

Owing to the epidemic of influenza which prevailed last summer, the health of the staff does not show such a satisfactory average as for the previous two years. The Christchurch staffs have, however, to be again congratulated upon the high average health of the officers employed in that city. The usual information is given below :—

				Numbers comprised.	Average Absence per Sick Officer.	Average Sick Absence per each Officer employed.
					Days.	Days.
Men	...	...	...	964	9.72	4.09
Women	...	...	...	134	15.09	11.82

There were six deaths during the year.

The third meeting of the Appeal Board under "The Post and Telegraph Department Act, 1894," was held in June of last year. As so large a number of the appeals made in former years was against the length of service allowed, and as cases which had long been considered as closed were being reopened without sufficient cause, it was, at the suggestion of the Board, decided to establish a standard Departmental List so as to confine appeals to grievances caused by promotions and other changes made within a year prior to the date of the appeal. With this object in view officers were advised that the list for 1896-97 was to be accepted as a standard list, and, failing appeals against it, that the list for 1897-98 would be regarded as final. This resulted in an unusually large number of appeals, many of which, as will be seen by the Board's findings, were made without any real grounds of complaint. Up to the present time officers have been given much latitude in appealing, and the time of the Board has been occupied to a large extent by matters such as errors in the printed list (of which the department would be only too willing to learn and correct), and applications for the inclusion for seniority of telegraph-messenger and other suchlike service, which officers have over and over again been informed cannot legally be allowed. Moreover, many of the appeals were really first applications for promotion, increase of salary, &c., the appellants apparently overlooking the fact that appeals must necessarily be made against some decision of the Minister. In all 81 appeals were received and considered. Of these, 32, which included 11 in respect to adjustment of service and numerical position in class, were favourably reported upon by the Board, and 49 unfavourably or already met by action taken or decided to be taken by the department. 7 cases were held over by the Minister, and 3 could not be carried into effect.

The fourth annual meeting of the Board commenced on the 30th May last, and the number of appeals considered was 13.

During 1897 1,001 visits of inspection were made to post-offices. The number of miles travelled by Inspectors was 20,056.

Much time is at present lost by letter-carriers, particularly in suburban districts, by the failure of residents to provide letter-boxes at their gates or house-doors. Were the adoption of some form of letter-box more general, the department would eventually be able to extend the delivery facilities. In many cases the time now wasted by the letter-carrier in waiting at doors and in traversing long garden-paths would almost enable two deliveries to be made instead of one. An effort has again been made to induce householders to recognise the advantages of their providing letter-boxes. Inquiries are in progress as to the most suitable form of letter-box for general use, and when a selection is made it will be possible to supply a standard pattern to applicants at a reasonable cost.

An Intercolonial Postal and Telegraph Conference met at Hobart on the 28th March last, Western Australia and New Zealand not being represented.

Many questions of importance were considered, the principal of which were the proposed reduction of the over-sea postage-rates on letters by the United Kingdom from 2½d. to 2d. per ½ oz., and by Canada from 5 cents (2½d.) per ½ oz. to 3 cents (1½d.) per ounce to all parts of the British Empire; and the proposed Pacific cable.

In regard to the over-sea postage the Conference resolved,—

"That . . . it would be inadvisable to make any further reduction of the over-sea postage rate until the way is clear for a reduction in the present large subsidies paid for the carriage of such mails, and the present inland and intercolonial rates.

"That the various Agents-General delegates to the Postal Conference in London be instructed to oppose the proposal to reduce the rate of postage to all parts of the British Empire from 2½d. per ½ oz. to 2d., and also the Canadian proposal to reduce her outgoing rate from 5 cents per ½ oz. to 3 cents per ounce, for the following reasons :—

"(1.) The present rate is not an unreasonably high one, having in view the large cost to the colonies involved in the maintenance of the present means of postal communication with the various portions of the Empire.

"(2.) Because of the anomaly which would be created by carrying letters fourteen thousand miles for the same rate as now charged for delivery within the limits of the town where posted.

"Regarding the proposal of Canada to reduce her outgoing postage, this Conference is strongly of opinion that no reduction should take place which would be a departure from the present uniform rate, for the following reason, *inter alia* : At present a charge of 2d. per ½ oz. is made in Australia for the carriage of letters to however small a distance, while the Canadian proposal would involve the carrying of her letters over the same routes at a greatly reduced cost. This would, in the opinion of the Conference, lead to confusion and dissatisfaction."