

In England and Wales for 1878-79 the average was 37 letters to each person, in Scotland 28, Ireland 14, and for the United Kingdom 32.

The percentage of increase of letters for 1879 was nearly double that of the previous year, and that of book-packets and pattern parcels more than double. There was, however, a decrease in the proportional increase of newspapers.

The exceptionally large increase of letters may fairly be attributed to three causes: (1) To a more accurate check having been kept at country post offices of the number of letters posted for local delivery; (2) to the natural increase of letters which followed the establishment of more frequent communication both by sea and by railway; and (3) to the larger use made of the post office for the transmission of communications previously forwarded by wire, until the effect of the existing commercial depression had made itself apparent to all classes.

The large increase of post-cards is an evidence of their usefulness. They are now used generally and for a variety of purposes.

The unusually large number of book-packets and pattern parcels dealt with is due to the department permitting articles of merchandise, &c., not exceeding five pounds in weight, and all matter printed or written not being of the nature of a personal correspondence, to pass through the post at parcel and book-packet rates of postage, when intended for delivery within the colony.

The small increase in the number of newspapers is, no doubt, due to the depression of trade. The falling-off is mainly in the number of newspapers posted, and it is difficult to determine any other cause than that suggested.

On the 31st December there were 148 offices at which combined postal and telegraph business was performed.

The business of the Government Life Insurance Department was transacted at 155 post offices, and at a minimum cost to the Government.

It may be remarked that the duties of postal and telegraph officers are not confined to the discharge of merely postal and telegraph business. These officers also act as countersigning officers for Treasury cheques, Government Insurance Agents, Registrars of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, Railway Stationmasters, Land-Tax Collectors, Registrars of Electors, &c. It is also intended that, in several districts, the Postmasters shall collect the property-tax.

With the view of providing a convenience which seemed to be required by the wages class, the several chief post offices have been opened every Saturday night, from 6.30 to 7.45 o'clock, for the receipt of savings bank deposits. Should it be found desirable to keep open the offices on Saturday night, it is probable the interval will be extended, and an earlier closing effected in the afternoon.

The system of returning "special request letters," and letters bearing on the covers the name and address of the writer and sender, has been extended, as may be seen by referring to page 6.

The post office and telegraph duties at Hokitika, Westport, and Reefton were amalgamated on the 1st April last. They have also been combined at Albany Street, North Dunedin. Further amalgamation is to be immediately carried into effect at New Plymouth, Gisborne, Milton, and Mosgiel.

With the view of facilitating the combination of postal and telegraph duties, it has been decided to afford postal officers facilities for acquiring a knowledge of telegraphy. Classes of officers will therefore be drafted from the several chief offices to Wellington, to receive a course of instruction in the Telegraph Learners' Gallery. Following out this principle, no cadet will in future be placed on the permanent staff of the Postal Department until he has first passed through the Telegraph Learners' Gallery.

6 additional iron-pillar receivers were erected during the year; 15 receiving-boxes were established and 4 closed. 29 iron pillars and 88 receiving-boxes were available for the receipt of letters at the close of the year.

88 additional stamp licenses were issued in 1879, and 29 cancelled. The total number of licensed stamp vendors on the 31st December last was 367, who received £991 19s. 10d. by way of poundage on the sale of stamps.

The cost for the carriage of interprovincial and intercolonial mails by unsubsidized vessels was £2,385 12s. 10d.

3,098 private boxes were let, which, together with the fees on 194 private bags, produced a revenue of £3,197 10s.

Government Insurance Agencies have been opened at the post offices at Aratapu, Halcombe, Duntroon, Newton, Te Nui, and Waitara.

The names of the following post offices have been changed: Woodside to Papatoitoti, Waitoa to Morrinsville, Huntly Lodge to Huntly, Upper Ferry (Waitaki) to Kourou, Marewhenua to Livingstone, Harlington to Mount Cargill, Springfield to Ramarama, Bealey Road to Lovat, Horndon Junction to Darfield, Kowai Pass to Springfield, Stokes Point to Northcote, Duvauchelle's Bay to Duvauchelle, Lovat to Aylesbury, Waihi Bush to Woodbury, Warepa to Toiro, Elderslie to Lochiel, and Longbush to Woodlands.

19 money order and savings bank offices were established. At the close of the year 165 post offices were open for the transaction of money order and savings bank business.

The total savings bank deposits amounted to £812,399 11s. 11d., and the withdrawals to £876,180 19s. 3d.; the excess of withdrawals over the deposits for the year being £63,781 7s. 4d., caused no doubt by the severe depression. A reference to Table No. 4 will show to what extent the savings of the people have been affected by the dullness of trade and the dearth of employment.

117,999 money orders were issued, and 88,791 paid. 15,054 orders were issued for transmission by telegraph.

The money order commission on the total issue of money orders was £7,285 1s. 6d.

Money order telegrams may now be forwarded as urgent messages, on payment of the "urgent" telegram fee.

Payment for the carriage of mails by railway is now made at the rate of £10 per mile per annum,