

letter to 2s. per pound on letters for delivery at places beyond the colony, from  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. each to 1s. per pound on letters for delivery from one provincial district to another, and from  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. each to 4d. per pound on letters for delivery at any place within the same provincial district. The amount paid for gratuities for ship mails, 1900-1, was £14,126 14s. 9d., as against £10,549 14s. 10d. in 1901-2.

#### WORK FOR OTHER DEPARTMENTS, AND FREE TELEGRAMS AND POSTAGE.

The ever-increasing call made upon the Post Office to perform functions which in other countries are undertaken by special State officers tends to swell very considerably the work of the Department, and to increase the number of officers employed and the salaries paid. These services have been willingly undertaken, and performed with such efficiency as to lead to their real importance being in a measure overlooked, although the saving to other departments is very much greater than the increase in Post Office salaries. The time has arrived when Post Office expenditure should no longer be debited with the cost of the increased salaries of officers because of their performing outside duties. The unreasonableness of this may be gathered from the fact that the salaries of a number of our classified officers is based on their total work, including of course the work undertaken for other departments.

During the past year the total receipts on account of other departments were £2,205,826, and the total payments on their behalf £2,247,477.

During a period of five years the vouchers paid for the Treasury have increased in number by 53 per cent., the transactions on behalf of the Public Trustee by 62 per cent., those on behalf of the Superintendent, Advances to Settlers, by 1,096 per cent.; Customs duties collected on parcels have increased 225 per cent.; fees collected for game licenses, 42 per cent.; for the Government Printer, 87 per cent.; for the Income-tax Department, 52 per cent.; for sheep rates, 54 per cent.; and for registration of births, deaths, and marriages, 32 per cent.

Among the new business undertaken may be mentioned the collection of fees under the Arms Act and Homing-pigeons Act, for fishing licenses, for baths at Rotorua and Hanmer Springs, and for the Valuation Department.

The payment of all old-age pensions, the number of which during the past three years has increased over 80 per cent., involving considerable labour, demands special mention.

The discount-stamp system, which in some centres is being freely used, in the aggregate means a considerable number of transactions.

With the following exceptions, no payment is received by the Post Office for the services performed: Old-age Pensions, Advances to Settlers, Public Trust, and game licenses. A mutual arrangement exists between the Railway Department and Post Office for settlement of the claims for services rendered.

The prepayment of Government telegrams and correspondence may here be appropriately raised again. The abolition of free telegrams is as urgent to-day as it was when the question was last reviewed. The system is still abused—diffuse and inconsequential telegrams, and matters which could be equally well dealt with by post, are too frequently being sent by wire, to the exclusion at times of more legitimate telegraph business. The franking-list is also getting beyond reasonable limits and out of hand, owing to the large number of names added to it from time to time. Economy would assuredly result were Government telegrams required to be prepaid, and to a lesser degree would this apply to the large quantity of mail matter now sent free through the Post Office. Such has been the experience in Cape Colony since the Government there decided that Government telegrams and correspondence should be paid for—more particularly in respect to the telegrams, which immediately fell off by nearly one-half. The Commonwealth Government, it may be mentioned, has determined to abolish the franking system in Australia, for good and sufficient reasons.

The value of free telegrams (GVMS) forwarded last year in New Zealand was £27,508, and free postage £62,142, making the total £89,650.

#### OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

The following is a comparative return showing number and amount of old-age pension payments made each month, for the two years ended 31st March, 1902:—

Month.	1900-1.		1901-2.	
	Number of Payments.	Amount.	Number of Payments.	Amount.
April ... ..	10,899	£ 15,601 s. 4 d. 5	11,900	£ 16,962 s. 19 d. 5
May ... ..	11,094	15,877 4 7	12,107	17,207 17 7
June ... ..	11,242	16,095 13 8	12,110	17,190 16 11
July ... ..	11,314	16,216 11 4	12,220	17,327 17 9
August ... ..	11,366	16,270 13 2	12,210	17,276 9 8
September ... ..	11,434	16,375 8 9	12,121	17,132 4 6
October ... ..	11,561	16,552 8 5	12,256	17,321 8 8
November ... ..	11,566	16,554 6 3	12,343	17,446 0 6
December ... ..	11,745	16,819 19 7	12,257	17,292 10 2
January ... ..	11,913	17,035 11 4	12,296	17,350 5 6
February ... ..	12,028	17,212 1 10	12,285	17,333 3 7
March ... ..	11,982	17,116 7 3	12,322	17,406 7 1
Totals ... ..	138,144	£197,727 10 7	146,427	£207,248 1 4