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John W. Knappe

Distinguished American Diplomat

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JOHN ADAM KASSON

AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL
UNION, 1863, 1867

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EARLY TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

At the age of thirty-five, John Adam Kasson, filled with ambition and burning with an unquenchable, restless energy typical of the time, turned up at the straggling village of Des Moines in 1857. Des Moines, too, was full of energy and ambition. It was soon to become the state capital of Iowa and it needed young, educated, experienced, and competent men such as Kasson. Under the ominous shadow of secession and the dark, threatening clouds of rebellion, an infant political party—the "Black Republican"—was struggling in Iowa for recognition, for direction, organization, and growth. Kasson, a lawyer by profession, intelligent, anti-slavery in sentiment, became an active Republican. Demonstrating a timely and appreciated ability to organize, he was soon made chairman of the State Republican committee. His party services, within four years from the time he arrived at Des Moines, projected him into the limelight of national politics at the nation's capital.

In 1861 Kasson stood among the tense audience in Washington, among the curious and anxious people who thronged about the platform to observe Abraham Lincoln

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sworn in as president of the United States. During his presence in the capital Lincoln appointed him assistant postmaster general. With this appointment Kasson began a remarkable career of statesmanship and diplomacy which extended over the next half-century, from Lincoln to McKinley. It was a career which embraced twelve years in congress, three terms in the Iowa legislature, and nine different diplomatic missions. It was a career noted for competency and fruitful achievement, not for spectacular and magnetic political leadership. For a half century Kasson's service was a durable thread running through the fabric of American foreign and domestic policies. Although the scope of this study is primarily to cover Kasson's promotion of liberal international postal relations, a brief examination will be made of his background, of the significant activities which qualified and led him into this long and varied career.

Prior to 1861, he had been able to provide himself with a training ample for public responsibility, and his background had been conducive to stimulate in the boy an ambition for leadership as a man. Kasson's ancestors were Scotch-Irish and English, the original family having come from Ulster to Boston in 1732. From there members of the family scattered over the whole of New England. His parents, who were fairly well educated rural people, resided for several years in Connecticut but in 1816 moved to a farm near Charlotte, Vermont, where John Adam Kasson was born in 1822. There on the farm adjacent to Lake Champlain and at the common school of the town he spent his early boyhood days.

At the age of six his father died and a few years later the family moved to Burlington, site of the state University, so that he and his brother might pursue a higher education. In 1842 he was graduated from the University of Vermont with first honors in Greek and with second honors in the general class average. For a short time thereafter he studied law in his brother's

office at Burlington. Possessed of a restless spirit, however, he preferred, for the time being, to drift about the country. One excursion led him into Virginia where he served as tutor to a southern family for a few months, and where he perhaps developed a distaste for slavery. In any event he soon returned home and continued his law studies until restlessness got the better of him again, and without farewell to the family, he left for Boston to go to sea. Failing to find there a suitable opportunity for embarkation, he significantly, from the standpoint of his career, wandered inland, finally stopping at Worcester after his funds were completely exhausted. There Emory Washburne, the acknowledged leader of the bar of western Massachusetts and later governor of that state, kindly took him in as an apprentice in law. In 1844, with Judge Washburne as examiner, Kasson was admitted to the bar at the age of 22.¹

From this point in his life until he began to play an active role in national politics sixteen years later, his law practice was not only successful but lucrative. And, more important, his political contacts were good. The distinguished lawyer, Rufus Choate of Boston, advised him to put out his shingle in the whaling port of New Bedford. There he soon formed a partnership with Thomas Dawes Eliot whose practice in the admiralty courts was well established. At both Worcester and New Bedford, Kasson came in contact with eminent leaders of the anti-slavery crusade which at the time was sweeping over the whole state. By 1848 his views on the slave issue and his promise as a leader attracted the attention

¹(Edgar R. Harlan (ed.), "John A. Kasson, an Autobiography," *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Ser., XII (July, 1920), 346-349. This 11-page fragmentary sketch was drafted by Kasson about 1895 apparently for some eastern publishing house. The manuscript as he wrote it is in the Kasson collection, Historical Department, Des Moines. Its chief value to the investigator is its chronology of his major appointments, positions and missions. It is subject to criticism for its omissions rather than for errors in given facts; Dexter Perkins, "John Adam Kasson," *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, Vol. X (1933), 260-261; Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines: The Homestead Pub. Co., 1916), p. 137; Johnson Brigham, *Iowa: Its History and Foremost Citizens* (3 Vols.; Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1915), I, 477.

of the Worcester Free Soilers who chose him as a delegate to the Free Soil convention at Buffalo. On his return from that gathering his friends honored him with the nomination for congress from the New Bedford district on the Free Soil ticket. This he declined because he believed himself too young. Two years later he made what was to be a momentous decision so far as his political career was concerned.²

In spite of his initial success in law and politics in Massachusetts, he suddenly responded to the lure of the West and turned up at St. Louis in 1850. Kasson explained that he made the change because of the settled institutions and the hereditary tendencies of the old eastern society. To a university-trained young man of twenty-six, extremely ambitious politically, as Kasson always was, St. Louis had much to offer. This western city, like New Bedford, was a rendezvous for prosperous lawyers many of whom had already distinguished themselves in national life and not a few of whom would yet play a dominant role in affairs at Washington. Kasson soon arranged for a law practice with J. B. Crockett to whose business he succeeded when the latter emigrated to California and there became a supreme court judge. Having thus established himself, he returned to New Bedford long enough to marry Caroline Eliot, the sister of his former partner at law and a member of the same family line which was to provide Harvard with one of its most famous presidents.³

At the St. Louis bar the young lawyer was so successful that within a very few years he was financially able

²(Harlan, *op. cit.*, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 348-350; Stiles, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138; *Free Soilers of 1848-1852: Reunion at Boston, June 28, 1888* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1888), pp. 14-16, 19.)

³("John Adam Kasson", *Who's Who in America, 1910-1911*, ed., A. N. Marquis, Vol. V (1911), 1045. Caroline Eliot was the sister of Thomas Dawes Eliot and Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, founder and president of the Washington University, St. Louis. George M. Kasson, *Genealogy of a Part of the Kasson Family* (Woodbury, Conn.: Arthur E. Knox, Printer, 1882), pp. 12-13; W. G. Eliot, *A Sketch of the Eliot Family* (New York: Press of Livingston Middleditch, 1887), pp. 109-110; E. R. Harlan, (ed.), "F. M. Mills writes of Mr. Kasson," *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Ser., XII (April, 1921), 611-612; H. K. Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866*, Vol. IV of *The Annual Reports of the American Historical Association* (1930), p. 553.

to make an extended tour of Europe. Politically, he was no less fortunate. Valuable and lasting friendships were established. For a short time he was closely associated with B. Gratz Brown, later a United States senator and a candidate for vice-president. Other Missouri associates included Henry S. Geyer, another future senator; Edward Bates, Republican candidate for president in 1860 and Lincoln's attorney-general; and the Blair brothers—Francis P. and Montgomery—both of whom would be important actors at Washington during the Civil War.⁴

Two conditions, however, conspired to make Kasson's life somewhat unpleasant in St. Louis. The damp Mississippi climate was injurious to his health and he disliked the fact that Missouri was controlled by pro-slavery elements. It was for the purpose of regaining his health that he visited Europe in 1856. And after that year of comparative idleness, he made his way to wind-swept Iowa where the climate was more conducive to his physical well-being and the prevailing opinions on slavery more in accord with his mental precepts of the issue. Not without the use of good judgment he settled down in the large, straggling village of Des Moines, which, full of hope and ambition, gave fair promise of becoming the capital city. His home site was now permanently selected for the rest of his long and active life.⁵

In Iowa, as in Massachusetts and Missouri, he had little difficulty in making a place for himself first in the local community and then in the state. Governor Lowe was one of the first to discover latent possibilities in the young lawyer and made him special examiner of the departments of the state government just removed from Iowa City. This responsibility he assumed during his second year's residence in Des Moines. He then became an active Republican and shortly was made chairman

⁴(Harlan, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 348; Perkins, *op. cit.*, X, 260-261; Stiles, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.)

⁵(Union Historical Co. (ed.) *The History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Birdsall, Williams, and Co., 1880), pp. 827-828; Harlan, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 348-349; Henry and Edwin L. Sabin, *The Making of Iowa* (Chicago: A Flanagan Co., 1916), pp. 197-200.)

of the State Republican committee. From this vantage point he efficiently organized the infant party and by 1860 was one of its most highly esteemed leaders in Iowa. It was only natural that when the Republicans assembled at the Wigwam in Chicago to choose their candidate for president, he was a delegate from his state.⁶

Among the first tasks taken up by the convention was the selection of members to the important committee on platform, which was composed of one delegate from each state and territory represented. Kasson was selected for Iowa without hesitancy. The entire membership of the committee worked one evening, the next day, and into the second evening without signal accomplishment. Eventually at eleven on the second evening, the committee as a whole deputed its labors to a sub-committee of five which included Kasson and Horace Greeley. While the sub-committee worked on through the night the former devoted his energies to reconciling differences of opinion. At dawn Greeley rushed off to wire his newspaper in New York of the decisions of the committee, leaving Kasson to reduce the platform to its final shape. In the *New York Tribune* appeared Greeley's acknowledgement of Kasson's services.

. . . . That the platform presented is so generally satisfactory as it has proved, is eminently due to John A. Kasson of Iowa, whose efforts to reconcile differences and secure the largest liberty of sentiment consistent with fidelity to Republican principles, were most effective and untiring. I think no former platform ever reflected more fairly and fully the average convictions of a great national party.

During the ensuing campaign Kasson took the stump in behalf of Lincoln in the west.⁷

Thus, it happened that in 1861, Kasson, elated over the Republican victory, made anxious by the threatening

⁶(Stiles, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138; Brigham, *op. cit.*, I, 477,478; Harlan, "Mills writes of Kasson," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 611-612.)

⁷(Horace Greeley (reporter), *Proceedings of the First Three Republican National Conventions of 1856, 1860, and 1864* (Minneapolis: C. W. Johnson, Publisher, n. d.), pp. 105, 174; L. D. Ingersoll, *The Life of Horace Greeley* (Chicago: Union Pub. Co., 1873), p. 352; *New York Tribune*, May 22, 1860, p. 4; *Register and Leader* (Des Moines), May 19, 1910, p. 1.)

organization of a rebellion, and undoubtedly desirous of a political reward from the incoming administration, came to Washington to witness the inauguration of his fellow westerner. He remained there until after the organization of the new cabinet. Two of his Missouri associates, Edward Bates and Montgomery Blair, were made respectively attorney general and postmaster general. But it was from the active support of Senator Grimes of Iowa that Kasson was unexpectedly offered the post of first assistant postmaster general under Blair—an appointment which he promptly accepted. The position might easily have been a routine job with patronage dispensation as its chief function, but Kasson chose to make it a position of high importance.

His previous approach to the various tasks before him indicated that he would not be content to let matters drift along in their usual course. In his record was change and promise of reform.⁸ As a lawyer at New Bedford he had published in the *Law Reporter* an article which advocated simplified pleadings and reduced legal expenses. In Iowa he had submitted to the general assembly a comprehensive recommendation for improvements in state administration. He had resided in Des Moines for a short time only when he recognized the utter lack of library facilities. A reading room was promptly installed over a store, generously supplied with periodicals, and kept open day and evening. When the editor of a local newspaper became ill, Kasson had assumed certain editorial duties, urging community improvement. In the field of jurisprudence, he had compiled and edited one of the state's first law books, *The Civil Code of Iowa*.⁹

These examples indicate that he would prefer to make of the postal appointment a position of important func-

⁸(Harlan, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 349; Perkins, *op. cit.*, X, 260-261; Greeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150; D. C. Seitz, *Horace Greeley* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926), p. 181.)

⁹(Johnson Brigham, *History of Des Moines and Polk County* (2 Vols.; Chicago: S. J. Clarke, Pub. Co., 1911), I, 167, 552; Brigham, *Iowa History*, I, 477; Harlan, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 347-349; Harlan, "Mills writes of Kasson," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 612.)

tions rather than a mere political job. As head of the appointment office he was at first overwhelmed with the task of appointing and discharging postmasters. Some were dismissed for reason of political expediency; others because of secession. Sometimes as many as six hundred changes were made in one day. Mail communications with the South had been disrupted completely by the seceding states. No arrangements had been made for the Union army mail service. The postal laws were scattered through numerous statutes and there were many outmoded provisions. When the stress from removals subsided, he turned his attention to these matters. As the northern armies made ready to advance, he provided them with adequate mail communications. In cooperation with the postmaster general he worked out an army postal system which was approved by the military authorities and used throughout the war. Next he prepared a postal code which eliminated many obsolete laws. His energies then were devoted to different postage rates in various parts of the country. Certain features of his proposed legislation to obtain uniformity of rates were adopted. Other duties included the proper distribution to his subordinates of blanks, paper, twine, and furniture; the paying of clerks and special agents; and the responsibility for regulations affecting postmasters.¹⁰

THE CALLING OF AN INTERNATIONAL POSTAL CONFERENCE

His most significant function, both from the standpoint of his own future and that of the public, was the supervision of foreign mail transportation and foreign correspondence. His connection with these matters paved the way for personal experience in foreign relations and internationalism. His recommendations and his activity

¹⁰(J. E. Briggs, "Kasson and the First International Postal Conference," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XIX (July, 1921), 366-367; Madison Davis, "The Public Career of Montgomery Blair," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, XIII (1910), 132-137; U. S. Congress, *House Miscellaneous Document No. 85*, "Proposed Amendments to the Postal Laws; Letter from John A. Kasson," 37 cong., 2 sess., pp. 1-3.)

in behalf of such recommendations were a high water mark in the evolution of the Universal Postal Union and in the furtherance of international accord. In the realm of international postal relations Kasson found disorganization, a deplorable lack of uniformity, and an unnecessary waste of time, energy and money. The challenge here presented led him into a diplomatic career which extended over a half century.

Prior to 1863 the defective system of international mail service was regulated by postal conventions concluded between individual states. They were made in accordance with the diplomatic theory of national interest. Each state tried to promote its own profit at the expense of another. The aim was not necessarily that of improving the mail service to the advantage of mankind in general but to make the foreigner pay the bill. The system was undoubtedly advantageous to some nations but it was by no means satisfactory to the citizens of any of the states. Its competitive nature naturally demanded a ridiculously high foreign postage rate.¹¹ The treaties by which the system was maintained were complex and the rates controlled thereby showed little or no uniformity. There were almost as many different rates for ocean transit as there were steamship companies carrying the mail. In overland transit, even in the United States, different rates prevailed in different parts of the country.

Postage included a payment to the state of dispatch, one to the state of destination and one to each state through which the article was carried. Mail going from one country to another required different amounts of postage for each route. The total United States postage rate of mails with a foreign destination usually consisted of four charges: the domestic rate assessed by the American government, the sea postage for maritime transport, the transit rate charged by each country

¹¹(L. S. Woolf, *International Government* (New York: Brentano's, 1916), pp. 118-119.)

through which the mail passed, and the domestic rate collected by the country in which the article was delivered. To send an article to Vienna it was important to know whether it was to go by steamer sailing for Bremen or Hamburg direct or through some French port, for the charges would vary from fifteen to thirty or forty-two cents per half ounce according to the choice of routes. One communicating by letter with a friend in Australia had a choice of six different routes requiring postage respectively of five, thirty-three, forty-five, fifty-six, sixty cents or one dollar two cents per half ounce. Varying rates prevailed for open and closed mails by the same route. Similar conditions as to rates existed in all countries which had negotiated postal conventions. Those possessing no treaties had no international postal communications.¹²

The scale of progression, moreover, under which the rate advanced in accordance with the weight of the letter was equally diverse. In England and the United States the scale was by the half ounce, in France by the ten grams, in Germany and Austria by the *loth*, and in Denmark by three-fourths of a *loth*. Some countries fixed the maximum weight of the letter at 250 grams; others recognized no limits. Some restricted the thickness of letters; others the width and length. In Denmark the thickness was not to exceed two and five-eighths centimeters; in England the maximum dimensions of foreign letters were put at two feet in length and one foot in width or thickness.¹³

The system of accounts was no less complicated. Each state was given credit in all the other states for its

¹²(U. S. Post Office Department. *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1895, p. 448; Hugo Weithase, *Geschichte des Weltpostvereins* (Strassburg: J. H. E. Heitz, 1895), p. 17; John F. Sly, "The Genesis of the Universal Postal Union; A Study in the Beginning of International Organization," *International Conciliation* (Worcester: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1927), No. 233, pp. 397-398; "Past and Present," *L'Union Postale*, XV (June 1, 1890), 85-87, 90)

¹³(Weithase, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 27; Hubert Krains, *L'Union postale universelle; sa fondation et son développement* (Berne: G. Grunau: Nouvelle Edition, 1908), pp. 9, 22; *L'Union Postale Universelle. Memoire publie par le Bureau International a l'occasion du 50^e anniversaire de l'Union.* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Benziger und cie, 1924), pp. 5-8; R. W. Hatzwell, "The Foundation and Development of the Universal Postal Union, *St. Martin's-Le-Grand*, XI (Jan., 1901), 150.)

portion of the sum prepaid on each piece of mail. Accompanying each article was a letter bill upon which the postmaster was required to enter minute details of accounts. The task was made more difficult since the accounts were kept by the standard weight and rate of the creditor country. Hence the credit on a single letter might require reckoning by the English ounce, the French gram or the German *loth* or a fraction of one of the foregoing units of weight. In some instances the dispatching office simplified matters by keeping the total receipts collected. But that was the exception.¹⁴ It happened that balances payable in gold annually accumulated against the United States. The Civil war put gold in the United States at a premium, greatly increasing the usual burden of the foreign mail service. Domestic revenues had to be used to defray the expense of the balances due to foreign postal departments.¹⁵

The problem of the foreign mail service, when Kasson entered the Post Office department, was at the same time a national and international one. Throughout its history the department had showed a rapid expansion. The territory gained from Mexico in 1848 had necessitated sudden and difficult growth. The vast new country teemed with immigrants who demanded improved postal communications. To satisfy their demands, the department was faced with a series of deficits. The decade from 1854 to 1863 showed an unbroken succession of annual deficits rising in 1859 to more than seven million dollars. Each year the deficit for foreign mails was proportionally greater than the total for all other mails. The Civil War brought a great reduction in the amount of foreign postage.¹⁶ Added to financial woes were petitions and entreaties of exporters, importers, and immigrants urging the federal government to improve the

¹⁴(J. Jung, *Der Weltpostverein und sein Einfluss auf den Weltverkehr und die Weltwirtschaft* (Strassburg: Heitz and Mundel, 1903), pp. 4-5; U. S. P. O. Dept. Op. cit., pp. 448-449; Marshall Cushing, *The Story of our Post Office* (Boston: A. M. Thayer & Co., 1893), p. 155.)

¹⁵(U. S. P. O. Dept. Rept. of P. G., 1895, p. 449; *Ibid.*, 1862, pp. 121, 159.)

¹⁶("A Hundred Years of Postal Statistics," *Union Postale*, XIV (Sept. 1, 1889), 145-149; U. S. P. O. Dept. Rept. of P. G., 1862, pp. 26-27.)

postal system both domestic and foreign. Publicists and statesmen stressed the importance of reform in order to spread the democratic way of life. The cry for social justice in postal matters was a natural consequence of the forces growing out of the democratic movement. Uniformity and reductions of rates were particularly desired.¹⁷

From a national viewpoint Kasson possessed ample incentive for carrying out reform in the international postal system and from the international viewpoint he perhaps possessed a knowledge of the possibilities for improvement. There are indications that he was familiar with the idea of internationalism long before he became assistant postmaster general. As a student and young lawyer in New England, he could hardly have escaped the humanitarian currents there prevailing. Certain Massachusetts leaders, with whom he shared the anti-slavery sentiment, were also internationalists. One of these leaders, in particular, was Elihu Burritt, the "Learned Blacksmith" who became famous in the forties as an international postal reformer. While residing at Worcester in the early forties, Burritt toyed with the idea of cheap and uniform postage rates for ocean transit. In 1846 he departed for England and in the same year wrote his famous pamphlet, advocating an ocean penny post. His speeches—150 in all—made throughout the English country-side attracted wide attention and were acclaimed by leaders both in Great Britain and the United States. Burritt was encouraged by a person of no less eminence than Charles Sumner who arose in the senate and urged the president to propose to England and France a cheap international postage. Edward Everett wholeheartedly endorsed the plan. In the same year that Kasson proposed an international postal conference John Bright publicly announced in the House of Commons his advocacy of the Burritt plan. Both

¹⁷(R. A. McReynolds, *United States Postal Development, 1607-1931: Summary and Interpretation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1937) pp. 19, 24, 55; U. S. Cong. (*Senate Miscellaneous Document No. 50*, "Petition of Citizens of New York Praying Postal Reforms," 37 cong., 2 sess., pp. 2, 12.)

Burritt and Kasson lived at Worcester in 1844. In a town of this size, there seems little doubt that Kasson was aware of Burritt's plans at their inception. And since the latter's efforts in behalf of postal reforms were widely known, it is likely that Kasson was aware of the challenge presented.¹⁸

That he was familiar with the efforts of Sir Rowland Hill, the great English leader of the postal reform movement, is certain. In 1861 Hill and Kasson began negotiations for a new Anglo-American postal convention to supplant the old and out-moded one of 1848. Certain additional articles, liberal in spirit, were added.¹⁹ No doubt, too, Kasson was impressed by the ease with which postal communication between the United States and Canada was maintained under liberal treaty arrangements. Why could not the same arrangements, in principle at least, be inducted into one general treaty to which all the nations of the world adhered?²⁰

So it was as a natural consequence of his official position and background that Kasson in the spring of 1862 proposed to the postmaster general that the United States take the initiative in calling a conference of all countries to improve the international postal system. Blair, who is regarded as a very competent and far-sighted postmaster general, was heartily in sympathy with the plan. Kasson then formulated a circular letter which was sent through the Department of State on August 4 as an invitation to all the countries with which the United States carried on diplomatic relations.²¹ The letter deplored the many embarrassments to foreign correspondents brought on by the great diversity of

¹⁸(Merle Curti, *The Learned Blacksmith: the Letters and Journals of Elihu Burritt* (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), pp. 28-29, 90; Charles Northend (ed.), *Elihu Burritt: A Memorial Volume containing a Sketch of His Life and Labors* (New York: D. Appleton, 1889), pp. 18, 32; "Postal Agreement with Great Britain," *American Journal of International Law*, II (Oct., 1908), 849-853.)

¹⁹(U. S. P. O. Dept. Rept. of P. G., 1861, p. 48.)

²⁰(McReynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Clyde Kelly, *United States Postal Policy* (New York: D. Appleton, 1931), p. 19.)

²¹(Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-135; Harlan, "Autobiography," *Ann. Ia.*, 3d Ser., XII, 350; U. S. P. O. Dept. Rept. of P. G., 1862, pp. 165-169.)

rates, mistakes, and serious delays. The solution of these problems could be attained only by international concert of action. A conference between delegates of the various postal departments was preferable to a conference of diplomats because of the former's practical knowledge of details and of the special character of the interests involved. The powers of the postal representatives would be limited to "discussion and recommendation of measures for the adoption of their respective administrations." Attention was called to fourteen different topics suitable for conference deliberations; new ones might be proposed by any delegate from the floor of the meeting. The most convenient time and meeting place would be ascertained by the American postal department from replies to the invitation.²²

Response was cordial, and in some cases enthusiastic. At this early stage of international cooperation, Kasson had shown wisdom by proposing to limit conference action to discussion and recommendation. By thus disarming the national spirit he left no logical excuse for a state to refuse the invitation. Direct and favorable replies were received from all the leading powers of Europe by the end of December, and many of the smaller countries of Europe and South America approved of the plan. Since delegates of the German-Austrian Postal Union were meeting early in the same summer, Prussia and Austria wanted the conference held in the spring of 1863 so that its conclusions could be considered at the German meeting. Primarily on the basis of this request, Blair and Kasson chose May 11 as the opening day. Subject to the approval of the French post department, Paris was selected for the place of meeting.²³ The preliminaries were completed by the middle of March when France gave her assent to this detail. Kasson was

²² (*Ibid.*, pp. 48-51; U. S. Department of State Archives. *Miscellaneous Letters*, Blair to Seward, Sept. 3, 1862.)

²³ (U. S. St. Dept. Archvs. Foreign Service Records. *Instructions. France*, Seward to Dayton, Jan. 5, 1863; Enclosure, Blair's circular letter, Dec. 27, 1862.)

naturally the person to represent the United States. He was appointed on April 1 as special agent to act as commissioner of the post office department at a salary of twelve dollars per day.²⁴

During the early part of April he made the necessary preparations for participation in the conference. Arriving in Paris near the first of May he was cordially received by the American minister, William L. Dayton, who did all in his power to make the mission useful and agreeable. Within the next few days Kasson was presented to the French minister of foreign affairs, Drouyn de Lhuys. This was his first experience at meeting one of the leading diplomatic figures of Europe. In the future such incidents were to become a common occurrence. The French authorities had made all preliminary arrangements. The meeting was to be held at the Hotel des Postes where Kasson for almost a month would match wits with European experts on postal matters.²⁵

FIRST INTERNATIONAL POSTAL CONFERENCE, PARIS, 1863

Kasson was responsible for the initiation of the Paris Postal conference of 1863¹ which was a great factor in the successful establishment of the Universal Postal Union eleven years later. A short time after the conference he was able to negotiate several postal treaties which adopted the principles laid down in Paris in 1863. In the conference deliberations he played a sensible and practical role but not a dominating one. Nor did any

²⁴(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Journal of Daily Orders of the Postmaster General*, LII, 249.)

²⁵(U. S. St. Dept. Archvs., F. S. R. *Notes to the French Foreign Office*, Dayton to Drouyn de Lhuys, May 5, 1863; *Ibid.*, *Despatches. France*. Nos. 303 and 305, Dayton to Seward, May 1 and 8, 1863.)

¹(International conferences not concerned with the results of some war were without numerous precedents in 1863. Only ten, to which official delegates were sent, had been held. S. E. Baldwin, "List of Memorable International Conferences, or Associations of Official Representatives of Governments, Exclusive of those mainly Concerned with the Results of a Particular War, 1826-1907," *American Journal of International Law*, I (July, 1907), 808, 809. It is said that the Postal conference of 1863 was the first in which the United States was officially represented. Conversation with Mrs. Natalie Summers, Department of State Archivist, March 2, 1942.)

single delegation dominate its proceedings. In general a remarkable spirit of cooperation was displayed, although in a few important cases certain delegates balked at sacrificing the national interest for the benefit of the international public. Kasson seemed well aware of the difficulties involved. Perhaps his practice in international law at New Bedford had impressed him with the delicacy required in treating international matters. The gossamer thread spun around the theory of national interest could not be broken abruptly. He was first of all a practical man. Throughout the deliberations he supported the most liberal interpretations. But when strong opposition arose, he was willing to compromise for the sake of harmony. In view of later developments his course was correct. It required only a few years for nations to realize that more was to be gained from universal cooperation in postal intercourse than from the conventional bargaining system. The importance of the conference of 1863 upon the evolution of the Universal Postal Union has been amply recognized in the extensive literature on the subject. Proper attention has been given to the activity of the United States government in taking the lead and to the department chief, Postmaster General Blair. But due credit has not been given to John A. Kasson.

Of the fifteen countries represented at the conference, all the major powers sent delegates with the exception of Russia. There were a total of ten sessions scattered over the period, May 11 to June 9. As a whole the delegates were remarkably able men and the debates manifested distinguished ability and a thorough knowledge of postal relations. Strictly speaking, the assemblage cannot be designated as a diplomatic one; nor can the representatives be called diplomats. It is true that some of the delegates were diplomatic officers before

they were chosen to attend the postal meeting.² But the majority were postal experts who possessed a detailed knowledge of foreign postal communications. The absence of diplomatic maneuverings for a bargain was conspicuous. On the contrary, there was a deliberate effort on the part of most delegates to attain unanimity on major decisions.

More than thirty complicated problems required attention, although three principal questions stood out—uniformity of weight, uniformity of rate, and suppression of accounts.³ A clear-cut, liberal decision, if later adopted in postal conventions, would temporarily affect adversely one or more of the postal administrations. It was natural that countries which had the most to lose from reduced and uniform rates would interpose objections and delay accord. At such points of discord there was a tendency among the delegates to defer to Kasson, since he represented the nation taking the initiative. He was careful not to spoil the advantages of such deference by overplaying his part. He did not monopolize the time at the sessional meetings but preferred to let his colleagues, who shared his views, do the talking. He received much support from Kern, the Swiss delegate. In most cases these men worked together behind the scenes on the committee which formulated the initial answers to the questions. In the conference, Kern usually defended the committee decisions.

²(Countries represented were Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Hanseatic Cities, Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, Holland, Portugal, Prussia, the Sandwich Islands, Switzerland, and the United States. Both Russia and Turkey approved of the meeting but were unable to send delegates at the time. By letter, Ecuador agreed in advance to the conference action and requested the American delegate to represent her interest. U. S. St. Dept. Archvs. *Misc. Letters*. Blair to Seward, Jan. 27, 1863; U. S. P. O., Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1863, "Proceedings of the Paris Postal Conference of 1863," pp. 109-110, 111, 117. This document is the official written report as translated from French by the post office department. It is used here for the first time. In 1863, Postmaster General Blair stated in his annual report that it was his intention to publish a translation of the proceedings as an appendix to his report. In 1927, Professor Sly searched the "leading depositories of the United States" but failed to locate a copy in any language. Sly, *op. cit.*, No. 233, p. 424, n. 20; In 1921, Professors Briggs used a copy in French from the Kasson collection, Des Moines, but so far as he knew, no translation into English had ever been made. Briggs, *op. cit.*, XIX, 372-373, n. 10. Blair's promised translation does not appear in the postmaster general's report published in the Executive Documents of Congress. It does appear in the postmaster general's report now deposited at the Post Office Department Library, Washington, D. C.)

³(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1863, "Proceedings," 131-137.)

The conference was officially opened with a short address by Vandal, the French counsellor of state and director general of the posts. He paid glowing tribute to the spirit of fusion then permeating international relations, rather than isolation. Next he defined the purpose of the meeting as the French government understood it—a definition which was important on later deliberations. The meeting was called “not to discuss or regulate certain physical facts belonging to the domain of negotiation” but to proclaim certain principles, certain speculative doctrines in the interest of the public and of the “treasuries” of the several states. The decisions would bind no one, he concluded. The latter part of the definition was correct. But to prohibit “discussion” of physical facts which belonged to the domain of negotiation would make the conference useless. Previously, all physical facts relating to foreign postal matters had been regulated by negotiation. When no one at the time questioned Vandal’s concept of conference purposes, the organization of the assembly proceeded. Upon Kasson’s nomination, the director of the French post was made president, who, with the approval of the delegates, chose a subordinate officer of French foreign correspondence as secretary of the convention.⁴

Prior to the first meeting, Maurin, head of the French foreign correspondence, had prepared a program for deliberations. It included the points mentioned by Kasson in the American letter of invitation, a list of questions submitted by the British delegate Sir Frederick Hill, and several additional proposals from other delegates. Altogether the French program suggested thirty specific questions for discussion. To this list Kasson proposed two more problems which were eventually adopted by the assembly. The first suggested a geographical division of the world into postal zones, each of which should include the greatest possible number of countries; to each of these divisions a single postage rate would be assigned.

⁴(*Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.)

This was a significant proposal in view of the fact that it later formed the basis of the Universal Postal Union. The second point called for free official postal communications between the various administrations.⁵

During the second session it became apparent that agreement upon specific points could not be reached in the conference meeting as a whole without endless debate and much superfluous discussion. The president's efforts to keep the discussion centered on questions in the order of their appearance on the program were in vain. There was a tendency of certain delegates, more interested in a proposition further down the list, to turn the discussion to the subject of their special concern. To delay further positive action, closely related questions invited discussion simultaneously—a condition which resulted in the solution of none of them. Early in the third meeting the British delegate proposed the appointment of a sub-committee which should prepare in advance answers to program questions. These would be presented to the conference as a basis of debate. As the motion met with general approval, the president appointed a committee of five. Kasson, the first-named, became chairman. The other members were Kern of Switzerland, Hill of England, Metzner of Prussia, and Maurin of France.⁶ The committee plan was used successfully during the remaining sessions. Committee answers were reported singly to the conference where they were debated and voted upon without delay. Often committee members used considerable time in explaining the regulations they had adopted.

The committee answered affirmatively the question: Can the same scale of weight be adopted for the rating of international correspondence? It then proposed that the decimal metrical system would best satisfy the demands of the international postal system. In support of this proposition, Kasson took the floor and gave a de-

⁵(*Ibid.*, pp. 117-124.)

⁶(*Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.)

tailed description of the system's advantages and deplored the fact that his country had not adopted it as a standard of weights and measures. Both of these proposals were adopted without a great deal of debate. Nor was much difficulty experienced in concluding that a uniform rate of progression for the weight of letters should be adopted.⁷ But the selection of a particular rate involved considerable argument. In the committee Kasson had favored the rate of fifteen grams. He was opposed by the French delegate who argued that a letter weighing fifteen grams could not be handled as cheaply as one weighing ten grams. Fifteen grams was the standard eventually adopted by both the committee and the conference after much detailed discussion.⁸

The problem of regulating overland and ocean transit was the most difficult one to solve. To establish a uniform rate or to reduce the rate would affect adversely the French postal administration. The geographical position of France was such that a greater amount of foreign mail in transit passed over her territory than over the territory of any other nation. A reduction in the international transit rate meant a reduction of funds coming into the French treasury. And unlike the situation in the other countries, the French post department was subordinated to the treasury. The problem had arisen in the early sessions but the difficulty of its solution caused frequent postponement. Eventually, at the fifth meeting the Italian delegation read a memorial so extreme that it has not been accepted to this day. It proposed to abolish all transit charges accruing to intermediate offices. Each country would retain the entire postage collected on foreign articles mailed within its domain, but for the transport of foreign mails in transit, no charge was to be made. At least, urged the memorial, agreement should be reached in such a fashion "that the geographical position of a country, making it the forced

⁷ (*Ibid.*, pp. 125-131.)

⁸ (*Ibid.*, pp. 146-156.)

intermediate agent of another country, could no longer, on account of exorbitant prohibitory transit charges, be an obstacle to the direct exchange of closed mails, the reduction of rates, and the increase of correspondence."⁹

The committee in the meantime arrived at a decision after much work and study. It recommended that the transit rate for each nation should never be higher than one-half the interior rate of the transit country. For states of small territorial extent the charge should be even less. In the case of ocean transportation, the cost claimed by one country from another should never be higher than the rate charged upon its own correspondence for similar conveyance. In the committee, Maurin accepted Vandal's interpretation of the limitation of conference powers and found himself "incompetent to discuss" the question since it belonged exclusively to negotiation. In the convention, he insisted that a transit rate was a matter of reciprocity which could be regulated only by conventions between the different states and in proportion to the services rendered by each administration. The committee proposal was the negative of the principle of reciprocity. No government, he affirmed, would consent to pecuniary sacrifices at the loss of its own country and for the benefit of strangers without a *quid pro quo*. Vandal concurred with his colleague's views and again maintained that the delegates had no powers to discuss proposals which recommended tariff and rate regulation.

The arguments were answered by Kern, Kasson, and the Italian representative. Kern defended the committee proposal elaborately and effectively. As to the competency of the assembly to discuss matters of transit he read from the American letter of invitation: "It is evident that the international adjustment . . . for intermediate and ocean transit . . . is clearly of first importance. . . . Transit postal charges overland and on the sea ought to be established on a uniform basis."

⁹(*Ibid.*, pp. 131-137.)

Kasson pointed out that the transit rate was inseparable from the problem of the suppression of accounts and that, furthermore, the committee had not meant to establish an absolute rule but simply to determine a maximum rate. The Italian demand for complete suppression of both rate and accounts, he considered a step backward, since any solution would have to be sufficiently practical for adoption. In the end the committee proposal was accepted, but only after the Swiss delegate had replaced Vandal in the chair. Both French representatives refused to participate in further discussion and the voting.¹⁰

The suppression of accounts was now the only remaining major problem which required discussion and agreement. Here again the French delegate opposed a liberal decision. And here again Kasson at first worked for a liberal decision but yielded for the sake of harmony. The conference did not deem it expedient to recommend a complete suppression of accounts. On the contrary it was decided that accounts could not be suppressed by a rule of general application. The only concession obtained was that they should be simplified as far as possible.¹¹

During the twenty-nine day conference, a total of thirty-four specific problems relating to international postal affairs had been discussed. At the end of the meeting accord had been reached upon thirty-one issues.¹² These thirty-one articles were considered as general principles which postal administrations would include in bilateral postal treaties. Thus, the concrete results of the meeting depended wholly upon the future action of the various national postal officers and their governments.

At the end of the ninth session, when conference labors were ended, Kasson delivered a short address of thanks to the delegates on behalf of the United States. He

¹⁰ (*Ibid.*, pp. 137-146.)

¹¹ (*Ibid.*, pp. 156-163.)

¹² (U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 1, "Rep't. of P. G., 1863," 38 cong., 1 sess., V, 7.)

pointed out that the delegations represented nine-tenths of the commerce and nineteen-twentieths of the correspondence of the world. The conference recommendations, he believed, if adopted by the postal administrations, would greatly augment the flow of foreign correspondence which in turn would increase foreign commerce, sustain commercial marines, and aid largely in the development of interior industry. The improvement of postal facilities was a precursor of international peace and prosperity. The conference was officially closed by the remarks of the Swiss representative who felt that he voiced the sentiments of all the delegates when he declared that:

. . . if the deliberations of the Conference have led to results from which a favorable influence upon future postal treaties may be expected, these results are largely due to the liberal and conciliatory spirit constantly shown during the deliberations by the Delegate of the Government which took the initiative in the Conference.¹³

Kasson's service to the United States post office department and to the international postal system was by no means ended with the close of the Paris conference. Nor did his participation in the meeting constitute the whole of his labors for the postal administration at Washington. Throughout his sojourn in Paris, he took advantage of his close relationships with the several delegates and obtained much valuable information relating to the organization and operation of foreign administrations. This knowledge transmitted in his reports to the postmaster general was of great aid in the future improvement of American domestic administration.¹⁴ Blair was so well pleased with Kasson's success "in obtaining favorable action on most of the postal reforms desired" that the latter was requested to remain in Europe for the purpose of negotiating personally postal conventions with certain European governments. He was to visit the several post departments

¹³(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1863, "Proceedings," pp. 163-164.)

¹⁴(U. S. Cong. House *Ex. Doc. No. 1*, "Rept. of P. G., 1863," 38 cong., 1 sess., V, 5-6.)

and arrange details for conventions which would embody the general principles recommended by the conference.¹⁵

Before he departed for Paris, he had begun with the French minister in Washington a correspondence aimed at effecting certain changes in the Franco-American postal convention of 1857.¹⁶ In Paris, when the work of the conference was over, he renewed the American request for changes in the old treaty and, of course, desired to base the modifications upon principles laid down by the conference. Unable to carry on direct negotiations with French postal authorities, he eventually, with the aid of the American minister, received an appointment with Drouyn de Lhuys. Later when an accidental delay prevented his keeping the engagement at the appointed hour, he departed for Turin, leaving his project for a new treaty with the French government.¹⁷ In Turin he was cordially received by the Italian director general of posts. Without difficulty a new treaty, adopting generally the conference recommendations, was drawn up and signed.¹⁸ Returning to Paris in early September, he did not find conditions conducive to accord with France. When he submitted his project to the American minister for transmission to the French foreign office, he had written Dayton that he felt the French were not disposed at the time to accept fundamental changes for improvement. In transmitting the project, Dayton sent Kasson's letter along. The foreign office denied that it was indisposed to negotiate along liberal lines. The delay, it held, was occasioned by the fact that Vandal, the only French officer with power to make such arrangements, was at the time engaged upon a similar task with Switzerland and Denmark.¹⁹ The

¹⁵(Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-383.)

¹⁶(U. S. St. Dept. Archvs. *Miscellaneous Letters*, Kasson to Seward, Feb. 27, 1863.)

¹⁷(U. S. St. Dept. Archvs. *Despatches, France*, No. 317: Enclosure, Dayton to Drouyn de Lhuys, June 22, 1863.)

¹⁸(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1866, full text of treaty, pp. 57-61.)

¹⁹(U. S. St. Dept. Archvs. *Despatches, France*, No. 343: Enclosure, Drouyn de Lhuys to Dayton, Sept. 10, 1863.)

convention with Italy was Kasson's only positive achievement in the field of negotiation before he returned home in the early fall to make ready for the opening of congress. Four years later he was to be more successful in effecting treaties with European postal administrations.

SECOND POSTAL MISSION TO EUROPE, 1867

Postmaster General Blair continued his efforts to improve the international postal system, even undertaking a thorough revision of United States postal arrangements in the direction of the principles embodied in the thirty-one articles of 1863. In the fall it was reported that Switzerland, Belgium, and Italy were adopting generally the conference proposals as the basis for their postal conventions. Other European nations were said to be on the point of following their example. These favorable reports prompted Blair to open correspondence with several states for treaty revision. To some countries, with which the United States had previously carried on no direct postal relations, he proposed new treaties. With Venezuela a liberal convention was concluded. With Brazil and Hongkong direct postal relations were opened. And favorable replies came in from Europe. Yet through the years 1864, 1865, and 1866, no further agreements were successfully concluded. Negotiations were complicated and involved, and they were endlessly drawn out when carried on through the channels of correspondence. Personal negotiation appeared to be the only method promising success.²⁰

Two conditions, which increased the need for a personal representative, arose in 1867. Great Britain gave notice of terminating the convention with the United States for the purpose of concluding a new one on a more liberal basis,²¹ and the treaty of 1857 with France

²⁰ (Union Postale Universelle. *Documents de congrès Postale International réunis à Berne du 15 Septembre au 9 Octobre 1874* (Berne: Grunau, 1874), p. 37; U. S. P. O. Dept., *Rept. of P. G.*, 1866, pp. 6-7; *Ibid.*, 1895; U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 1, "Rept. of P. G., 1863," 38 cong., 1 sess., V, 7-9.)

²¹ (U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1866, pp. 6-7; *Ibid.*, 1867, pp. 18-20.)

had become antiquated and was entirely unsatisfactory. It failed utterly to meet the advanced opinions of the time and to afford public benefits which such compacts were intended to secure. In detail and practical operation, it gave unfair advantage to the French post department. The international postage rate was exorbitantly high compared to the ones more recently adopted in the other countries of Europe. When notified by the United States government of the necessity of revising the arrangement, French officials responded favorably and requested that a special delegate be sent to Paris with full powers to confer with the director general of postal affairs upon the conditions of agreement. The invitation was promptly accepted. The same person might settle affairs with both England and France and perhaps sign new and improved treaties with other European states.²²

Again Kasson, who was just completing his second term in congress, seemed to be the logical person for the appointment. At least, that was the opinion of Randall, the new postmaster general. Kasson, he reported, was chosen "because of his knowledge of postal details obtained during his connection with the department, and particularly on account of his familiarity with the postal questions to be dealt with, which were fully discussed at the Paris conference, in which he took a prominent part."²³ To Kasson, the opportunity presented by the mission was, perhaps, welcome since he had lost the nomination for a third term in congress in the preceding election.²⁴ He promptly accepted the appointment as special commissioner of the post office department and departed immediately for Europe, where, according

²²(U. S. Cong. *House Ex. Doc. No. 40*, "The Postal Convention with France," 41 cong., 2 sess., V, 1; *Ibid.*, No. 14, "Correspondence with the French Government Relative to Modification of Postal Convention of 1857," 41 cong., 2 sess., I, 1-3.)

²³(U. S. Cong. *House Ex. Doc. No. 40*, *op. cit.*, V, 2.)

²⁴(H. S. Fairall (ed.), *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 1882 (Iowa City: Republican Steam Ptg. House, 1882); pp. 27, 29.)

to the postmaster general, he labored "faithfully and perseveringly to accomplish the object of his mission."²⁵

In general, he was instructed to let the principles of the Paris conference be the basis of his activity. Specifically, he was to reduce postage on both written and printed matter; reduce or abolish charges for overland transit of correspondence in closed mails; establish, as far as practicable, uniformity in rates to different parts of Europe; and simplify and render uniform the exchange of mails between the United States and Europe. Originally, the mission was to include Britain, France, Prussia, and Belgium.²⁶ It was later extended to Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. From the standpoint of tangible results, this mission proved far more successful than the one in 1863. Liberal postal conventions with six European nations were successfully negotiated, signed, and eventually ratified. These states were Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Prussia, Switzerland, and Italy.²⁷

France, for the third time, remained adamant against any fundamental change. In this case the French position was surprising, since the Paris government had been the first to suggest a special delegate from the United States.²⁸ Early in May, 1867, Kasson arrived in Paris. This city he made his headquarters for the duration of his mission. Between trips from Paris to the other European capitals, he constantly kept up negotiations with the French authorities. At an early date, he realized that the French were no more disposed to treat the matter liberally than in 1863. From then on he showed a degree of irritation and impatience which had not been apparent in 1863. To be sure, the attitude and conduct of the French officials were sufficient to try one's patience.

²⁵ (U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 40, *op. cit.*, V, 1-5.)

²⁶ (*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.)

²⁷ (U. S. P. O. Dept. Rept. of P. G., 1867, pp. 97, 111, 115, 118, 122, 125. These conventions were substantially uniform both in principle and detail. Slightly different terms were necessary to meet the peculiarities of the postal systems of each country. In general, uniform and reduced rates were established.

²⁸ (U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 14, *op. cit.*, I, 2-3.)

His first interview with the director of the foreign mails indicated that the post department would make few concessions. It was willing to advance the rate of progression from seven and one-half to ten grams.²⁹ This Kasson considered as a concession to the French rather than to the United States, since the latter preferred fifteen grams. A reduction of postal rates and transit charges, the French would not discuss. The administration is not "unaware in what measure the reduction of its transit charges may favor its financial interests," it was maintained. Kasson felt that rate reduction was a *sine qua non*.³⁰

Failing to derive any satisfaction from interviews with subordinate postal officials, he attempted to deal directly with higher officers. For this effort, he was given a dose of departmental red tape and proverbial "heel cooling." When he called at the ministry of foreign affairs, where negotiations were to be conducted, to fill his appointment, which had been made previously by the American minister, he found the entire diplomatic corps calling at the same time. A second appointment turned out no better. On arriving at the ministry he was referred to the chief-of-cabinet who sent him to Director Deprez who in turn referred him to Under Director Villefort, who would take him to the director of the posts the next day. The morrow came slowly. Vandal needed certain information from the British office—a need which necessitated several days further delay. Still later, after negotiations were begun, they were interrupted for a month or more because of the absence of the minister of finance to whom Vandal, as a subordinate, had to submit the project. It is not surprising that the American delegate wrote to Washington: "It is hard to work here." His earlier prediction that the French were "too apt to be fond of being waited on" proved to be true indeed. He would signify the necessity of taking his

²⁹ (*Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.)

³⁰ (*Ibid.*, pp. 6-8, 13-20.)

"*congé*", he had written the postmaster general, if the French proved "negligent or dilatory."³¹ Now there seemed to be no other alternative.

Before concluding that it was a "mere waste of time to argue questions of equity with subordinates who travel only in old ruts," he made certain recommendations to the United States post office department. France should be given a notice of termination for the treaty of 1857—an act which might facilitate happier conclusions in the future. And continental closed mails should be sent by the way of Dover and Ostend so that the American public would be able to take advantage of the lower transit rates provided by the Belgium postal convention which he had just negotiated. Early in November after his return from Florence, where he had met the Italian postal officer, he vainly prevailed upon the French to accept the principles which a great many European countries had now adopted. When the French again refused, he considered further discussion useless and left to others the "disagreeable task of agreeing with the French office."³²

Others encountered similar difficulties. The attitude of France changed slowly. Negotiations between the two governments dragged along for almost eight additional years without positive achievement. A postal convention was signed and ratified only two months before the Universal Postal Union came into existence at the famous Berne conference of 1874. In February, 1869, the post office department gave to France a one-year notice of termination of the old convention and requested the French to send a delegate to Washington. This France was unable to do.³³ At the request of Paris, the notice of termination was extended to 1870. Meanwhile, the chairman of the senate committee on post offices and post roads, Alexander Ramsey, who was about to depart

³¹ (*Ibid.*, pp. 6-8, 11.)

³² (*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, 20-21, 23-24.)

³³ (*Ibid.*, p. 29.)

for Europe on an extended tour, was commissioned to undertake further negotiations.³⁴ With the failure of this mission, direct postal communication was terminated but negotiations for a new treaty continued. Through the years 1871 to 1874, France gradually receded from her position and accepted in principle the outstanding features of treaties between the United States and other European nations.³⁵ Her transformed attitude was probably influenced greatly by the general acceptance in Europe of more liberal treaty terms, and particularly by the apparent progress then being made in postal relations through an international concert of action.

The idea of a postal union was in the air and the conference of 1863 was its cradle. Heinrich von Stephan, Superior Privy Councillor of the posts of Germany, observed the activities in Paris and the subsequent developments with interest. In 1868, after conducting several missions with talent, he concluded eight postal conventions with European states upon the basis of the principles proclaimed at Paris.³⁶ In the same year he published in the official journal of the German postal administration a detailed project of a world-union for the furtherance of postal communication.³⁷ Stephan had obtained enough practical experience in postal matters to see clearly the need of an international union. He had been responsible for unifying the sixteen separate services operating over Germany and played a useful role in improving the Austro-German Postal Union which had been established in 1848.³⁸ Upon his initiative in 1869, diplomatic preliminaries were begun for the

³⁴(U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 40, *op. cit.*, p. 2.)

³⁵(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1869, pp. 15-23; 1871, pp. XXI-XXII; 1872, pp. 17-18; 1873, pp. XVII-XIX; 1874, p. 16.)

³⁶("History of the General Postal Union," *Union Postale*, I (Nov., 1875), 23-24; Raoul Blayac, *Origine, evolution, et organization de l'Union Postale Universelle* (Montpellier: Dehan, 1932), 68.)

³⁷(Sherwin Engall, "Dr. von Stephan," *St. Martins-Le-Grand*, V (Oct., 1895), 390-391.)

³⁸(Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 220; Hans Buhler, *Der Weltpostverein; eine volkerrechtsgeschichtliche und wirtschaftspolitische Untersuchung* (Berlin, F. Dummler, 1930), p. 18.)

calling of a second conference. France was first approached and reluctantly agreed to send an agent to Berlin to converse on the matter. Then came the Franco-Prussian war and Stephan's proposal was temporarily abandoned. At its close, the Swiss government, urged by Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, was induced to invite the several governments to a general meeting. In 1874 twenty-two nations sent delegates to Berne. In the assembly Stephan was clearly the dominating figure. When the conference closed, his idea of a world-union had become a reality.³⁹

The Universal Postal Union brought into existence by the Berne conference of 1874 is perhaps the most outstanding example of successful international cooperation.⁴⁰ The treaty, which today constitutes the union and to which all political divisions on earth adhered at the beginning of World War II, with the exceptions of the Laccadive and the Maldive Islands, includes all the important principles laid down at the conference of 1863. Kasson's desire to divide the world into postal zones was carried much further than he suggested at the first conference. Today all the contracting countries form a single postal territory over which mail may be dispatched at a low and uniform rate. The rate of progression is established at fifteen grams. The rate of transit is uniform, transit is guaranteed throughout the Union and the cost is borne by the country of origin. Since each postal administration keeps the total sum it collects, there is no necessity for a complicated system of accounts.⁴¹

It is obvious that the conference of 1863 merits a high position in the evolution of the Universal Postal Union.

³⁹(Weithase, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Union Postale Universelle. *Documents du Berne conference*, p. 141; "Hist. of General Postal Union." *op. cit.*, I, 23-24; Hatswell, *op. cit.*, 150-151.)

⁴⁰(S. E. Baldwin, "The International Congresses and Conferences of the Last Century as Forces Working Toward the Solidarity of the World," *AJIL*, I (July, 1907), 567-568; F. B. Sayre, *Experiments in International Administration* (New York: Harpers, 1919), pp. 19-20; Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 197; Hatswell, *op. cit.*, p. 154; Blayac, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 193; P. S. Reinsch, "International Unions and their Administrations," *AJIL*, I (July, 1907), 581.)

⁴¹(Union Postale Universelle *Documents de Berne Conference*, pp. 139-148.)

And though the idea of such a union does not seem to have been entertained by the American government in its call for a conference, it cannot be gainsaid that the invitation was the initial step. At home and abroad the significant part played by the United States has been duly recognized.⁴²

It is equally obvious that John A. Kasson merits a high place in the evolution of the Universal Postal Union. But his services have seldom been amply recognized. First honors have usually gone to Postmaster General Blair. Undoubtedly, this condition was far from the intention of the postmaster general who publicly gave full credit to Kasson for the idea of an international postal meeting:

I deem it proper, in concluding my remarks on this subject to make known the fact that the public owes the suggestion to invite this international conference to the Honorable John A. Kasson, who represented our government in it with such zeal and ability as to command the thanks and warm approval of his associates. I do not doubt that important and lasting advantages are to flow from this conference, due in a great degree to his assiduity, practical ability and earnestness in the cause of progress.⁴³

Today von Stephan is the recognized Father of the Universal Postal Union—a recognition justly granted to the same extent that the father of any great social or humanitarian force may be designated. It is admitted on all hands that he was the great moving power in the foundation of the Union and in its progress for several years. Yet to find the inception of the idea, one must turn back many pages of history. Long before the conference of 1863, the Dane, Josef Michaelson, had toyed with the idea of an international postal organization.⁴⁴ The Austro-German Postal Union was preceded by the

⁴²(Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 376; U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1895, p. 451; 1896, p. 51; 1897, p. 23; Leon Poinsard, "Les Unions Postales," *Annales de l'Ecole Libre des Science Politiques*, VII (July, 1892), 390-391; Buhler, *op. cit.*, p. 21; Blayac, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 68; Hatswell, *op. cit.*, p. 150; Englall, *op. cit.*, p. 390; Union Postale Universelle. *Documents du congres Postal de Stockholm* (2 vols.; Berne: Grumau, 1924), II, 12; P. S. Reinsch, *Public International Unions* (Boston: Ginn, 1911), p. 22.)

⁴³(U. S. Cong. House Ex. Doc. No. 1. "Rept. of P. G. 1863," 38 cong., 1 sess., V, 9.)

⁴⁴(J. Buser, "Zur Entwicklung des Weltpostvereins und des Weltpostrechts," *Schweizerische Vereinigung fur Internationales Recht*. XXXIV (1935), 25.)

Dresden conference of 1847;⁴⁵ the Berne meeting by a Paris conference. Von Stephan wisely and modestly summed up the Union's origin at the Vienna Postal conference of 1891:

Ideas are not originated by any individual. They float in the atmosphere for a whole epoch, at first vaguely, then in a more distinct form, until they condense and precipitate themselves in taking body and life. The idea of unification is in harmony with the aspirations of our century; it prevails today in many of the domains of human activity; it constitutes the true motive power of modern civilization. As for our great machine of international exchange, it was, moreover, stimulated by this irrefutable fact, that the enormous masses which devolved upon it to handle, which increased from day to day and extended from frontier to frontier and to the farthest seas and latitudes, urgently demanded a simplification of the entire mechanism as the only means of making headway against its almost unlimited requirements, and of maintaining indispensable rapidity and regularity. Such are the natural elements which were the true founders of the Universal Postal Union.⁴⁶

Kasson and von Stephan, each in his turn, were able to perceive in the vague idea semblance of form which might alleviate some of the ills of the day. They took the lead in giving the idea body and life. They stand out above the others because they did perceive and brought forth concrete results from their perception. As assistant postmaster general, Kasson believed it his duty to improve the foreign mail service. And duty fit him like a cloak. From the viewpoint of service to people the world over, his activity in behalf of improved international postal relations, constitutes one of the most signal achievements of John Adam Kasson.

⁴⁵(Buhler, *op. cit.*, p. 17.)

⁴⁶(U. S. P. O. Dept. *Rept. of P. G.*, 1894, pp. 38-41.)

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