

The total amount withdrawn during the same period was £781,260 2s. 10d., leaving a balance of £357,654 14s. 6d., to the credit of depositors at the close of the year 1871; and the number of accounts opened at that date was 10,549, against 8,315 accounts open, and £295,372 1s. 7d. to their credit, on 31st December, 1870.

The total number of deposits since the commencement of the system to the 31st December, 1871, was 82,225, averaging £13 9s. 6d. for each deposit. The total number of withdrawals during the same period was 44,283, averaging £17 12s. 10d. each.

The average amount at credit of each account open on 31st December, 1871, was £33 18s. 1d.

POSTAGE STAMPS.

It having been discovered that the colours in which certain of the denominations of the postage stamps were printed were liable, by chemical process, to be so altered as to resemble the colours of stamps of higher value; in order to the protection of the revenue it was deemed advisable to alter the colour of such stamps. These are now so arranged that the effect of any change in the colours will be to assimilate them to those of postage stamps of lower value.

Some of the plates from which the postage stamps are printed have been in use for a considerable period, are now very much worn, and require to be replaced. Sets of electrotype plates have accordingly been ordered, and their arrival may be shortly expected.

STEAM POSTAL SERVICES.

A contract has recently been entered into with the New Zealand Steam Shipping Company for a four-weekly service between Manukau and Picton, for delivering and collecting the West Coast Mails for the San Francisco route. This service is performed for £300 per four weeks, and is terminable by three months' notice on either side.

Messrs. Webb and Holladay have continued to carry out the San Francisco Service. They have had great difficulties to contend with; but latterly the service has not been of a satisfactory nature, owing to an insufficient number of suitable boats having been employed. Elaborate returns have been prepared on the subject; and it is not necessary to state their substance here. The Contractors have been informed that in future they will be held strictly to the terms of their contract. It must not, however, be forgotten that great difficulties are incident to the carrying out of almost every ocean mail service; and the Postmaster-General is of opinion that if Messrs. Webb and Holladay are treated with firmness, but without anything like undue severity, the service will become a most valuable one. They have been placed at a great disadvantage, through not obtaining subsidies upon which they had calculated. A very favourable arrangement for a joint-contract was made with Victoria, but it has since fallen through, owing to the Victorian Parliament not ratifying it. The Postmaster-General believes, however, that by the exercise of judgment and moderation favourable arrangements with the Australian Colonies may yet be effected. It is the more to be regretted that the joint-contract was not ratified by Victoria, since there is reason to suppose that, had it been brought into operation, the Imperial Government would have contributed £10,000 to that Colony, and an equal sum to New Zealand, in aid of the cost, thus leaving the two Colonies to pay, respectively, £22,500 and £17,500. Those amounts would have been reducible by subsidies which it was likely would have been obtained from the other Australian Colonies.

The whole of the arrangements connected with the service have presented great difficulties; but the Postmaster-General repeats that he believes the result will yet be highly satisfactory. Returns which have been laid before both Houses show that, even with the admitted irregularities, the present San Francisco Service compares by no means unfavourably with former services; whilst there can be no doubt that it is cheaper than any previously paid for by the Colony. The Postmaster-General is of opinion that New Zealand should hold strictly the vantage ground already gained, and should continue to keep control of the service. Its value to the Colony is beyond question: for not only does it afford a quick and cheap route for the conveyance of mails, but it has already opened up an extensive trade with the United States, which trade will, by the maintenance of the service, be considerably extended.