

a motor-vehicle, or the performing of a marriage ceremony. With a view to increasing the efficiency of individual officers, the Department has a series of examinations for testing an officer's ability in various directions. Before a message-boy is appointed to a cadetship he is required to pass an examination which tests his knowledge of English, arithmetic, algebra, geography, and other subjects, as well as his knowledge of purely postal or telegraph work. Before a clerical officer proceeds beyond £155 per annum in salary he is required to pass what is known as the Competency Examination, which tests his knowledge of his particular official duties. Before being promoted to a controlling position each officer is required to pass an examination designed to test his detailed knowledge of the work of the branch in which he seeks promotion and his general knowledge of the activities of the rest of the Service. In this examination, apart from marks for matter, the officer is awarded marks according to his knowledge of the use of the English language. For many of the examinations which they are required to pass officers are able to avail themselves of the valuable assistance given by the departmental Correspondence School, in which are employed an Instructor and ten assistants. The work of the Service as a whole is the sum total of the work of individual officers, and it is by the intensive education of the individual officer that the Department hopes to continue to hold for the Service the very high place it now occupies in the public esteem. It is the Department's aim to meet the public wherever possible, and the need for co-operating with the public is being instilled into the personnel of the Department. Public appreciation of the efforts of the Department is not wanting, and, although complaints are received from time to time, rarely is one made which is of a serious nature. In many cases of complaint inquiry shows beyond all doubt that the fault did not lie with the Department.

For the year 1927-28 the average absence on account of sickness was for men 4.33 days, and for women 10.02 days. For the year 1928-29 the figures are 4.61 and 9.5 respectively. Where it is necessary, as it is in the Post and Telegraph Department, to provide continuous service over the whole twenty-four hours of the day, it is obvious that the maintaining of the staff in good health is of paramount importance. Therefore, while no effort is spared in preparing officers for the efficient performance of their duties, the need for conserving the health of the staff is not overlooked. Moreover, the Department believes that in adhering to its policy of seizing every practical opportunity for improving the conditions of working it is not only acting in the interests of the members of the staff, but is also giving increased opportunity for the rendering of efficient service to that great public with which it is so intimately concerned.

#### OVERSEAS MAILS.

Mails for the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Canada continue to be despatched with regularity by the Vancouver and San Francisco contract steamers. Practically no interruption occurs in the ordered precision of the running of the mail-steamers, and invariably the mails reach Vancouver and San Francisco in time for despatch overland by the express trains connecting with the fast Atlantic steamers.

The presence of Mail Agents on the vessels enables mails for the Dominion to be sorted and ready for despatch to destination immediately on arrival at New Zealand ports.

#### INLAND MAIL-SERVICES.

The contracts for the performance of mail-services in the South Island were re-let during the latter part of 1928. The number of mail-services in the South Island is approximately only half the number in the North Island. Competition for the South Island services was not so keen as it was in connection with the re-letting during the previous year of the contracts for the North Island services, but a feature of the South Island re-letting was the number of "block" tenders received. Owing in some measure to this fact, a saving of £2,100 was effected in the cost of the services in operation as at the 1st January, 1929, compared with the cost of those in existence on the 31st December, 1928. Considerable changes were effected in many routes, enabling a greater number of settlers to participate in the services at little or no increase in cost to the Department.