

The restriction against sending newspapers weighing over 8 oz. by the San Francisco and Federal routes was necessary owing to the high poundage and overland-transit rates charged for newspaper matter transmitted by these services; but it is hoped that a reduction in the transit-rates will shortly be possible.

This reduction of postage is a great work achieved. It confers an almost incalculable advantage on the newspaper press of the colony, and must inevitably lead to our country's attractiveness becoming more widely known, as the result of the largely increased foreign circulation of our excellent illustrated papers, the postage on which formerly amounted to 3d. or 4d. a copy, and in some cases even more.

The Australian Commonwealth Post Office has been asked to agree to a penny rate, irrespective of weight, in place of the present charge of 1d. for the first 20 oz. and $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for each additional 10 oz.

Another concession which has been made, and is much appreciated by newspaper proprietors and news agents, is the acceptance of newspapers unstamped in lots of 100 or more. Special application is necessary, and the authority is granted in the case of newspapers addressed to places within New Zealand only. Settlement of the postage due is effected periodically.

POST-OFFICE INSPECTION.

During the year the four Assistant Inspectors visited and inspected 1,544 offices, and travelled 30,652 miles.

NUMBER OF POST-OFFICES IN PROPORTION TO POPULATION.

As an indication of the postal facilities enjoyed in this colony, it may be mentioned that New Zealand has a greater number of post-offices in proportion to the population than any other country in the Postal Union, there being one office to every 465 inhabitants. The countries next appearing to advantage in this respect are the following: New South Wales with one post-office to every 635 persons, and Victoria with one to 734; Norway, 886; Switzerland, 916; United States of America, 1,017; Germany, 1,482; Sweden, 1,844; and Great Britain, 1,858. It must, however, be remembered that the rural deliveries in some of the older countries tend to reduce the number of post-offices.

POSTAL UNION CONGRESS.

With the prospect of the Universal Postal Union Congress assembling in Rome in April last, consideration of several important matters was deferred. Unfortunately, it has been found necessary to postpone the Congress for a year; but it is to be hoped that nothing will intervene to prevent its being held at the appointed time—in April next.

Among matters of importance to this colony to be discussed is the proposed reduction of land-transit rates, which, if given effect to, will result in a material saving in the cost of the transportation of New Zealand mails across America.

Proposals are also to be made for reducing the present high charges on newspapers to foreign countries. In another paragraph it is announced that the long-desired reduction of newspaper-postage to the United Kingdom has become an accomplished fact; but there are still many countries both within and outside the Empire to which our newspapers would be sent more freely if the postage were reduced to the popular penny rate.

A strong effort will be made to bring about a reduction of the letter-postage to countries not at present participating in the penny-post scheme; and the New Zealand delegates to the Congress will also inquire closely into the postal and economic aspect of the value-payable or cash-on-delivery-parcel system, a question which, apparently, is becoming of increasing interest to the mercantile community of New Zealand. The arguments for and against the introduction of the system are given in another paragraph, and will, no doubt, be of interest.

Another matter of some importance will be a proposal on behalf of New Zealand to reduce the postage on printed matter from $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for each 2 oz. to $\frac{1}{4}$ d. for each 4 oz.

An attempt will be made to induce the Congress to affirm the desirability of altogether excluding gambling and lottery circulars from the mails. At present New Zealand is occasionally flooded with lottery circulars from a Continental country, and, unfortunately, under the present state of the postal laws such matter cannot be interfered with.

A proposal by Switzerland, of general interest, has for its object the reduction of the minimum postage on commercial papers from 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 1d. Although the New Zealand minimum inland rates have long been $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for town, and 1d. for inland delivery, a reduction of rates to places outside the colony would be of considerable advantage to merchants and others.

VALUE-PAYABLE OR CASH-ON-DELIVERY SYSTEM.

The question whether the value-payable or cash-on-delivery system should be introduced in New Zealand has again been revived. The matter was brought up in the House of Representatives in 1898, but it was considered that the time was not ripe for the introduction of the scheme.

In the meantime it may be of interest to give a brief outline of the system.

The arrangement is intended to meet the convenience of persons who wish to pay for goods on delivery, or on the receipt of the bills, or railway or other receipts, relating to them; and also to enable traders and others to recover, through the agency of the Post Office, the value of articles supplied by them.

The Post Office on its part charges a small sum for commission in addition to the ordinary postage, and the value of the money-order if the amount is collected. In Australia, for example, the commission on the value of the articles forwarded is 2d. for the first 10s., and 1d. for each additional 5s.

The system may be applied to the collection of trade charges on letters and parcels; the collection of subscriptions to newspapers and societies as they become due, and of periodical payments on the instalment system; collection of amounts for goods sent by rail or steamer, and of goods previously sent on approval; collection of insurance premiums and sums due on promissory notes, &c.