

Letter-cards are now sold at 1d., the large stock in hand being surcharged "One penny" over the 1½d. stamp.

A new series of postal notes was issued, and brought into use on the 1st January last.

POST OFFICE ACT.

"The Post Office Act, 1900," came into operation on the 1st January, 1901. The Act is mainly a consolidation of previous measures, and includes parts of the Savings-bank Acts of 1867 and amendment of "The Gaming and Lotteries Act, 1885." Provision is made for fixing the maximum rates of freight and passenger-fares in the case of contracts for the conveyance of mails by sea or inland waters. The insurance of parcels and registered postal packets is provided for, and provision is also made for a scheme for the insurance of letters. A fee of 5s. is now required to be paid before a newspaper can be registered at the General Post Office. The Postmaster-General is also empowered to strike out of the list any publication he deems not to be a newspaper. Under clause 22 power is given to enforce a penalty against any shipping office, public or private lodging-house, retaining more than two months any letter addressed to its care. Telegrams are also included. Power is also given to refuse delivery of a postal packet bearing previously used or defaced stamps, unless the addressee discloses the name of the sender. Penalties are provided for wilful damage to any post-office letter-box, telegraph-post, or telephone-post, and for the posting of any postal packet containing any indecent or obscene print, painting, photograph, engraving, book, card, article, or representation of any kind, or the posting of any postal packet having on the cover words, &c., of an indecent, obscene, or grossly offensive character. There is also provision for punishing persons affixing posters and other matter on telegraph-poles.

EXTENSION OF HOURS OF TELEGRAPH OFFICES.

On 1st September last year an arrangement was made under which the chief telegraph-offices were to remain open for public business continuously day and night, Sundays and holidays not excepted; but it was found that the business done did not warrant the continuance of the arrangement, and the hours were subsequently altered as follows: Ordinary week-days, between the hours of 8 a.m. and midnight; Sundays, between the hours of 9.30 a.m. and 10 a.m., and 5 p.m. and 5.30 p.m.; and statutory holidays, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., and 7 p.m. and midnight. The offices to which these hours apply are given the advantage of ordinary rates on Sundays, instead of the double rates which were formerly applicable.

MISSING ARTICLES OF VALUE ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN POSTED.

In view of the unjust suspicion which frequently attaches to postal officials, occasionally involving the whole of the employes of one or more offices, and of the difficulty of disproving erroneous statements that valuable articles had been sent through the post but not received, it is considered desirable to refer to a case tried in the Supreme Court recently, where a fine of £10 was inflicted under section 98, paragraph 2 of "The Post Office Act, 1900," upon a person falsely representing that he had posted articles of value, when in reality he had not done so. His Honour the Judge said, "The offence was a serious one because it affected the character of postal officials.

The effect of making a false statement such as the prisoner had pleaded guilty to, was to throw suspicion on the officials at the post-office, which was a very serious thing indeed. It appeared, however, that those connected with receiving and delivering letters had so good a character that in this particular instance it was not affected in the eyes of their superior officers. Still, one must not look at this view of the case, for there was necessarily a suspicion in regard to the officials, and it arose through the falsehood of prisoner."

PACIFIC CABLE.

The Committee of representatives of Colonial and other Governments mentioned in last year's report has been superseded by a permanent Board controlling all business connected with the cable. A contract between the Governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand, and Queensland and the Telegraphic Construction and Maintenance Company (Limited), of London, was signed in December last for the construction and laying of the cable from Vancouver to Fanning Island, Fiji, Norfolk Island, Queensland, and New Zealand. The total cost is £1,975,000, including the cost of installation, surveying route, &c.

The cable surveying steamer "Britannia" recently visited New Zealand in connection with the survey of the route, and for the purpose of selecting a landing-place for the cable. The representative of the Pacific Cable Board, Mr. R. E. Peake, was met at Russell by the Superintendent of Electric Lines. After visiting several places on the coast to the north of Auckland, Doubtless Bay was finally selected as the landing-place in New Zealand for the cable.

Plans have also been prepared for the necessary buildings for offices and staff quarters, and everything should be in readiness for the landing of the cable by April next.

It is expected that the cable will be laid about the end of next year.

Copies of correspondence to date will be presented to Parliament in the usual course.