

CHAPTER II

Colonial post office under Queen Anne's act—Early packet service.

For some years various circumstances had been arising which made it necessary that the post office in Great Britain and the colonies should be established on a footing different from that on which it then stood. The legislative union between England and Scotland in 1707 called for a uniform postal service throughout Britain; but without additional legislation the postmaster general of England could not dispose of the revenues of the post office in Scotland.

The colonies were in their infancy when the English law of 1660 was enacted, and they were not mentioned in it at all. The only clause in that act which affected the colonies in any way was that which required all masters of ships who brought letters with them from beyond the seas, to deposit them at the nearest post office. There was no penalty attached to the disregard of this clause, and the attempt to induce the shipmasters to obey the law by paying them a penny for every letter they delivered in the English post office was pronounced by the auditors to be illegal, and there was a threat made that these payments would be disallowed in the accounts.

There were a number of other circumstances arising out of the growth of the kingdom and its colonial expansion, which compelled the postmaster general to take action in advance of legal authority. When the treasury, after the union of England and Scotland, learned that a new post office law was necessary, they determined to take advantage of the fact to serve their own purposes. The war of the Spanish Succession, which began in 1702, while ruinous to France, also seriously crippled England; and the treasury saw that the enactment of a new post office act might be utilized to increase the postal charges, and additional sums raised for carrying on and finishing the war.

In 1710, accordingly, a post office bill was presented to parliament.¹ It was passed by parliament; and this act was the first

¹ Statutes of the United Kingdom, 9 Anne, c. 10.