

### THE POSTAL SERVICE.

In no human institution of a business nature are centred so great a variety of human interests as those of the Post Office, nor does any one of them minister more to the comforts and the material well-being of the people of all ranks, climes and conditions. It is pre-eminently the characteristic of civilization of which it has ever been one of the most effective agents and promoters. Hence, we find the history of postal communication running as far back as we have authentic records. The very word "Post" indicates the antiquity of the system of transmitting letters from one distant place to another. In Assyria and other eastern countries of vast area, communication between the rulers at the various capitals and their representatives at a distance was maintained by a system of posts, or stations, along the main routes of travel, which were placed a day's journey apart. Couriers on horse back carried the official letters to and fro, by relays of horses kept at such posts, just as they were in coaching days at the places where a fresh team was harnessed. By this system of posts imperial decrees were promulgated in the Roman Empire, and reports from local governors sent to head quarters. The Emperor Charlemagne established a similar system of posts throughout his vast domain. In the 13th century there were officials engaged in this postal service who carried the government mail on horseback. A private postal service was established even earlier for the convenience of students who by thousands were attending the chief centres of learning in Europe. Out of this system was developed one for the transmission of business and private correspondence, still based upon the plan of using post-riders. In 1581 there was a Postmaster-General in England, but his functions were confined to the regulation of the chain of post houses, or stations, throughout the kingdom, the work of carrying letters being a private enterprise. In the reign of James I, a postal service was organized by the government, the revenues of which were given to the Duke of York. In 1635, the contractor, as we should call him, for the postal service between London and Edinburgh was required to secure a return service in six days. A few years later a weekly post was established all over Great Britain and Ireland, the rate being fixed according to distance, from two pence for 80 miles to eight pence for Scotch letters, and fourteen pence if over 300 miles. With slight variations these rates continued up to the penny postage reform of Rowland Hill in 1839-40. When the new rate came in the number of letters passing through the post offices was 76 millions yearly, with a revenue of \$11,730,000. In a few years the number had risen to 907 millions, besides 72 millions of post cards and 129 millions of book packets, the revenue from which was \$26,740,000. In 1838, the government took over the issuance of money orders, which had been in private hands, and in 1856 this service was extended to the British colonies, and to some foreign countries.

By an Imperial Act of 1851 the different provinces

now known as the Dominion of Canada were given absolute control of the local postal system. At Confederation, the Federal Parliament assumed control and established common rates and a common system for the whole Dominion. At that date, 1868, there were 3,638 post offices in Canada, and the total letters posted was 18,100,000, which gave 5.37 letters per head as the percentage yearly. In ten years, the letters posted were 44 millions, or nearly 11 per head. In 1888, the number rose to 97 millions, including post cards, which gave over 17 per head, and in 1897 letters and post cards numbered 152,479,500, besides over 31 millions of other articles passed through the post office. The increases since Confederation were, 135 millions of letters, an average of 26 letters per head increase, and, in post offices, 5,553 increase. As the population only increased about 20 per cent., the above increases in the number of letters posted is a remarkable evidence of the increased intelligence of the people and of their closer association by the ties of business and social interests.

The Postmaster-General's Report for 1897 gives the following schedule of the various classes of mail matter posted in the Dominion for that year, ending 30th June. Letters, 123,830,000; Registered Letters, 3,509,500; Free Letters, 5,501,000; Post Cards, 26,140,000; Newspapers, Book-packets, Circulars, 22,915,000; Printers' Copy, Deeds, Insurance Policies, Photos, etc., 1,337,500; Goods, 2,377,900; Parcel Post, 339,350; Parcels for Great Britain, 30,229. These make a total of 185,980,470 letters and other articles transmitted by the post offices of Canada in the year 1897. Of these letters, post cards, etc., the letter carriers delivered 155,461,220, so that free delivery was made of 84 per cent. of all the articles posted in the Dominion, leaving only 16 per cent. of the total for foreign letters, and those called for at offices where there are no letter carriers.

The following shows the development of the post-office business between 1887 and 1897:—

	1887.	1897.	1897.
Gross Revenue.....	2,603,255	2,984,222	4,311,243
Expenditure:—			
“ Deductions..	.....	763,718	1,108,304
“ Paid by chq. ....	.....	2,982,321	3,789,478
No. of post offices.....	7,534	7,838	9,192
No. of miles letters were carried.....	10,953	.....	14,780
No. of letters posted... 74,300,000		92,668,000	123,830,000

The "deductions" stated above were expenditures for salaries, rent, etc., which were made by officials, and deducted from their receipts in accounting to the Department. The cost of mail conveyance by railways was \$1,350,786, by other land carriers \$847,660, and by steamboats \$83,734.

Besides the postal business proper, that is, the carriage of letters, the Post Office Department conducts an enormous business somewhat of a banking character, as the receiver of deposits and the issuer of money orders, as the following table shows, giving details for several years.