

15 June, 1911.]

UNIVERSAL PENNY POSTAGE.

[9th Day.

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

Roughly, two-thirds of this increase is estimated as being the result of the introduction of the penny post, the remaining one-third representing the normal natural growth in the mails at the rate of about 5 per cent. That the increase still continues is shown by the Appendix to the Report for 1910, and there it will be found upon reference that it is stated that the weight of the letters and post-cards exchanged by the United Kingdom with foreign countries and British Colonies, which in 1908 was 3,926,000 lbs., had increased in 1909 to 4,348,000 lbs. The experience of the British Post Office pending the extension of the penny rate has been somewhat similar to that of the introduction of Universal Penny Postage in both Canada and New Zealand.

The point I am endeavouring to make is not due to any abnormal circumstances or any unusual causes, but to the enhanced facilities extended to the public. I want to show what took place in the increase of correspondence in New Zealand following the introduction of the penny rate there. We brought the system into operation on the 1st January, 1901. Counting took place in July, 1901, and that counting showed that the increase in letters was at the rate of about 10,000,000 over the number posted the previous year, before the introduction of penny postage, and at that period it showed that the loss according to the estimate made by the officers of the Department was only 43,591*l.*

Now the first year after the introduction of the penny rate the increase in the number of paid letters despatched was 11,705,000, or 35·47 per cent. The next year it was 16,269,000, or 49·31 per cent. In the following year it was 19,207,000, or 58·51 per cent., and in the succeeding year it was 24,014,000, or 72·78 per cent. That is the increase in the number of letters alone. I know from examination into the matter and also from information furnished to me personally by the then Postmaster-General of Canada the experience of Canada in the introduction of penny postage with a larger amount of revenue at stake in the first instance was almost identical with that of New Zealand, and it shows that, although we were separate countries, the causes which were at work in the restoration of that revenue are world wide, and I believe you will find in the great Commonwealth of Australia—where they have, I am happy to see, under Mr. Fisher's Government, established a system of Universal Penny Postage—although their loss in proportion, on account of their greater numbers compared to ours, will be greater, yet I am satisfied that within the same period they will recover the whole of their revenue. The point I want to impress on the Conference is this: The great old British Post Office in this old British world has all along been the forerunner of tremendous reforms in the postal service of the most far-reaching character, conferring enormous benefits on the users of the British Post Office. I took the British Post Office as my guide in my earlier years of administrative life in my country as being the institution to follow regarding penny postage, it having conferred an inestimable boon upon the people whom the Post Office serves. I had the argument brought up time and again in New Zealand, because of the fact that in the United Kingdom there was a population of about 40 to 1 of ours, that what was all right with that large number of people was going to be all wrong with a thinly populated country like New Zealand. Those sort of theories in the face of the facts that come out as a result of operations will not stand in the way of reform for a moment. The revenue must be less in proportion to the number of the people, and the expenditure of the Department must be less in the same proportion, but the net results of the adoption of the system, if you look at it upon the *per capita* basis, is practically the same whether the population of the Old Country is 40 to 1 of ours or otherwise. If that theory were true, why should Canada, with only about 5,000,000 of people in its territory, and New Zealand, at the time I speak of, with only about 700,000 people in its territory, separated as those countries are, and with the comparatively speaking small populations, have brought about virtually the same results as followed the tremendous reforms made in the days gone by in the British Post Office in this all-important matter of conferring penny postage on the people using the British Post Office?