

where more clearly reflected than in the increase of postage stamps issued. The impatient reader and the careful reader will alike be glad to have the figures tabulated; the former can skip the whole thing and the latter can take in the facts more readily:—

TABLE SHOWING INCREASE OF STAMPS ISSUED
IN TEN YEARS.

1900.....	236,335,462
1901.....	244,616,040
1902.....	263,473,179
1903.....	291,166,179
1904.....	306,382,154
1905.....	336,587,614
1906.....	387,908,230
1907 (9 months)....	329,189,095
1908.....	481,223,267
1909.....	584,264,774

According to this latest report, there were 12,887 post offices in operation, an increase of 408 over the previous year, which, in turn, had shown an increase of 605 over the year before. There are also about 3000 stamp vendors, of whom a special word is said later. The size of the transactions may be even better understood if translated into terms of money. The total transactions in postage stamps, post cards, &c., for the last year covered by the table amounted to no less \$9,942,435 90, so we are safe in saying that the Postage Stamp Branch today is handling stamps to the value of not less than ten millions of dollars a year. A business of quite respectable size.

It will be seen at a glance that this work is not a work merely of handling so much paper or so many packages of printed supplies.

In the first place, these are not mere forms for the use of the Department; they are little vouchers used by the public to prove payment for the service the post office renders, and it makes no difference what stamps the public may want or when or where they want them, if there is anything like a failure of prompt and sufficient supply, the Branch is pretty sure to hear of it, for there is no service of the government to which the people feel they are quite so fully entitled as to that of the post office, and stamps are supposed to be available at any post office whenever the public may see fit to call for them.

In a small and completely settled country, this work of supply and distribution would present difficulties enough, but in a half continent, most of which is only now being brought to the use of postage stamps, and with the work of the service being extended in rapidly growing cities, and even more extended in the newly-opened West and North, the difficulties are increased a hundred fold. With new post offices opening at the rate of about two a day, and many old post offices being changed or closed, there are complexities of work calling for the use of administrative ability of a high order which can only be dimly understood even by the liveliest imagination.

In the second place, these stamps are money—for purposes of accounting they are nothing less. Every stamp is worth its face and can be used by anybody, and a few stamps at a time can even be turned into cash with little or no difficulty. Therefore, even down to the undersized and insignificant half-cent stamp, every one of these little bits of paper must be traced to its final destination, either in the hands of a customer or in the furnace in which unused stamps are consumed. If there were a leak through which a single stamp could escape, there would be no protection either for the public or for the officers of the Branch. These things need to be borne in mind when this work is considered, for otherwise the value of the service rendered by the Branch cannot be understood.

The sixty years of experience which the Branch has had in its work has developed a system which is practically perfect and which operates like clock work—or rather like chronometer work, for the variations of conditions are allowed for and the demands of the public are met with practically unfailing precision.

Under the system as it stands, the Postage Stamp Branch deals directly only with what are called "accounting" post offices. The smaller offices receive their supplies each from its own most