

in ten thousand; and in the event of a letter being missent the fact of missending is known. If the date of receipt is of any advantage at all, we should, to be logical, date-stamp a letter on its receipt not only at the office of delivery, but by the letter-carriers' sorter, and the letter-carrier who performs the final operation of delivery.

In the United States and Canada the date-stamping of received letters has ceased at certain offices without any inconvenience to any one; and in London letters for the morning delivery are not back-stamped. In the days when the post was irregular and postages were high it was, no doubt, of advantage to be able to certify to the date of receipt at the delivering offices. This is a useless arrangement when letters occupy so short and so regular a time in transit as they do now.

The process of back-stamping letters is costly, and always results in delay. Moreover, the necessity for back-stamping letters nullifies to a large extent any sorting of transit letters which may be made by the office of despatch. To abolish the date-stamping of transit letters would result in great saving of time at central offices, as it would then be possible for inland offices to sort and despatch forward letters in bundles, which need not be disturbed by the transit office. For example, an office like Palmerston North could without any inconvenience tie letters for Christchurch, Dunedin, foreign places, &c., in separate bundles, which on receipt at Wellington would simply be placed in the proper bags. At present, as letters have to be back-stamped, it is useless attempting any sorting of the kind. Another important advantage is that when no back-stamping is required every bundle of letters tied up can be faced with a slip bearing the name of the despatching officer. As each bundle is being sorted at the office of receipt any missent letters can be directly charged to the officer missending them, and a record thus kept which is of infinitely greater advantage than an unexplainable gap between the date of despatch and receipt, as would be revealed by the back-stamping.

I have no hesitation in recommending that the back-stamping of all letters cease forthwith. This will, I estimate, result in the saving of £1,000 per annum.

CLOSING OF MAIL-BAGS.

In America numberless devices have been tried with the object of closing mail-bags without the use of twine. These range from a bag with a simple leather strap, staple and padlock, to bags which close more or less automatically. The best device intended to be used with a padlock is, without doubt, the simplest one—namely, a leather strap and staple; but, although such bags might be useful in connection with mails made up on railway-trains, their general use is not to be recommended, owing to the trouble and expense of keeping a large supply of padlocks capable of being opened by keys of one pattern. After full consideration I have come to the conclusion that the evil-smelling wax-pot could be dispensed with, and lead seals used by all offices. In London I found that lead seals were being used for all country mails with great satisfaction to the office. The Inspector of Post-offices here has recently gone fully into the question, and, somewhat to my surprise, I find that the adoption of lead seals will not only enable us to do away with the unsatisfactory wax seal, which as often as not arrives at its destination in a broken condition, but there will be a saving of £900 per annum. An initial expenditure of £1,500 will, however, be required for steel punches. The proposal is one which I recommend.

STAMP-VENDING MACHINES.

Considerable interest has been displayed in stamp-vending machines of various patterns which have been submitted to postal administrations. The United States Post Office has not, I understand, yet come to a decision as to the best machine to adopt. In Germany and Belgium I found the Abel machine, a German invention, outside the principal offices. This machine appeared to do its work well whenever I tested it. I did not have an opportunity of seeing the inside mechanism, but, judging from a sample machine of the same make which reached New Zealand two or three years ago, I should say that the mechanism is complicated and delicate. Indeed, it is alleged that if the mechanism gets out of order it is possible to obtain a large number of stamps for one coin. The machine adopted by the British Post Office is that invented by Mr. Dickie, of this Department. In the latest model the mechanism has been reduced to a minimum, and it is difficult to find any fault with the machine.

There is no doubt that the adoption of a reliable stamp-vending machine would materially reduce the work of clerks at the counter, and relieve congestion in the public lobbies of large post-offices. I understand that the proprietors of the Dickie machine are preparing one or two machines suitable for selling New Zealand stamps; but there seems to be too much delay in submitting a practical machine to the Department.

If the proprietors of the Dickie machine are prepared to install the machine within a reasonable time, I would recommend that this type of machine be adopted by the Department. I do not consider that the Department would be warranted in purchasing the machines. It would be better, at any rate at first, to allow the company to install machines in suitable places, a commission being allowed on the sale of stamps. The only objection to the use of the best penny-in-the-slot machine is that it is possible, by making a disc of the exact size and weight of a penny, to obtain stamps by fraud. The selective mechanism of the Dickie machine is, however, now so exact that it would be very unprofitable for any person to attempt to make discs for fraudulent purposes.

PARCEL-POST.

The very great increase in our parcel-post business within the last two or three years—the business has been more than doubled—naturally made the subject one which I considered to deserve very full inquiry.