

UNIVERSAL PENNY POSTAGE.

The introduction of penny postage on the 1st January, 1901, was indeed an important and memorable event in the postal progress of the colony, and was befittingly celebrated on the advent of the new century.

With the commencement of the new year an Executive Council, presided over by the Officer Administering the Government, was held in one of the rooms of the General Post Office, for making the Order in Council bringing the universal penny rate into operation. Following this, at the invitation of the Postmaster-General, there was a gathering of a number of principal officials and citizens to celebrate so important an event in the colony's history. The gathering served a double purpose, as advantage was taken to present the Postmaster-General on behalf of the entire staff of the department with a medallion, a reproduction of the universal penny postage-stamp, and an illuminated address, suitably inscribed, commemorative of this important and far-reaching postal reform. A souvenir card, date-stamped immediately on the expiry of the old year, was at the same time issued by the Postmaster-General to official dignitaries, politicians, and prominent business people within the Empire, as well as to leading officials in foreign countries. For the occasion the General Post Office was brilliantly illuminated, and appropriate devices exhibited.

Reciprocal recognition of the penny post throughout the British Empire, with the exception of Australia, had already been secured, the replies being highly appreciative and complimentary. Although few foreign countries have been able to adopt a reciprocal penny rate, a large number has agreed to accept and deliver our penny letters without surcharge, and only wait the next gathering of the Postal Union in the hope that an agreement may be come to as to the general adoption of penny postage. France, the United States, and other important countries, while unable to accept the penny rate, have evinced much sympathy; and the German Imperial Post Office, to which many notable postal reforms are due, while not definitely committing itself to any course of action at the next Postal Union Congress, has written in such terms as to give this department little reason to doubt that it will support a proposal to introduce a universal penny post throughout the Postal Union. The British Imperial Post Office has throughout been generously helpful, and has evinced much interest in the result of the negotiations now going on.

The following is the list of countries to which the penny rate applies:—

New Zealand (including Aitutaki, Cook Islands, Mangaia, and Niue), United Kingdom, Aden, Africa—British Central, Africa—British East, Akassa, Antigua, Asaba, Ascension, Bahamas, Barbados, Benin, Bermudas, Bonny, Borneo—British North, Brass, British Guiana, Canada, Cape Colony, Ceylon, Chili*, Costa Rica*, Cyprus, Dominica, Ducie Island, Easter Island, Egypt*, Falkland Islands, Fiji, Forcados, Gambia, Gibraltar, Gold Coast, Grenada, Grenadines, Honduras—British, Hongkong, India, Italy*, Jamaica, Johore, Labuan, Lagos, Liberia*, Malay States, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico*, Montserrat, Natal, Nevis, New Hebrides, Newfoundland, Nicaragua*, Niger (northern, including Borgu, Idda, and Lakoja), Nigeria (southern, including Burutu, Calabar, new and old, and Onitsha), Norfolk Island, Opobo, Orange River Colony, Paraguay*, Penang, Peru*, Pitcairn Island, Portugal*, Portuguese Colonies*, St. Helena, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent (Windward Islands), Samoan Islands, Sarawak, Servia*, Seychelles, Siam*, Sierra Leone, Society Islands, Solomon Islands, Straits Settlements, Switzerland*, Tobago, Tongan Islands, Transvaal, Trinidad, Turk's Islands, Uganda, Virgin Islands, Zanzibar.

Where not reciprocated by the foreign countries marked with an asterisk in the foregoing list, our penny letters are delivered without charge. The department has reason to be satisfied with the replies from foreign countries, and especially with the strong indication that prominence will be given the question of universal penny postage at the ensuing Postal Union Congress, which is to be held in Rome in 1902 or 1903.

The adoption of the penny-post by the colony was estimated would involve a loss of £80,000; and, although the "countings" and other checks show that the loss will be much less, the fact is not to be accepted as implying that the loss was originally over-estimated. Several "countings" have been taken, but each showed considerable variations. The original "countings" were probably made too early, as the public had then scarcely realised that a penny stamp would carry a letter to any part of the colony, to Great Britain, and to nearly every part of the Empire. Some allowance must also be made in respect to the sales of the new stamp for philatelic purposes, and of the old penny stamp, in anticipation of its early withdrawal. While there had been a very marked increase in the number of letters posted at the larger centres, there was for a time no appreciable spring in the postings at country offices. This, however, is now changed, and the increase in the number of posted letters is general throughout the colony. The loss, however, is not to be determined solely by the actual postage face-value of the letters, as the introduction of the penny rate has also brought about an increase in printed matter, especially commercial papers. The latest "counting," which was made last month, indicates that the yearly increase of paid letters posted was at the rate of about ten millions over the number posted last year, and the net postage loss about £43,591. This is a surprising result, and the fact may be accepted as additional proof of the generous appreciation of the penny-post, and the unexampled and sustained prosperity throughout the colony, while it affords good reason to believe that the total loss following the introduction of this great reform will very soon be made up.

* Foreign countries outside the scope of the Imperial penny-post scheme.