

**A GENERAL PLAN FOR A MAIL  
COMMUNICATION BY STEAM,  
BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND  
THE EASTERN AND WESTERN  
PARTS OF THE WORLD**

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A General Plan for a Mail Communication by Steam, Between Great Britain and the Eastern and Western Parts of the World by James M'Queen

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**JAMES M'QUEEN**

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A GENERAL PLAN  
FOR  
A MAIL  
COMMUNICATION BY STEAM,  
BETWEEN  
GREAT BRITAIN  
AND THE  
EASTERN AND WESTERN PARTS OF THE WORLD;  
ALSO, TO  
CANTON AND SYDNEY, WESTWARD BY THE PACIFIC:  
TO WHICH ARE ADDED,  
GEOGRAPHICAL NOTICES  
OF THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA, NICARAGUA, &c.  
With Charts.

By JAMES M'QUEEN, Esq.

LONDON:  
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1838.

A GENERAL PLAN  
FOR  
CONVEYANCE OF MAILS BY STEAM,  
&c. &c.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE conveyance of mails and despatches from one place to another is of the utmost possible importance to individuals, and to a country. The rapidity and regularity with which such communications can be made, gives to every nation an influence, a command, and advantages such as scarcely any thing else can give, and frequently extends even beyond the sphere of that influence and that command which the direct application of mere physical power can obtain to any government or people.

Much as Great Britain has already done, in this respect, to connect and to communicate with her very extensive, valuable, and important foreign dependencies, still much more remains to be done, to give her those advantages, and that influence, and that command which she might have, which she ought to have, which all her great interests require she should have; and which the power of steam, together with the late great improvements in machinery, can and ought, in a special manner, to secure unto her, her commerce, her power, and her people.

In no quarters of the world could the application of the power and the improvements alluded to prove so advantageous

to the commercial and the political interests of Great Britain as in the East Indies, in the West Indies, and in those places connected with these quarters; and also in all those countries and places which afford the safest and the speediest means of connecting the chain closely which tends to enable her to communicate more frequently, more rapidly, and more regularly with these places; and, at the same time, all these quarters, and her own possessions, with the parent State.

The object being a national one, it ought to be carried into effect by the nation, without reference to the mere question of pounds shillings and pence; that is, whether it is to become a directly remunerating concern or not. While the important subject ought to be taken up in this manner by the Government of Great Britain, it may be observed that the plan requisite, carried into effect in the most extensive manner, will certainly remunerate fully the Government or the individuals who may undertake the work, either on the general or on the more limited scale; but the higher, the more the scale is extended.

In fact, unless the plan is carried into effect on an extensive scale, it will not prove a concern so remunerating as it would otherwise be, because it is only by connecting different places in the line, or within the sphere of communication, that a greater number, or rather a sufficient number, of letters and passengers can be obtained; and unless the communications are sufficiently frequent and regular, both letters and travellers will continue to find private traders and ships in general the quickest mode of proceeding on and getting to the end of their journey, or the place of their destination.

The position of the United States, in the western world, and the very extensive trade which these States carry on with every part of that quarter of the world, and indeed with every quarter of the world, gives the merchants of these States, constituted as the packet arrangements and communications of Great Britain with foreign parts now are, an opportunity of receiving earlier intelligence regarding the state of many important foreign markets than British merchants in general enjoy, except such as are immediately connected with establishments in the United States, and by which means both obtain

decided advantages over the rest of the commercial community. This ought not to be the case in a great commercial country like Great Britain. It is a fact quite notorious, that from almost every quarter of the western world the earliest intelligence is almost uniformly received through the United States. The whole correspondence of the important British Provinces, the Canadas, comes through these States. It is also notorious, that, by means of our own commercial marine, intelligence is generally received from many foreign countries earlier than by Government Packets. Indeed, it is not uncommon among merchants to return, unopened, to the Post-office many letters in originals, they having previously received the duplicates by private merchant ships. Besides, it is well known that vast numbers of letters from Great Britain to Foreign States are sent through the United States, because these go earlier to their place of destination. In these various ways a great Post-office revenue is cut off, while the mercantile world are put to a great inconvenience and uncertainty. It is not befitting that the first commercial country in the world should remain dependent upon the private ships of another commercial and rival state for the transmission of commercial correspondence. If such a deficient system is persevered in, the result will most infallibly be, that that country which obtains, and which can obtain, the earliest commercial information, will, in time, become the greatest and most prosperous commercial country.

It is, in fact, quite impossible that the commercial interests of any country can ever compete with the commercial interests of another country, unless the one have equally rapid, frequent, and regular opportunities and means of correspondence and conveyance with the other. If the merchants of other countries have quicker and more frequent communications with any particular quarter of the world, than the merchants of the United Kingdom have, it is obvious that the former will obtain a decided advantage over the latter, in regulating and directing all commercial transactions.

The foreign trade of Great Britain, besides forming an immense moving power for giving activity to every branch of internal industry, trade, and commerce, becomes also, from the



correspondence to which it gives rise, and by which it can alone be carried on, an immense and direct source of Post-office revenue: but the direct postage derived from the correspondence required in the foreign trade, great as it is, is small when compared to the addition which the correspondence in the foreign trade directly and immediately gives to the internal postages of the kingdom. If it is examined narrowly, it will, it is not doubted, be found that almost every letter of the moiety of those which come from the British transmarine possessions, and from other foreign parts, whether by packets or by merchant ships, (of the latter, it may be said, a number equal to the whole which pay postage do, because the very great number of letters directed to consignees come free,) produces, perhaps, *ten letters*, on which the largest single internal postages are charged and paid. This arises from orders sent to different places to tradesmen, mechanical and manufacturing establishments for goods; orders for insurance; invoices sent; payments, in consequence, by bills or orders, and in bills transmitted for acceptances, &c. &c.

In all mail communications, such as those which are about to be considered, the point to be kept steadily in view, and one which is absolutely indispensable, is to connect and to bring the return mails and the outward together, in such a manner as that every intermediate place shall have the full benefit of both, without trenching upon the general interests, or occasioning any unnecessary detention or delay. This great and essential point is more particularly necessary to be attended to in the conveyance of mails by sea to distant parts, especially if conveyed by steam. In the quarters about to be noticed, the point alluded to will be shown to be more than in any other quarter necessary. Without this is effected, nothing beneficial is, in fact, effected; and to secure the object, a commanding power is obviously and indispensably necessary. For various reasons, which it is considered unnecessary here to state, steamers of 250-horse power each, will be found to be the best and most economical class of vessels to employ in the service contemplated.

The next and a still more important point to attend to,

and to keep in mind, is to have always in readiness, and at well-selected stations, a sufficient quantity of coals to supply each boat: without such are at command, no movement can take place; and unless the supply is ample, and always at hand, no regular communication can ever be carried on. Wood, indeed, may be procured in some stations in the West Indies, but not in all; while even where it can be obtained, it will be found to be dearer than coal. The quantity also necessary for a vessel of large power, and for a voyage of any considerable length, would far exceed the room that could be afforded, in a vessel of properly regulated tonnage. A supply of coals, moreover, could be had at all the places to be brought into notice by care, and foresight, at moderate rates, and at the rates taken in the subsequent calculations. Merchant vessels, bound to all quarters, so soon as they perceived that they were sure of a market, would take a proportion of coals as ballast; and others would be glad to take a portion even beyond that, to aid them in completing their cargoes, instead of remaining, as vessels both at Liverpool, Glasgow, &c. frequently do, some time, till they can obtain a sufficient quantity of goods to enable them to do so: while such vessels could at all times furnish in this way a sufficient supply of coals, at moderate rates, and still afford to them a fair profit; such assistance in loading, by enabling vessels to sail at short and regularly stated periods, would become of the most essential service to the commercial interests of this country.

The time hitherto occupied by steamers in taking in coals, in almost every place, has constituted of itself a considerable drawback on steam navigation: it may, to a great extent, be avoided. Let carriages, such as are used on the railroads for carrying coals at Newcastle, &c. be constructed with iron handles. These may be made to hold one and a half, or two tons of coals (either of these weights, it is supposed, might be hoisted into a vessel without difficulty), and be all filled and placed on a raft or punt ready at each depôt, thirty to sixty in number, according to its importance, awaiting the arrival of the packet steamer. The moment she comes into port, the punt will be alongside, and the whole will be hoisted in in a few hours, the place for

receiving them being always, and during the voyage, prepared for them. In this way 120 tons of coals may be taken in within a very short space of time; the buckets first emptied, refilled, and emptied again, to a considerable extent, in a period of no great additional time. At smaller depôts and ports, the steamer might hoist in thirty or forty tons of coals during her shorter time of stoppage; and thus steamers, without any material delay, would always have a sufficient and certain supply of fuel. The coals at all the depôts should be well covered and protected from the sun.

Further, on this head, most of the small coal (the best) which goes to waste at the depôts, may be saved by the following simple process:—Let it be mixed with a little clay, considerably diluted, then made into small balls, and afterwards dried in the sun (a rapid process within the tropics), and then taken on board with the others when wanted. It burns with great force. It is so used on estates in the West Indies for Stills. The saving is great, and the labour of making it up exceedingly light. A child may almost perform it.

It is necessary to observe, that steam-boats for the torrid zone must be fitted up and out in a manner considerably different, more especially in their hatches, from the best and most splendid boats in this country. For the convenience and health of both the passengers and crews, those for the torrid zone must, in every part, be more roomy and airy, yet so constructed as to be closed in the speediest and securest manner in the event of a hurricane; consequently they will require less expense in building, and fitting up of cabins, &c. than the crack boats in this country, in order to make them so.

In all the distances stated, there are, be it observed, included in the time allowed, three or four hours to land and take in mails and passengers at every place where the steamers may have to touch; and at the more important stations, at least six hours beyond the longer periods allowed for stoppages for coals and mails, &c. It will be necessary to give six or eight hours at Barbadoes before the departure of the steamer, that Government despatches may be forwarded. In fact, the steamer should always, and only leave that island at sun-rise