

A very large business is done for both the Public Trust Office and the State Advances Office in connection with the receipt and payment of moneys throughout the Dominion, amounting last year in the case of the former office to £626,000, and in that of the latter to £6,027,000. Payments of all kinds, including advances on mortgages, are made upon vouchers prepared and certified in the Head Offices of these Departments, and transmitted to the Accountant's Office, General Post Office, for payment. On the other hand, lodgments are received at any money-order office in the Dominion of any moneys whatever that may be due to the Public Trustee or to the State Advances Office. A very large number of vouchers are paid on behalf of the Treasury. Last year these amounted in value to £4,176,093. This system admits of the prompt payment through the Post Office of all claims against the General Government of sums of £5 and under, without pre-audit and without reference to the central authority. This is very much appreciated by small creditors, enabling them, as it does, to receive payment immediately after completion of the service.

In addition to the items mentioned, where the Post Office acts as the agent or intermediary, there is a very considerable number of others, including such diverse matters as the collection of fees under the Arms Act; sale of fishing and game licenses; collection of Customs duty on parcels received from abroad; collection of goldfields revenue; collection of premiums for the Government Insurance Department; the payment of old-age, widows', and military pensions, Imperial pensions, and public servants' superannuation allowances; the collection of machinery fees, of amounts for the National Provident Fund, of fees in connection with the registration of births, deaths, and marriages, of valuation revenue, of land and income tax, orchard-tax, beer duty, workers' dwellings instalments, and industrial-schools receipts. All these operations entail special knowledge on the part of the officers dealing with them, and require special classes of accounts. This is particularly the case in connection with the payment of both Imperial and old-age pensions, where rules governing the payments are elaborate and intricate. There is probably no country in the world where the machinery of the Post Office is put to a greater or more varied use. Its systems and methods are so flexible that there are practically no limits to the extension of its functions.

Apart from the advantages which are enjoyed by the public under the Post Office system of the collection and disbursement of public moneys, there is a very distinct benefit to the State, as the work is performed at a fractional part of the cost which would be incurred under other conditions.

The turnover of transactions under this heading for the year 1923-24 will be found in Table No. 8 on page 39.

WAR-LOAN CERTIFICATES.

During the period from 1914 onwards the Post Office, which might fitly be described as the "handy man" of State Departments, undertook the creation and sale of war-loan certificates on behalf of the Government, and subsequently arranged repayment of the amounts as the certificates matured. A sum of £4,613,202 was raised as an aid to the Government's war effort, and, up to the 31st March, 1924, £4,642,779, including interest, had been repaid to the lenders. As might be expected, hundreds of certificates were mislaid, lost, destroyed by fire, &c., with the result that the investor was not able to produce documentary evidence of his right to the money when the certificates matured. Each case has been carefully examined, and ultimately settlement was effected to the satisfaction of the persons concerned. This may be regarded as a very satisfactory termination to a big undertaking, whereby securities for small sums were widely distributed amongst probably a quarter of a million of the population.

MONEY-ORDERS.

In the money-order business for the year there has been an increase both in the number of transactions and in the aggregate amount remitted; and this is regarded as indicating an improvement of conditions generally in the Dominion.

The improvement in the finances of the Dominion justifies a reduction in the rates of commission on inland money-orders, as a greater volume of business can be transacted at practically the same cost. Provision has accordingly been made for a new schedule to take effect from the 1st April, 1924, when the rate of commission will be reduced to 6d. for sums not exceeding £10 and 3d. for each succeeding £5 or fraction thereof.