

Mr. Peacock is of opinion that such vessels will be in law packet-boats, and that all letters forwarded by them will be legally chargeable with the packet rate of postage.

As I have little doubt that the public in this country will desire occasionally to send letters to the United States by these packets, I propose to write to the Postmaster General at Washington, and to inquire whether he has any objection to Dublin and Galway being constituted offices of exchange, under the postal convention between the two countries, provided an arrangement be made with the Steam Packet Company for the conveyance of the mails; and I request that your Lordships will authorise me to communicate with the Company, and, if they are willing, to enter into a contract with them for the conveyance of mails between Galway and the United States, containing such letters as are specially addressed to be forwarded *via* Galway, in consideration of the sea postage, at present at the rate of 8 *d.* per half-ounce letter, being paid to them.

I have, &c.
(signed) Colchester.

The Lords Commissioners of the Treasury.

The Postmaster-General to the Lords of the Treasury.

My Lords,

General Post Office, 10 January 1859.

I HAVE the honour to lay before you the copy of a letter addressed to this Department by the manager of the Atlantic Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company, in which he requests that the Company may be furnished with a certificate of exemption from the operations of the Passengers' Act for the steam-ship "Circassian," about to take the Newfoundland mails from Galway.

The interval between the receipt of this letter and the date fixed for the departure of the "Circassian" was so short, that it was quite impossible for me to communicate with your Lordships respecting the difficulty I experience in complying with this request, and to obtain your reply, before the sailing of the vessel, and I directed the Company, therefore, to be informed that the certificate could not be furnished until I had received the instructions of your Lordships, and that I could only suggest that, for this voyage at least, the vessel should undergo the prescribed survey of the officers of the Emigration Board, and that the ordinary certificate should be obtained.

In bringing this question under the consideration of your Lordships, I beg leave to observe that serious doubts have arisen in my mind whether these vessels come in any way within the spirit of the exemption authorised by the Act referred to.

It appears to me that, in giving to the Postmaster General a permissive right to exempt, by his certificate, mail packets from the operation of the Passengers' Act, the Legislature had in view vessels carrying mails under a contract with the Admiralty, and subject, therefore, to a strict survey by Admiralty officers, before being allowed to be employed in the conveyance of mails.

Such mail packets, it is important to bear in mind, carry very few emigrants, and those only of the better class, whilst I am disposed to believe that the passengers by the vessels of the Atlantic Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company are almost entirely composed of the poorest description of emigrants, for whose protection mainly the Passengers' Act was doubtless intended.

There is again another point which appears to me to require consideration before this request for exemption be complied with.

The contract with the Atlantic Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company extends only to the conveyance of mails to Newfoundland; but the passengers will, no doubt, be chiefly for the United States; seeing, therefore, that most vessels bound for the United States carefully avoid Newfoundland on account of the dangerous nature of the coast, it seems more than usually necessary that the vessels which are to make St. John's a port of call should undergo a strict examination by officers of some department of the Government.

I have thought it right to submit these observations to your Lordships, and I shall be glad to be informed of the course to be pursued before the time arrives for the departure of another packet from Galway, which is fixed to take place on the 5th February next.

I have, &c.
(signed) Colchester.

The Lords Commissioners of the Treasury.