

mail-bags, containing 176,000 letters, &c., were received from the United States during the week ended the 27th December. The heaviest mail ever received from that country arrived by the North German s.s. "Trave" on the 26th December. It consisted of 718 bags, as against 716 received by the same vessel on the same date in the previous year.

During the season 600 extra bags, and nearly 400,000 additional letters, &c., were despatched from this country to the Continent. The inward mails showed an increase of 900 bags and over 600,000 letters.

The five mails for New Zealand, which were more or less affected by Christmas postings, took out 3,839 parcels, being an increase of 1,424 over an ordinary period, but only 24 over the corresponding season in the previous year. The heaviest mail consisted of 1,106 parcels, or nearly three times as many as the usual number. As regards the parcels for the Australian Colonies the results are very satisfactory. The number of mails taken into account was eight, and the total number of parcels despatched by them was 9,532, as against 7,815 at the previous Christmas season and 5,232 at ordinary times, being an increase of 22 per cent. and 82 per cent. respectively. The heaviest mail of the eight left the Tilbury Docks by the Orient steamer "Cuzco" on the 20th November, and consisted of 58 boxes, containing nearly 2,000 parcels, or over three times the normal number. This is the largest parcel-mail to the Australian Colonies yet on record. It must be remarked, however, that it was too late for the Christmas and New Year's deliveries in most cases.

There was a marked difference in the contents of the outward and inward colonial parcels. Those going out contained a great many Christmas cards, puddings, and other articles incidental to the season; but very few parcels of the kind were imported. Out of 1,142 parcels received from Bombay for the Christmas delivery in this country only 29 contained Christmas cards. The incoming parcels, however, consisted for the most part of miscellaneous articles suitable for Christmas presents.

Very marked indeed was the increase in the Continental parcel-traffic. During the Christmas week the parcels despatched from London numbered 20,230, that being an increase of 11,713 on a like number of days at an ordinary period. The inward Continental parcels rose from the usual weekly number of 4,970 to 11,800 for the Christmas week. The greatest number despatched was on Sunday the 21st December, when 3,585 parcels were forwarded, as against 1,420 on an average day. On Saturday, the 27th instant, 2,816 parcels were received from the Continent, or 2,000 in excess of an ordinary day's arrival. Of this number 1,800 were imported from Germany *via* Hamburg.

The excess number of parcels forwarded from London to places abroad during the whole season was not far short of 60,000, and about 28,000 extra parcels were imported.

In the week preceding the Christmas season the fog, frost, and snow gave rise to the gloomiest apprehensions. The mail-trains arrived from one to three hours behind time, and the services throughout London were dislocated in consequence. The drivers of the mail-vans and carts were in a benumbed condition. The horses were jaded and worn out, owing to the slippery state of the streets and to the great strain caused by the heavy fall of snow. Altogether, it was difficult to look forward to the Christmas week with any degree of equanimity. The usual difficulties of the season were intensified from the fact that Monday, the 22nd December, when it was expected that there would be considerable activity in the posting, was the blackest day of all the year, and private, and, indeed, business posting was only carried on where absolutely unavoidable. Truly that day will be marked in Post Office annals as "darkest Monday."

The fog, the frost, and the snow combined had the effect of putting all the mail-van arrangements out of gear. The horses, not recovered from the fatigue of the previous week, were not up to the mark to encounter the Christmas heavy work, and the contractors were at their wits' ends. So slippery were the roads that in the hilly districts of Highgate and Hampstead the postmen had to meet the carts and carry the bags to the sub-district sorting office on their backs. The officers were much tried by the fog. The night mail-trains from the several London termini were despatched very late, some of them starting nearly two hours behind the proper time.

Matters considerably brightened on Tuesday morning, the 23rd December, when the fog lifted; the thoroughfares became passable, and by about 3 o'clock in the day something like a restoration of ordinary working was achieved. The Christmas correspondence now poured into the Chief Office, at St. Martin's-le-Grand, there seeming no limit to the postings, and from that time it was a continuous struggle for the mastery. The work went on there by night and day without intermission, and it was not until 7 o'clock in the morning of Christmas Day that the primary sorting of the letters, &c., was finished.

The large accumulation of letters which had taken place in the railway division-rooms began to be overcome at about 8 o'clock, and soon after that time some of the supernumeraries, who had been on for a very lengthened spell, were permitted to leave. A general clear-up was made at about 9 a.m., when the bulk of the staff was allowed to go home. The despatching-officers had, however, to stop till noon to make up the bags for despatch by the night-mails. The letters, although not more numerous than last year, were received equally late, but on the whole very satisfactory despatches were effected. The letters, which were included in the bags for the night mails, bore no earlier date of provincial posting than the 24th of December. It was noticeable that about nine out of every ten letters in circulation on the 24th December contained Christmas cards. The cards on the whole were considered to be rather smaller in size than in previous years.

At the General Post Office the brunt of the battle has always to be encountered, as, being the large forwarding-office of the world, it becomes, at times, congested with its "through" work. This year was no exception to the rule; but it can safely be said that the circulation branches were never more than about six hours behind the work, and that is borne out by the fact of the absence of complaints of delay. Vast as the preparations have been, and large as was the extra force employed throughout London, not a single penny was expended unnecessarily. In order to keep important letters from bankers, merchants, &c., unmixed with the mass of Christmas