

The main arguments against the system are that large advertising firms might resort to unfair methods of competition; that retail shopkeepers, especially in the inland towns, are heavily rated, and that the Post Office should not give preference to the few large traders to the disadvantage of the small trader.

The following extract from a recently published letter from the Postmaster-General, London, in reply to representations by a trading association, expresses the views of the British Post Office on the subject. After stating that the association's arguments are irrelevant to the subject in hand—namely, the question whether the existing parcel-post system is to be completed by the introduction of "cash on delivery"—the Postmaster-General goes on to say,—

"The inducements to purchase put forward by the advertising firms, whether genuine or not, would seem to depend for their effect not on the existence of a postal cash-on-delivery system, but rather on the existence of the parcel-post itself. The alteration brought about by the introduction of facilities for paying cash on delivery would be merely that the purchaser would pay for his purchase at the door instead of having to remit his money, in some instances, before the goods were sent. The cash-on-delivery system would not give any special facilities to a fraudulent trader for obtaining payment for goods which had not been ordered, since it would be laid down that the sender must sign a statement to the effect that the goods are sent to a *bond fide* order, and the addressee, moreover, is at liberty to refuse any parcel. In any case, the Postmaster-General cannot admit that it is for the Post Office, which is concerned merely with the maintenance and development of postal facilities, to hinder the public in their dealings with advertising firms, or refuse to afford any facilities for which there may be a legitimate demand, and which it may prove practicable to give.

"It is not the fact, as stated in the circular which you enclose, that the consideration now given to the subject is due to a factitious demand manufactured by an advertising association. Lord Stanley, in his interview with a federation of grocers' associations, showed that a strong demand in the interests of British trade for the institution of a postal cash-on-delivery arrangement with this country existed in Egypt and other places abroad. On the other hand, although he has received from various trade associations and other bodies protests similar to yours, he is not in possession of evidence that the middle class as a whole—or even the retail traders as a whole—object to its introduction.

"The question of the equity of the burdens imposed on provincial shopkeepers by the rates is, of course, one for the rating authorities, and has no relation to the subject under discussion. The commission to be charged on collection of the charges payable on a parcel would fully cover the cost of the service, and there would be no question of a charge on the taxpayer in respect of it.

"The decision on the question of instituting the system will be based on one consideration—whether sufficient grounds can be shown for believing it to be for the benefit of the community at large; but no decision will be taken until the result of the extended inquiries now being made is apparent."

It had been understood that until very recently the Imperial Post Office authorities were not favourable to the introduction of the value-payable system into the United Kingdom.

The system is already in force in Germany, Denmark, India, Australia, and other countries, and has been found to work well.

It has been suggested that the system might open the door to fraud, but in such a case the ordinary penal laws would apply. In Germany frauds are said to be of rare occurrence, as the sender is obliged to give his full name and address, as otherwise the trade charge to be sent by money-order cannot be paid to him.

In 1902, 21,000,000 letters and 16,000,000 parcels, with trade charges amounting to about £32,000,000, were dealt with by the German post-offices. In Denmark, also, the system has developed to a considerable extent. In 1859–60, 48,000 packets, of the value of £30,000, were dealt with. In 1902–3 the number had risen to 1,291,000, and the value to £850,000.

In India, in the year 1901–2, the total number of value-payable articles increased from 2,608,888 in the previous year to 2,847,173. In Calcutta alone, the number of value-payable articles posted was 938,176, and the Post Office realised on the delivery of these articles and paid over to the tradesmen of Calcutta a total sum of £702,106.

PATTERNS AND SAMPLES.

The minimum inland rate of 1d. for small patterns and samples was unduly high, and a reduction was made to $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for each packet not exceeding 2 oz. in weight.

DELIVERY OF CIRCULARS.

A concession in the matter of delivering circulars has been made, which has been largely availed of. Under the new arrangement the Department delivers circulars or other printed matter, prepaid in cash, and addressed merely "The Householder," with or without place of delivery. If no place is mentioned, the town of posting is understood as the place of delivery. Delivery of the circulars is made by letter-carrier to every householder within the letter-carriers' deliveries so far as the supply goes. Circulars, &c., to the number of not less than 1,000, may be prepaid in cash at the ordinary rates of postage for such distribution. Any circulars undelivered are returned to the persons posting them.

UNCLAIMED AND RETURNED LETTERS, ETC.

A change has been made in the time for which undelivered letters, letter-cards, and packets are kept before being sent to the Dead Letter Office for disposal.

Letters originating in Australia, which were formerly kept at the office to which addressed for three clear months, are now only kept six weeks, unless addressed to a specified house or street, or to a person who has gone away, in which case the letters are kept one month.