

RAILWAY MAIL SERVICES.

In the last report mention was made that the question of payment for the carriage of mails by railway was under consideration. It was ultimately arranged that the Railway Department should be paid at the rate of £10 per mile per annum on every mile of railway open for traffic, in consideration of mails being transported over all open lines. The agreement dated from the 1st November last, and £2,000 was paid for the year, or at the rate of £12,000 per annum.

The total length of the railway-lines open for traffic on the 31st December was 1,171 miles. For the financial year 1880–81 the average number of miles has been estimated at 1,250, and £12,500 has been placed on the estimates on account of railway services. A further sum of £1,200 has also been provided for the purpose of defraying the cost of special trains. These are now secured by the department, on all occasions, at the reduced charge of 3s. 6d. per mile, instead of 15s. per mile formerly paid—a charge, it is needless to add, which had the effect of restricting the use of special trains for mail purposes.

In view of the necessity for the strictest economy in all branches of the public expenditure, special trains will in future be used only in cases of pressing emergency.

The travelling post offices attached to the express trains running between Christchurch and Invercargill, in the charge of postal officers, have proved to be a great convenience, not only to the department, but to the public. The mails are in the immediate charge of postal officers, called Railway Mail Clerks, by whom their delivery and receipt along the line is undertaken, and the public on payment of an extra fee are enabled to post letters in the travelling post offices until the departure of the trains. A considerable amount of sorting is performed by these clerks, whereby the delivery of correspondence from the larger offices is accelerated. The post offices are also relieved from despatching mails for intermediate offices, the correspondence being grouped and enclosed to the travelling post offices for distribution.

Travelling post offices have not been placed on other lines, but, where the public requirements seemed to demand the convenience, late-letter boxes have been affixed to the guards' vans.

Railway carriages adapted for post office purposes have been placed at the unreserved disposal of the department. The necessary alterations and fittings were undertaken and supplied by the Railway Department, but the cost was defrayed by the Post Office. It is due to the railway officials to acknowledge the many facilities accorded the department for the convenient discharge of the duties connected with the transport of its mails.

The alterations frequently made of late in the railway time-tables have proved of considerable inconvenience, as each alteration involved a corresponding change in the time of the arrival and departure of the mails at and from several post offices. The recent alterations in the running of the trains between Christchurch and Invercargill have had the effect of materially increasing the attendance of the mail officers, particularly at the Chief Post Office, Dunedin, where they are now required to be on duty from 4.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.

SAVINGS BANKS.

19 post offices were during the past year constituted offices for the transaction of Savings Bank business.

15,401 new accounts were opened during the year, against 13,005 in 1878. 12,786 accounts were closed, against 9,634 in 1878. The number of accounts remaining open on the 31st December was 34,747, against 32,132 at the close of 1878.

The number of deposits received was 71,865, amounting to £812,399 11s. 11d., and the amount of each deposit averaged £11 6s. 1d. The withdrawals were 54,698 for £876,180 19s. 3d., the average amount of each being £16 0s. 4d. The amount at the credit of depositors decreased to £787,005 19s., from £819,071 8s. 2d. at the close of 1878, a difference of £32,865 19s. 2d.

The withdrawals exceeded the deposits by £63,781 7s. 4d., against an excess of deposits in 1878 of £20,030 17s. 9d. The interest credited depositors was £31,715 18s. 2d., against £31,664 12s. 9d. in 1878.

Since the establishment of Post Office Savings Banks in the colony in 1867, 104,662 accounts have been opened, and 69,915 closed. There were therefore 34,747 accounts remaining open on the 31st December, 1879. The total amount deposited from the commencement of the savings-bank system, inclusive of the interest credited to depositors, was £6,642,431 14s. 7d., and the total amount withdrawn was £5,855,425 15s. 7d. The balance remaining on deposit on the 31st December was, therefore, £787,005 19s.

The average cost of every Post Office Savings Bank transaction, deposit or withdrawal, for the year was 5½d., and for the whole period of the existence of the Post Office Savings Banks in the colony, nearly 7d. The total amount of interest placed to the credit of depositors since the establishment of the Post Office Savings Banks in the colony was £245,722 12s. 4d. The average daily number of deposits made during the year was 229, and the average daily amount £2,596.

The proportion of depositors to the population was 1 to 13. In England and Wales, the proportion was 1 in 14; in Scotland, 1 in 70; in Ireland, 1 in 79; and the average for the United Kingdom was 1 in 17. The proportion was 1 in 19 in Victoria, and 1 in 38 in New South Wales.

MONEY ORDERS.

Money Order business was extended to 19 new offices—namely, Caversham, Duntroon, Duvau-chelle, Goodwood, Huntly, Helensville, Kingston, Mohaka, Nelson Creek, Newton, Ohacawai, Ohaupo, Otaki, Pokeno, Porangahau, Takapau, Te Aro, Wakefield, and Wyndham.