printers of papers to a certain tax for sending their papers by the mail; and now it is proposed to cut them off from all opportunity of making their own contracts—He thought the business ought to be simplified as much as possible—and the printers left to themselves to dispose of their publications as they think proper, independent of the mail.

Mr. Barnwell supported the motion, he said that by retaining the clause, the post-office would be subjected to innumerable impositions.

The proviso was struck out—and another proposed by Mr. Boudinot, to the same purpose, with an addition, subjecting papers sent by contract, to the inspection of the post-masters.

This motion was objected to, as it would operate against the revenue of the post-office.

Mr. Boudinot observed, that in forming the contracts, the contractors always agreed for a less consideration, on account of the advantage derived from carrying newspapers.

This motion was also disagreed to.

The committee then rose and reported the bill with amendments to the House.

MONDAY, January 16.

The message from the President of the United States, relative to the situation of the Western Frontiers, being the Order of the Day, after reading petitions, the House went into a committee of the whole, and the galleries were cleared.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17.

A bill to reimburse certain extra expences incurred by the late commissioners for treating of peace with the Creek Indians, was read the first time.

A representation and memorial of Christopher Junior, and Charles Marthal, stating that they have established a chemical laboratory in the city of Philadelphia, for the manufacture of Sal-Armoniac, Glauber Salts, &c. and praying the patronage of Congress, by laying extra duties on those articles imported from abroad—was read and laid on the table.

Several petitions for pensions and compensations were read, and referred to the Secretary of war.

A petition of Henry Lee was read, praying the renewal of a certificate of public debt, which had been destroyed—referred to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Mr. Murray moved that the petition of John F. Amelung should be taken up in order to its being referred to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Mr. White objected to going into the discussion of any business of a private nature, while public concerns of the first importance demand the immediate attention of the House.

The question being put for taking up the petition, it was negatived.

Mr. Dayton laid the following resolution, in substance, on the table, that the President of the United States be requested to cause to be laid before the House copies of the official communications which have taken place between the Supreme Executive of the State of Pennsylvania, and the Secretary of War, relative to a plan of military operations—also such documents as may have been received respecting an invasion of the frontiers of this State.

The order of the day on the President's message respecting the western frontiers, being called for, the galleries were shut.

BOSTON, January 2.

Capt. Clap, in the brig Lion, arrived at Portland on Saturday, the 24th ult. from Port-au-Prince, and informs that on the 22d of November, that place was set on fire by the Mulattoes, and almost entirely destroyed.

Immediately after the town was destroyed, the Whites (on the idea that the Blacks were accessory to its destruction) formed the horrid design of putting to death all the Negro and Mulatto women and children, who remained in the town. And this design, to the eternal infamy of the perpetrators, was put immediately into execution. An indiscriminate slaughter took place; and not one who could be found during that day—whether innocent or guilty, but was instantaneously butchered, either by a bullet through the head, or a bayonet into their bowels.

Capt. Clap left Port-au-Prince the 25th of November; at which time the town was still surrounded by the Mulattoes and Negroes. The Whites were greatly discouraged, and were disposed to make peace on any terms.