

## Jamaica Post Office Notices 1841

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*THE JAMAICA POST-OFFICE.*

(From a Correspondent.)

The present would seem to be a fitting opportunity to call the attention of the proper authorities to the defective arrangements and flagrant abuses of the Jamaica Post-office, together with the evils which result to the inhabitants from the high rate of postage charged on inland letters, since a synopsis has been lately published in *The Times* of the report of the committee appointed last year "to inquire into the comparative advantages afforded by different ports in the Channel for the West India mail service."

The Jamaica Post-office is a branch of the General Post-office, and its internal machinery is almost entirely under the direction and control of a deputy appointed by the Postmaster-General. Neither has the governor, or the council, or the assembly, any power over this functionary, or authority to alter or amend any rules or regulations he may lay down, with this exception, that the governor can, by virtue of his office, detain the mail-boat for England a few hours after the usual time of sailing. This privilege was formerly not limited, so that it was not unfrequently abused; hence the restriction. The net annual proceeds of the office may be, or rather was (it was said), about 14,000*l*. But, notwithstanding that two packets a month have been despatched for the last few years in place of one, as formerly, yet the receipts we believe have decreased. However, in the absence of any document to this effect, we shall assume that the income of the post-office has not retrograded. Till Mr. Rowland Hill's plan for the reduction of postage came into operation the charge for every single letter going by the mail from London to Kingston was 2*s*. 2*d*. sterling, or (taking the dollar, 6*s*. 8*d*., at 4*s*. 4*d*. sterling) 3*s*. 4*d*. currency. If directed to Spanish Town, about 14 miles from Kingston, there was an extra charge of 7*d*. currency, or say, for convenience sake, 6*d*. sterling; while to Montego-bay, Lucia, Savannah-la-Mar, &c., 1*s*. 3*d*. currency, or 1*s*. sterling, was the additional postage. By the recent alterations the postage from London to Jamaica was reduced to 1*s*., and it is stated thus in the rates of postage published by the General Post-office. But this is a complete delusion, for what is called "the inland postage" is still continued, making the sum paid for each letter to most parts of the island—Spanish Town perhaps excepted, and of course Kingston—2*s*. This high rate of postage, continued when the incomes of nine-tenths of the reading and writing classes have been almost entirely destroyed by the Emancipation Bill, is productive of much inconvenience, and in numerous cases among the poorer classes—immigrants for example—has put a stop altogether to all intercourse between them and their friends in Great Britain. Under the late regulations double letters were charged double postage, because the practice was that of the General Post-office; but why the practice should be continued now in Jamaica, when the General Post has discontinued it, requires some explanation. Nearly every man who writes a letter at the present day uses an envelope, and is not charged extra unless the weight be above half an ounce. Yet, if a correspondent in London, in writing to a friend in Jamaica, living out of Kingston, encloses his letter, the postmaster charges it as a double letter! This is to blow hot and cold with the same breath, and so far as the writer of this communication is concerned, this abuse has been the cause of his giving offence to several valued correspondents, while it has added to the expense of communicating with his friends in Jamaica.

But we have not yet done with the exactions of the Jamaica Post-office. The most extraordinary regulation is the charge of 50 per cent. for the carriage of island newspapers. Thus, supposing the subscription to a daily newspaper published in Kingston be 64*s*. per annum, which is the present charge, 32*s*. are demanded for its transmission by post. Nor is this the only grievance connected with this extortion. 16*s*. must be paid quarterly in advance by the subscriber to one of the postmaster's deputies, and no one else; otherwise the postmaster refuses to transmit the paper. In addition to this 50 per cent. he receives a gratis copy of the paper; and every one of his deputies—and, if our memory fail not, they are between 20 and 25—following his example, demands a copy also. It will be seen, then, from this statement, that not only are the public made to pay 50 per cent. more for their papers than under other circumstances they would be required to do, but the circulation of every paper is necessarily circumscribed, high prices keeping down demand. Again, the postmaster does not pay the newspaper proprietor as he receives the quarter's amount in advance, but at the end of three or four months, or when it suits his convenience!

"The (Jamaica) *Falmouth Post*," of the 1st of September, alluding to the subject, says, "In the first place, the tax upon knowledge is equal to 75 per cent. upon all publications sent by post, and where it becomes less, it does so in the inverse process of what ought to be the case. \* \* \* Nor, in our opinion, does the burden fall so heavily on the press as on the public; for though it limits the exertions of the former, and circumscribes the demand for its productions, the remedy (partial at least) is at hand,

viz., an increased price. But for its bearing on the public there is only one remedy, and that is, its removal, by provision for the free transmission of intelligence, as in the mother country. At present the postmaster claims half the price of each publication transmitted by post, while each of his deputies puts in his claim to a copy for the trouble of delivery." (That is, merely handing it over his counter; because even in Kingston every individual sends to the post-office for his letters and papers.) "This we have said is a tax tantamount in a great number of cases to 75 per cent." The writer next complains of "the extremely defenceless state in which the mail is generally conveyed from place to place. The letters, often containing thousands of pounds in checks, are placed in rotten bags, intrusted to the care of a youthful or diseased negro, who on some miserable hack or worthless mule may be seen wending his way through roads uninhabited for miles, without a weapon of any description for his defence." In continuation, "the probability of the mail being robbed by disappointed immigrants, ready to satisfy their vengeance on one and all, for the false promises held out to them by unprincipled and mercenary agents in England, Ireland, and Scotland," is alluded to, but the writer has forgotten that probability has already become certainty, since but a short time since "the youthful or diseased negro" Mercury was attacked and the mail-bags taken from him in the immediate vicinity of Falmouth, and that by a white man. We trust for the present we have said enough to call attention to this very important subject, considering that according to recent accounts Jamaica is once more in a convalescent state. Improve the regulations of the Post-office and a new order of things may arise.