

The principal business was the further consideration of the reduction of the tefegraph cable rates to Europe (brought forward originally at the Conference held at Adelaide, in May, 1890), and the entry of the Australasian Colonies into the Universal Postal Union. Many other important postal and telegraph matters were dealt with by the Conference, as may be seen from the printed papers already laid before Parliament.

On the question of the reduction of the cable rates, Queensland and New Zealand held aloof, by declining to agree to the proposals made to the Conference. The Eastern Extension Telegraph Company proposed to reduce the rates between Adelaide and London on private telegrams from 9s. 4d. to 4s. per word, Government messages from 4s. 8d. to 3s. 11d., and press from 2s. 3d. to 1s. 10d. per word; the company to take one-half the risk of any falling-off of revenue, and the colonies to guarantee the other half. The reduction was to apply in both directions, but as the Imperial Government declined to bear any portion of the loss, the colonies were practically asked to share not only the loss on their own outward messages, but also to bear half the loss on the messages from London—the amount which would be saved London merchants and other users of the cable system to Australasia. This was regarded as inequitable. This colony's loss under the proposals was estimated at £16,000 for the first year, a sum which the Government did not, under the circumstances, feel justified in incurring, holding as it did that the reduction should have been possible without the colonies being required to recoup the cable company any portion of the loss. The reduced rates, however, were accepted by the other colonies, and the amended charges came into force on the 1st of May last. Queensland and New Zealand do not, of course, participate in the reductions.

On the Postal Union question the Conference unanimously agreed that the colonies should accept the invitation to attend the Postal Congress at Vienna, in May, 1891, and that the representatives should advocate the admission of Australasia into the Postal Union, on the condition that the colonies received adequate representation, and that the maritime transit rates should not be lowered without the consent of the countries maintaining the sea-services.

The Congress assembled at Vienna on the 20th of May, and all the colonies, except New Zealand, were represented—our Agent-General, who was to represent the colony, was unavoidably prevented at the last moment from attending. Application was made for the admission of the colonies into the Union, which was agreed to—the colonies as a group to receive one vote, and the sea-transit rates not to be disturbed in the meantime. New Zealand subsequently accepted the conditions, and the 1st of October next has been fixed as the date on which the Australasian Colonies shall come under the Postal Union *régime*.

With the inclusion of Australasia, all the more important countries are now members of the Universal Postal Union. The colonies have long held aloof for fiscal reasons, but having adopted the universal 2½d. letter rate to the United Kingdom, there was no longer any good reason from financial considerations for remaining outside the Union. The advantages of the Union, more particularly in the public interest, are far-reaching and liberal, and this will be seen in a practical way on the regulations being applied to the interchange of postal matter with other Union countries.

POST OFFICE.

There was a large and general increase of business.

The number of letters, post-cards, book-packets and pattern-parcels, and newspapers delivered and posted during the year, compared with the number dealt with in 1889, was as under:—

					1890.	1889.	Increase.
Letters—Delivered	..	..	..	..	22,415,263	21,274,396	
	Posted	..	..	..	21,501,937	21,026,837	
					43,917,200	42,301,233	1,615,967
Post-cards—Delivered	..	..	..	..	1,019,434	914,342	
	Posted	..	..	..	991,065	935,818	
					2,010,499	1,850,160	160,339
Books and sample-packets—Delivered	..	..	..	..	2,838,329	2,604,719	
	Posted	..	..	..	3,320,801	2,776,774	
					6,159,130	5,381,493	777,637
Newspapers—Delivered	..	..	..	..	9,221,212	8,448,635	
	Posted	..	..	..	8,691,522	8,272,381	
					17,912,734	16,721,016	1,191,718

The letters increased 3·82, post-cards 8·67, books and sample-packets 14·45, and newspapers 7·13 per cent.

The increase in 1889 was—Letters 4·71, post-cards 11·85, books and sample-packets 13·81, and newspapers 3·20 per cent.

The average number of letters posted per head of population was estimated to be 34·37; in 1889 the average was 34·25. For the same year the average in the United Kingdom was 43·5; in the United States, 29·13; Canada, 18·93; Victoria (including post-cards), 38·56; New South Wales, 40·33; Queensland, 29·40; Tasmania, 24·90; and Western Australia, 22·85.

The revenue for the financial year ended the 31st March last was £223,542 9s. 7d., compared with £221,662 11s. 2d. for 1889–90, an increase of £1,879 18s. 5d. only.

This exceptionally small increase in the revenue was due to a diminution in the postage receipts during the last quarter of the year, consequent upon the reduction of the letter-rate to