

correspondence, and thus insure their due despatch, arrangements were made for such letters to be specially collected or handed in over the counter at the General Post Office, or at Lombard Street branch office. Altogether 80,000 important letters were thus saved the risk of delay, and satisfaction was given to city bankers and merchants. This year's record of numbers does not exceed that of last year, and it may be assumed therefore that the excess cards, letters, circulars, &c., dealt with in London during the season amounted to about 50,000,000—that is, about treble the normal numbers for one week, or nearly four letters at Christmas for one at an ordinary period. That through the channel of the General Post Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand alone close upon 25,000,000 more letters than usual passed during the Christmas week, shows the vast capabilities of Post Office head-quarters. Heavy as the correspondence was, no difficulty was experienced in rapidly transmitting it from one point of London to another, or from railway-station to station, as about 1,000 vehicles and drivers, 1,500 horses, and 300 handcarts were available for the purpose.

From the busy duties at the General Post Office and district letter-offices, thoughts had to be turned from time to time towards the parcel-offices. It might be supposed that from the bold display of "Post early" notices, people would take care to post their parcels sufficiently early to admit of delivery at latest on the morning of Christmas Day; but they have yet to become alive to the fact that bulky parcels cannot be handled so easily and with such rapidity as letters. And while such is the case, it is out of the question for them to expect that the one should be dealt with in as little time as the other at the Christmas season. It is evident that the public now place great confidence in the parcel arrangements of the Post Office, for, although there is Free-trade in parcel carrying, yet the increase in the parcel-traffic of the Christmas season shows nearly as great an expansion as the letter-service.

The troubles caused by the adverse elements to the letter-service affected the parcel-service even in a more marked degree. The fog in the East End was so dense that the mail-cart drivers could not see their horses' heads, and the guard who accompanied the Indian and Australian parcel mails to the docks had the utmost difficulty in finding the ship. The mail-van arrangements were entirely upset by the late arrival of trains, the vehicles being kept waiting at stations for hours, and having in many cases to be driven off to perform other services. The same thing happened with the force; men were up all night at the stations with little to do, and when they had gone home to rest and the trains arrived the platforms were crowded with baskets for a time with scarcely any one to touch them, and with few vans to carry them away. Then a jaded force had quickly to be got together again. Reserve vans had been placed at each station, but even these were drawn away. At the Mount Pleasant Parcel Office, which is the chief dépôt in London, from the 23rd December, was a most remarkable scene. The very large premises and the temporary sheds erected for the occasion were literally choked with parcels of all shapes and sizes. The baskets, bag-protectors, barrels, and other receptacles were opened as rapidly as possible, but notwithstanding this there was scarcely room to move in any part of the building. The vans were unloaded immediately they arrived, so that there was no detention of them, and consequently no dislocation of the vehicular service. Inside the building the receptacles were opened and the parcels carefully packed in heaps against the walls, in order to confine the bulk within the narrowest possible limits. At 5 p.m. on the 24th December so numerous were the parcels that it seemed as though it would be a matter of impossibility to clear the office for many days; as parcels disappeared others came in. Never before had so many parcels under 11lb. in weight been aggregated in one dépôt.

On Christmas morning it was evident that the vast accumulation of parcels could not be cleared off by the tired and jaded men who had been on duty for about twenty-four hours, and there was nothing for it but to disperse the staff, which was done at noon. When the order was given for all the men to break off and to resume their labours at midnight, there was a cheer, showing that the men were animated with British pluck, and would be ready and willing to recommence the struggle after a little rest. By noon on the 26th December (Boxing Day) the accumulation was disposed of, but there were heavy and late arrivals from the provinces on that morning, and on the following morning also.

The business transacted at the public counters was far in excess of any previous year. Taking the three days immediately preceding Christmas Day, the number of transactions, excluding the sale of stamps, was 18 per cent. more than last year, and about 66 per cent. more than in ordinary. A similar comparison shows an increase of 60 per cent. over the usual sale of stamps. But even this large increase in transactions and sales does not fully indicate the extra work involved. The stamp sales were largely made up of very small purchases, and these involve as much work individually as large ones. Thousands of demands were made for single stamps, and the number of inquiries and requests to weigh letters was much higher proportionately than at ordinary times. At many offices on the busiest days the parcels handed in were seven or eight times, and postal-orders and registered letters from four to five times, more numerous than usual. There was a constant stream of people at the counters from early morning till late at night, and many offices were crowded to the doors for hours together. At many of the more important of these offices the business is conducted by a female staff, which coped with the extra work in a most satisfactory and creditable manner.

At the Chief Office, on the 23rd December, 6,000 parcels were handed in over the counter, the ordinary daily number being about 2,500. The largest number handed in on any one day last year was 4,600.

At the Putney branch post-office the average day's posting of parcels is about 100. On the 23rd December this number rose to 800. At the High Street, Hampstead, branch office the number of parcels posted on the same date were twelve times as many as on an ordinary day.

A considerable increase took place even in telegraph business; there were 27,000 more messages handed in, and 29,000 more sent out for delivery from the telegraph-offices in London than ordinary. Fortunately, this very important branch of the service was not affected by adverse elements, and the other services, crippled as they were, derived much assistance from its powerful agency.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation (not given); printing (1,900 copies), £75.

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