

The act of Queen Anne's reign, so long the charter of the British postal system, also greatly increased the charges on letters passing between the mother country and the colonies. In place of the penny or twopence which satisfied the captains for the delivery in America of the letters which had been placed in the letter bags hung up in the London coffee houses, the postage on a single letter passing from London to New York became one shilling. If the letter weighed an ounce, the charge was four shillings.

Captains of vessels, moreover, were no longer at liberty to disregard the requirements of the post office that they should deliver their letters at the post office of the port of arrival. If they failed, they laid themselves open to a ruinous fine.

Remembering the resentment with which half a century later the Americans greeted every scheme, which could be construed into imposing a tax without their consent, one wonders how the post office act of 1710 was regarded in the colonies.

The question is interesting enough to warrant some inquiry. The legislative records have been searched carefully, and also, so far as they were available, the newspapers of the period. With one exception about to be mentioned, the only reference to the post office act which has been discovered is in the New Hampshire records. There it is stated that the act was read before the council on the 13th of September, 1711, and afterwards proclaimed by beat of drum in the presence of the council and of some members of the house of representatives.

The case in which the act came into question occurred in Virginia. This colony had no post office in 1710, nor for a considerable period afterwards; and it was the attempt to put the post office in operation in 1717 which led to the protest and the countervailing action.

Virginia seems to have had no desire to be included in the American postal system. In 1699 Hamilton reported on the proposition of extending the system southward to Virginia.<sup>1</sup> The extension would cost £500; and Hamilton declared that the desire for communicating with the northern colonies was so slight that he did not believe there would be one hundred letters a year exchanged between Virginia and Maryland and the other colonies. Practically all the correspondence of the two colonies was with Great Britain and other countries in Europe.

In the autumn of 1717, steps were taken to establish a post office in the two colonies, and to connect them with the other

<sup>1</sup> G.P.O., *Treasury*, II. 253.