The National Intelligencer,

AND

WASHINGTON ADVERTISER.

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WASHINGTON CITY.

Monday, Feb. 9, 1801.

The following letter was received on Thurfday laft from the Affiftant Poft Mafter General, with a defire, as will be obferved from its clofe, to have it publifhed in the National Intelligencer.

The Editor of the National Intelligencer.

General Poft-Office,
February 4, 1801.

Sir,

IT has been a common thing with fome of thofe printers who have many diftant fubfcribers, to attribute the failure of their newfpapers to neglect in this department. When communications have been made to the poft-mafter general by letter, he has never failed to give them proper attention; but to newfpaper publications he has de med it not worth while to make any reply. The editor of the Wafhington Federalift has lately afferted, that his newfpapers were repeatedly fent from the poft-office, and were again returned, and you affert, that your papers are deftroyed, even between Wafhington and Alexandria—the former has happened in but a *single instance*, the *latter, never.* The poft-mafter of this city, of George-town, and of Alexandria, are gentlemen of the firft refpectability in their feveral towns. The fame is the cafe with all the poft-mafters between this city and New-York, one perfon only excepted, and his integrity is unqueftionable. It is well known to you, that none but poft-mafters and their clerks can open or handle the mail—men who, in addition to the common principles of juftice and regard to reputation, are bound by the moft facred obligations not to delay or deftroy your papers, and yet you charge fuch men with deftroying them, and for no other reafon than that they were not received.

The truth is, you either omit to put up the papers, or mifdirect them; and to juftify yourfelf to your fubfcribers, charge the poft-mafters with deftroying them. The poft-mafter at Alexandria informs me, that your packets have been received there regularly fince the firft of January, faftened with pafte, without the appearance of having been opened. Previous to that time, fometimes three, fometimes two, fometimes one paper, and at others, no chargeable paper, arrived. It appears that only two or three of your papers have failed in reaching Alexandria fince the firft of January; that the packets have been regularly received, unopened, after leaving your office; and that they did not contain fo many papers as they ought to have contained. This demonftrates the neglect to be on your part. A letter from one of your fubfcribers at Zanefville mentions, that your papers do not come to him regularly, while the Aurora never fails—inftead of receiving No. 4, 5 and 6, he received two of No. 6; inftead of receiving No. 7, 8 and 9, he received two of No. 9. I have not heard from the poft-mafter on the fubject, but it is evident from that letter, that you omitted to put them up.

The failure of newfpapers is generally to be attributed to the printers—Two papers fhould be received at this office every day from New-York; one of them never fails in coming to hand, although it is fometimes delayed a day on the road, while of the other, only from one to four is received in a week—This is known to be the fault of the editor. At the time Mr. Cobbet publifhed his newfpaper in Philadelphia, he was conftantly railing at this department, and abufing the poft-mafters, particularly the poft-mafter of Philadelphia; and yet the failures of which he complained, arofe almoft wholly from his own neglect. Having a great number of diftant fubfcribers, he employed his carriers and his apprentice boys to pack up and direct the papers—they did the bufinefs in a hurry—addreffed thofe intended for New-York, to Baltimore, or to places where he had no fubfcribers—fometimes omitted to pack the proper numbers, and fometimes to fend any. In feveral inftances the poft-mafter took the trouble to return packages, which were evidently mifdirected, and had the addrefs corrected; but this only increafed his abufe, and the poft-mafter general did not confider him worthy his attention.

I have no doubt but the fame caufes which occafioned the failure of Cobbet's newfpapers, the great number of papers which you have to fend, the employment of all your hands, apprentices and journeymen, in packing and directing, and omitting to make a proper arrangement for detecting errors, occafion the failure of yours.

There is no doubt but that newspapers are fometimes fent in a wrong direction by a poftmafter. Where one route branches from another the mails for the different routes are to be divided by the poftmafter, and if he happens to put a mail or package of newspapers into the wrong portmanteau, it will be carried in a wrong direction until fome other poftmafter difcovers it and puts it in the proper route. This will not occafion the lofs of the mail but only a delay. And when newspapers are properly directed and packed up as ftrongly as yours are, it is hardly poffible for them to fail. Where there are a great number of mails to be feparated it requires much care in the poftmafter and a knowledge of the geography of the country to enable him to make a proper divifion.—Although a plan was devifed the laft fpring to reduce the number of mails fo as to facilitate the making of fuch a divifion and render it lefs liable to error, ftill the number is great—I believe you depofited at one time, a few days fince, not lefs in bulk than three bufhels of newspapers.

But the moft frequent caufe of delay is the failure of contractors owing to unavoidable accidents and obftructions. It fhould feem that many of the editors of newspapers either did not know that there was fuch a thing as boifterous elements, or elfe confidered them fubject to the poftmafter-general's command. It is hardly neceffary to ftate that violent winds and ftorms, and ice, will at times render it impoffible to ferry acrofs rivers; that inconfiderable runs are fometimes fwelled by rains to the fize of rivers—that heavy rains or the breaking up of frozen ground render fome roads fo deep that it is impoffible to travel on them with the neceffary fpeed—that the mail is carried either in ftages or on horfeback—that poft ftages are as liable to break as thofe of individuals, that they may break where no other carriage is to be had for a number of miles—that a horfe may be overcome by heat, may fall dead with difeafe, may become lame or unable to travel where no other horfe can be procured—that the riders may fall fick, and many other accidents may caufe a delay of the mail. Yet fuch is the fact, and nineteen out of twenty of the failures and delays that do happen arife from unavoidable accident. A regifter of the arrivals of the different mails is kept at the proper offices throughout the United States, and is returned to this office every month; it is examined, if failures have happened the contractors are notified and if they do not fhew proper caufes for their failures, the penalties are exacted.

I have lately feen an article from Laurens county, S. C. in which the grand jury prefented as a grievance the uncertainty of the poft-office. Many failures have happened on that route, and I believe fome of them have arifen from the weaknefs of the contractor's horfes. But the contractor attributes them to the badnefs of the roads and want of bridges and ferry-boats. He ftates that he had no lefs then ten fording places on his route, where there is neither bridge or regular ferry-boat, and that they are fwimming deep every heavy rain. I do not know whofe duty it is to build bridges and eftablifh ferries unlefs it belongs to the county; under thefe circumftances whether it was a proper fubject of prefentment for the grand jury of Laurens muft be left with the public to determine.

I find my letter has grown too long, but it is juft to throw blame where it belongs, and I truft you will communicate this to your fubfcribers in the fame manner that you have your afperfions againft this office.

I am Sir,
Your moft obedient fervant,
ABRAHAM BRADLEY, jun.
Assistant Postm. general.

The article inferted in the National Intelligencer of Monday preceding, to which the above is a reply, is as follows:

The Editor of the National Intelligencer during the laft week, has received fo many complaints refpecting the irregular receipt of papers by his fubfcribers that he finds himfelf unable to reply individually to each.

Complying on his part rigidly with the rules of the department, and making up his packets in fuch a way as apparently to defy injury from the moft carelefs neglect of them, he is authorifed to fay that the failure is folely to be afcribed to the poft office department.

Neglect and mifconduct appear to occur in the whole extent of the line. The papers are deftroyed before they reach even Alexandria, Newport, Del. Philadelphia and New-York, all of which are on the main line.

Determined, if poffible, to redrefs an evil of extenfive and growing magnitude, he invites information from his fubfcribers (requefting that letters may be poft paid) which information fhall be, as that received has been, fubmitted to the Poft Mafter General.

The fole object of the Editor in the publication of this article, was to exculpate himfelf from a mafs of cenfure thrown upon him by his fubfcribers. Convinced that the cenfure was unmerited, he had no other alternative but that of declaring what was, in his opinion, the true fource of the evil complained of. In doing this he could not avoid noticing the poft office department. The notice was expreffed in terms, conceived by him, to be moderate and refpectful. It was not levelled at the Poft Mafter General, or any particular poft mafter, under an impreffion that the neglect or mifconduct of any particular officer would be a proper fubject of application to the Poft Mafter General.

The facts, which he ftated, were fuch as he ftood prepared to fupport by proofs; which proofs fhall now be ftated. It was not intended to publifh them; but the unadvifed language of the Affiftant Poft Mafter General impofes the publication upon the Editor, as a duty due at once to himfelf and to truth.

The ftatement of the Editor declares,

1. That the failure in the receipt of his papers by the fubfcribers is folely to be afcribed to the poft office department.

2. That neglect and mifconduct appear to occur in the whole extent of the line.

3. That the papers are deftroyed before they reach even Alexandria, Newport, Del. Philadelphia, and New York, all of which are on the main line.

4. That determined to redrefs an extenfive and growing evil, he afks information from his fubfcribers, which information fhall be, as that received has been, fubmitted to the Poft Mafter General.

With refpect to the *first* declaration, the failure in the receipt of the papers can only be afcribed either to the Editor, or to the Poft Office department, meaning thereby not Poft Mafters alone, but all the perfons employed in the feveral branches of the department.

The Affiftant Poft Mafter General attempts to prove the negligence of the Editor, by ftating two cafes; the 1ft is that at *Alexandria*, fince the 1ft of Jan. his packets have been regularly received, but that they did not contain fo many papers as they ought to have contained. The fact is that for a fhort time two gentlemen at that place, owing to their temporary refidence there, took the National Intelligencer, which fully accounts for the miftake committed by the Affiftant Poft Mafter.—The fecond inftance is that of a fubfcriber in Zanefville who is ftated to have received two copies of No. 6 and No. 9, inftead of other numbers; and it is haftily inferred that this muft be owing to the *error and negligence* of the Editor. Whereas had he been fpoken to by the Affiftant Poft Mafter General, he would have informed him, what is really the fact, that thefe duplicate numbers were received in this way. He was defired by fome friends to forward feveral copies of the early numbers of the National Intelligencer to perfons at a diftance to diffufe a knowledge of its plan, and the individual who received the duplicates was of the number.

Having fhewn the futility of thefe two inftances to prove negligence on the part of the Editor, he will ftate the manner in which his papers are directed, in order to repel the general affertions and infinuations to the fame effect made by the writer of the letter.

The name of every fubfcriber is written on each paper, taken from a book kept for that exprefs purpofe. After the papers are fo directed, the names on the papers are compared with thofe in the book by two perfons. Thefe papers are then enclofed in ftrong wrappers, on which the names of the poft offices to which the papers are fent are written, which are again examined. Having been fo examined, the large packets are fecured by twine. Occafional errors may, and probably do, occur. To prevent thefe no human caution is adequate. But, from this ftatement, it will appear that the beft means are purfued to infure a faithful transmiffion of the papers; and that the ufe of thefe means by the Editor juftifies him in faying that the numerous failures complained of muft flow from fome other fource. It follows, from what has already been ftated, that the failure muft proceed from the Poft Office Department in fome of its ramifications.

The *second* declaration of the Editor was that neglect and mifconduct appear to occur in the whole extent of the line.

For irrefragable proof of this, let reference be had to the whole of the fubjoined ftatement. It exhibits grofs failures in Connecticut, Maffachufetts, New-York, Pennfylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky.

The *third* declaration of the Editor was that the papers are deftroyed before they reach even Alexandria, Newport, Del. Philadelphia, and New-York.

The word *destroy* feems to have produced painful fenfations in the mind of the Affiftant P. M. General, as implying a flagrant violation of duty. It was not fo intended by the Editor. It was fimply ufed as moft expreffive of a fact, which he could not doubt, without being able to affign its caufe. Knowing that the papers were duly fent, and informed by fubfcribers of unimpeachable veracity that they were not received at the places to which they were fent, to him it appeared an irrefiftible confequence that they were deftroyed.

For its proof the reader will confult the extracts from letters marked A, B, C, D, and E.

Other places might have been mentioned in the fame way, and among thefe Pifcataway, which is only between 30 and 40 miles from Wafhington.

The *fourth* declaration of the Editor was, that determined to redrefs an extenfive evil, he afks information from his fubfcribers, which information fhall be, as that received has been, fubmitted to the Poft Mafter General.

This declaration, corroborated by the fact of having laid before the Poft Mafter General an abftract of the greater part of the fubjoined complaints at his requeft, is an evidence of the determination of the Editor, if poffible, to vanquifh an evil, ferioufly injurious to himfelf, by thofe means, which were acknowledged to be moft refpectful, and which he hoped would be moft fuccefsful.

When the Editor fome time fince waited upon the Poft Mafter General, and made him acquainted with the contents of feveral letters complaining of the failure to receive papers, offices on the weftern route of Virginia appeared to receive newfpapers a whole week later than the period at which they ought to be received. On enquiry the Poft Mafter General acknowledged the fact, and faid that it had originated from