

MISSING POSTAL PACKETS.

During 1923 the Department investigated 6,156 inquiries for postal packets alleged to have been posted and not delivered. In 3,153 of the cases the investigations resulted in the missing articles being traced or accounted for. These cases may be summarized as follow :—

Number of Traced Cases.	Result.
877	Sender responsible for delay.
876	Addressee responsible for delay.
375	Post Office responsible for delay.
1,025	No delay, or responsibility not fixed.

This means that 3,003 packets dealt with in the Department during last year failed in delivery. On comparing this number with the total number of articles handled, the percentage of losses is found to be 0.0016. Included in these losses are packets inadvertently mislaid before posting, or lost after delivery by the Post Office, and packets misappropriated, either inside or outside the Service.

In each case of a postal packet being reported as missing the circumstances surrounding the loss are investigated fully by special officers of the Department, and very frequently the assistance of the Police Department is obtained. On each occasion on which it is found that an officer of the Department has handled a postal packet irregularly, the circumstances of the mishandling form the subject of Police Court proceedings. Unfortunately, similar action is not always taken in cases of the theft of postal packets by persons outside the service—that is, before posting or after delivery. Employers of labour frequently refuse to furnish to the Department or to the Police, information that would lead to the prosecution of one of their employees for the theft of postal packets; indeed, in many cases in which it is believed that the thefts have occurred outside the Post Office, obstruction is placed in the way of those persons undertaking the departmental or police inquiries into the matter. It follows that in numerous instances in which persons should be punished for offences under the Post and Telegraph Act such action is not possible.

The failure of members of the public to register packets containing articles of value is a problem that has to be faced by every Postal administration. As has been pointed out frequently, registered postal packets receive special handling, and are checked not only from office to office, but also from officer to officer. This ensures that, in the event of a registered postal packet going astray—a very rare occurrence—the point at which the loss took place can be ascertained from the Department's records. The Department is in a position to state definitely whether the registered article was placed in the custody of the Post Office or not, and, in the former case, it is in possession of definite information regarding the delivery or otherwise of the packet.

Particulars of two recent cases in which valuable packets were forwarded by post as unregistered articles may prove of interest. A person calling at the delivery counter of a post-office for his correspondence was tendered a packet wrapped in brown paper and tied with string in the ordinary manner. Because the corners of the brown paper were frayed somewhat he asserted that the packet had been tampered with in the post-office. The delivering officer then inquired as to the nature of the contents of the packet, and was informed that it contained £400 in bank-notes. In view of the condition of the wrapping, the packet was opened in the presence of the Postmaster at the office concerned, and the contents were checked. They were found to be intact. In the other case, while a mail-bag was being emptied at a chief post-office, a large number of loose bank-notes was found. The bag had been conveyed approximately twenty miles by rail. A subsequent check of the contents disclosed that the bank-notes had become dislodged from a packet wrapped in tissue paper and tied with string. The amount contained in the packet was posted for lodgment in a commercial bank, which it duly reached.

A system somewhat similar to that obtaining in connection with registered articles is followed in respect of parcels forwarded through the post. The sender is given a receipt for each parcel posted, and a receipt is obtained by the Post Office from the addressee when delivery is effected. If, therefore, the Department is unable to produce the addressee's receipt for an article forwarded by parcel-post, there is no doubt as to the point at which the parcel went astray. The percentage of parcels failing in delivery is very much lower than the percentage of letters. This is an indication that the Post Office is not responsible in the case of a large number of the untraced letters.

Each misappropriation of departmental moneys or material results in the circumstances of the theft being reported to the police, and the officer concerned being dealt with according to law. This action is taken whether restitution of the amount stolen is or is not made. As is well known, this rule does not apply in the business community generally. This differentiation of treatment between officers of the Department and persons employed by outside firms results in the impression being conveyed to the public that Government employees are less honest than the men and women employed in other walks of life. Obviously, a comparison is possible only if the same conditions regarding punishment are observed throughout the whole community.

POST OFFICE.

ARTICLES DELIVERED.

The number of articles delivered in the Dominion, including those received from places beyond New Zealand, during the year 1923, compared with the number in 1922, was as under :—

	1923.	1922.	Increase.
Letters	129,463,663	122,949,819	6,513,844 (5.30 %)
Post-cards	3,653,179	3,435,489	217,690 (6.34 %)
Parcels	3,544,650	3,480,127	64,523 (1.85 %)
All other articles	59,201,429	52,192,220	7,009,209 (13.43 %)
	195,862,921	182,057,655	