

ten men only. In the ballot of Class A 199 departmental officers were selected, and of these 139 passed as fit for service. The strain on the Department to make good the losses has been heavy and constant.

During the year the Department has found the need of considerably extending the employment of girls as telegraph messengers. The services of the girls are satisfactory.

Hitherto the Department has required that the declaration of secrecy (non-statutory) of a telegraph officer or a telephone-exchange officer be made before a Justice of the Peace. Pending an amendment of the Post and Telegraph Act, it has been arranged, as a matter of convenience, for the declarations to be made before the Inspector of Telegraph-offices, a Superintendent of a Telegraph-office, a Post Office Inspector, a Telegraph Engineer, or any Postmaster. This will permit of dispensing with the appointment in future of post and telegraph officers as Justices of the Peace, as such officers were appointed solely for the purpose of witnessing these declarations in isolated places.

It was arranged that, commencing with the month of April, 1918, payment of salary should be made by twice-monthly instalments to those officers who so desired; other officers to continue to be paid monthly.

EXAMINATIONS.

The number of officers who sat for efficiency examinations during the year 1917-18 was 939. Of this number, 538 (57 per cent.) were either wholly or partially successful.

CURTAILMENT OF SERVICES.

Notwithstanding the severe drain upon its man-power due to military requirements, the Department was able to give the public practically a pre-war service up to the end of June, 1918. When it was found that the calling-up of members of the Second Division of the Expeditionary Force Reserve would make it impossible for the full services to be continued, the question of reducing the facilities to the public was exhaustively considered; and the curtailments decided on were made from the 1st July, 1918. Generally, they are in the direction of shortening the hours during which post and telegraph offices are open to the public, reducing the number of deliveries by postmen in the cities and towns, allowing a greater margin of time between the closing and despatch of mails, and reducing the frequency of clearances of street posting-boxes. The alterations, involving a considerable reduction of night-work, have enabled women to be employed to a greater extent than formerly, when a large proportion of the work was done at night. The policy under which women are engaged for the period of the war instead of permanently is rendered necessary by the undertaking of Government to keep open against his return to civil life the position of every man released to join the military Forces. The loss of the services of permanent officers of experience is felt in every office in the Dominion, and as the same skill and local knowledge cannot be expected of the temporary substitutes, it is felt seriously. Controlling officers, working with depleted and inexperienced staffs, find their duties most exacting and responsible and their executive abilities tried to the utmost.

AUCKLAND POST-OFFICE INQUIRY.

Allegations against the Auckland postal service were made by the Rev. Howard Elliott at a public meeting of the Protestant Political Association held at Auckland on the 11th July, 1917. Mr. H. W. Bishop, Stipendiary Magistrate, was appointed by Royal Commission to investigate the charges. The Commissioner was empowered to inquire—

- (a.) Whether correspondence addressed to post-office box 912 at Auckland had been corruptly or improperly suppressed or detained by the officers of the Post-office.
- (b.) On what grounds military censorship has been established over the correspondence of the persons using the said post-office box.

The Commission sat in Auckland from the 13th to the 23rd August, 1917. The Commissioner reported (a) that he was convinced that no postal official was responsible for any improper or corrupt dealing with any of the letters in question; (b) that the charge that the military censorship had been established in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church was completely disproved. The Commissioner's report and the minutes of evidence taken at the inquiry have been printed in parliamentary paper F.—8, 1917.

POST OFFICE SAFE-DEPOSIT SYSTEM.

A safe-deposit system has been inaugurated by the Department, and special safes for the purpose have been installed at twenty-five principal post-offices. The system will enable the public to place in safe keeping sealed packages not exceeding 11 in. in length containing valuable documents, such as wills, insurance policies, debentures, deeds, &c. Coin, bank-notes, jewellery, precious stones, or other articles of value will not be received. The charges for the service, which range from 5s. to £1 per annum, will be according to the thickness and the weight of the packages deposited.

SUGAR FOR SOLDIERS.

During August, 1917, complaints reached the Department that parcels containing sugar addressed to persons in the United Kingdom were not being delivered. As no official intimation of any embargo had been received, the London Post Office was asked by cable on the 5th September whether, in the event of the report being correct, an exception could be made in favour of New