The conveyance of letters by post is one of the few industrious undertakings which are evidently better managed by governments than they would be by individuals. Nearly the same exertions that are necessary to send a single letter from London to Liverpool, are sufficient to send 50,000. The labor of a few persons, devoted exclusively to the forwarding of letters, produces results which all the exertions of the inhabitants of Europe could not accomplish, were each person to act independently.

Posts appear to have been established in modern Europe, about the year 1479, by King Louis XI., of France. They were originally intended for the forwarding of public dispatches, and of persons travelling under authority of the Government. Later, however, the public at large were allowed to use this institution, and the Government levied a tax, or postal rate, on each letter or package sent; and thus gave rise, eventually, to the Postage Stamp issue.

As far as we can ascertain, the Post office was not established in England until the beginning of the seventeenth century. But we have every reason to believe that postmasters existed in more ancient times; but their occupation was, evidently, only to furnish post-horses to persons who wished to travel quickly, and carry dispatches of any importance. Charles I erected the first Letter Office for Great Britain, in the year 1635. This was only for a few principal roads, and the postmasters were required to furnish horses at a very small sum per mile. This establishment proved a failure; and, at the breaking out of the Civil War, there were great difficulties in transmitting letters. In 1657, the Post Office was established on nearly its present footing, and the rates of postage then fixed were continued until the reign of Queen Anne.

In 1784 Mr. John Palmer, of Bath, who was then Comptroller of the Post office, made extensive improvements in the delivery of the mails, by contracting with the diligences, to carry and deliver the mails more expeditiously than they formerly were. At that time it took about seventeen hours to travel by the diligence from London to Bath; and forty hours for the posts to go over the same road. About this time the nett (sic) revenue, which the British Government derived from the Post Offices throughout the United Kingdom, was £1,676,522 sterling. His arose from the rates of postage varying according to distance; the average amount charged on each letter was 7½d.

A clamor for a more uniform rate soon became too powerful to be resisted by the Parliament; and that law making body was obliged to lend its sanction to the “Penny Post.” The new system was established, and stamps for pre-paying postage, first used in 1840. England therefore, is the Mother of Philately. To her belongs the honor of first using postage stamps. It is not my purpose to give a description of her stamps; I leave that for some more learned person than myself, and for the present will leave the Post Office, for some interesting subject.