

				Number of Parcels.			
				Despatched to		Received from	
				United Kingdom.		United Kingdom.	
1897	...	...	...	...	4,197	...	15,742
1896	...	...	...	...	3,446	...	13,730
Actual increase				...	751	...	2,012
Increase per cent.				...	21.79	...	14.65

Parcels are now exchanged with Canada direct; and a reduction in the rates is under consideration.

A parcel-post convention has been concluded between France and the Australian Colonies, under which New Zealand will be able to exchange parcels with French possessions.

An exchange of parcels with Fiji was established on the 1st ultimo. On the same date exchanges, *via* Sydney, with the New Hebrides, Banks Group, and Santa Cruz Islands were inaugurated.

Parcel exchanges, *via* London, have been extended to Peru and the Republic of Honduras.

The postage on parcels to the following countries has been reduced: Persia, Cameroons, British East Africa, and Zanzibar.

A convention for the direct exchange of parcels with South African countries will shortly be signed.

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE.

The estimated volume and value of official and other free correspondence posted during the year is given in the statement below:—

District.	Letters.	Packets.	Registered Articles.	Newspapers.	Value of Official Correspondence.
					£
Auckland	361,146	92,511	5,724	117,550	9,530
Thames	47,414	3,043	1,537	21,975	1,240
New Plymouth	102,019	10,000	1,397	31,422	2,692
Gisborne	26,776	2,840	960	10,992	712
Napier	119,897	12,144	2,532	30,882	3,168
Wanganui	168,148	9,852	3,495	76,900	4,435
Wellington	907,335	133,075	20,488	159,358	23,944
Nelson	76,887	4,326	4,276	30,284	2,032
Westport	25,100	116	400	10,920	660
Greymouth	56,667	2,223	1,896	34,871	1,486
Hokitika	19,053	1,909	720	9,724	501
Blenheim	52,004	2,200	550	18,000	1,372
Christchurch	276,188	8,448	14,988	102,648	7,286
Timaru	61,235	2,340	756	23,452	1,610
Oamaru	37,999	..	1,055	6,906	1,003
Dunedin	288,348	38,340	8,025	88,396	7,603
Invercargill	122,772	9,732	3,555	63,336	3,247
Totals	2,748,988	333,099	72,354	837,616	72,521

DEAD LETTERS.

The following comparative table shows the number of unclaimed letters, letter-cards, and post-cards dealt with during the under-mentioned years:—

Manner of Disposal.	1884.	1885.	1886.	1887.	1888.	1889.	1890.	1892.	1894.	1896.	1897.
Opened and returned to the writers ..	68,942	66,592	66,729	62,847	55,118	62,654	60,540	63,483	61,745	63,112	66,886
Returned unopened to other countries ..	9,134	8,115	8,359	7,287	6,892	6,220	7,779	7,751	8,941	7,546	7,648
Reissued ..	107	185	251	96	88	92	141	128	130	148	132
Destroyed ..	3,986	2,872	6,600	5,974	5,246	4,340	2,660	2,092	4,725	4,069	3,245
Returned unopened by Chief Postmasters ..	17,593	19,187	21,144	20,185	19,963	21,164	21,931	19,909	22,042	26,414	34,260
Totals ..	99,762	96,951	103,083	96,389	87,307	94,470	93,051	93,363	97,583	101,289	112,171

The proportion of dead or unclaimed letters, letter-cards, and post-cards to the total number dealt with in the colony was 0.33 per cent.

31,325 book-packets and circulars were returned to foreign countries, 52,173 were returned to senders through the Dead-letter Office, 15 were reissued, and 43,032 were returned by Chief Postmasters—a total of 126,535 book-packets and circulars, as compared with 119,103 in 1896.

436 letters were wrongly addressed. 29 letters were discovered to have been posted with previously used stamps.

The under-mentioned articles of value were found in letters opened in the Dead-letter Office, and returned to the senders where practicable:—