

twenty-one ships carrying two thousand tons of cargo each. What a burden of sorrows, joys, scandals, midnight studies, patient labours, business energy, and everything good or bad which proceeds from the human heart and brain does not this represent.

In view of the great quantity of correspondence conveyed by the post, as well as the hurry and bustle in which letters are often written it is not astonishing that writers should occasionally make mistakes in addressing their letters; but it will perhaps create surprise that one year's letters which could neither be delivered as addressed, nor returned to the senders through the Dead Letter Office, were over half a million in number! Letters posted in covers altogether without address number 28,000 in the year, while loose stamps found in post offices reach the annual total of 68,000. It may be interesting to note just here that for the United Kingdom, one year's issue of those tiny bits of paper known as postage stamps amounts in weight to no less than 114 tons.

In London on valentine's eve, 1874, some 316 extra mail bags were required for the additional work thrown on the post-office. This custom reached its culmination some twelve years ago, since which it has steadily declined. Its decay may be attributed to the progress of the rival custom of sending cards of greeting and good wishes at Christmas time, which, owing to its patronage by all classes has developed to enormous proportions. In the Christmas week of 1882 the extra correspondence which passed through the London post-office was estimated at fourteen millions, including registered letters (presumably containing presents of value), of which there was no less than three tons.

The post-office is not only called upon to perform the duty of expeditiously conveying the correspondence entrusted to it, but is made the vehicle for the carriage of an almost endless variety of small articles. Amongst these are the following—many of them having been alive when posted—viz, beetles, bees, gold-finches, caterpillars, crabs, frogs, leeches, moles, owls, rabbits, rats, squirrels, snails, snakes, worms, toads, etc; also artificial teeth, artificial eyes, cream, eggs, mince pies, musical instruments, ointments, pork pies, revolvers, sausages, tobacco, cigars, etc. Occasionally the sending of live reptiles through the post-office gives rise to a lively scene when the snake's hiss has escaped from the packages in which he had been enclosed.

A large portion, or in fact nearly all the work done by the post-office in the transmission of mails, devolves on sorters, who, unlike men following some other avocations, are a race unsung and a people unknown to fame, possibly because they are a comparatively modern institution, and the work done is carried on practically under seal.

The sorters form a very large body ever engaged in performing an important and by no means simple duty. In many offices they are required to work all night. Most persons have a very hazy idea of what the sorting of letters really is. This is the process in Edinburgh, for example: The letters when posted are found all mixed together and bearing addresses of every kind. They are first arranged with the postage stamp in one direction and are stamped—the labels being defaced in the process—and the letters are then ready to be sorted. They are conveyed to sorting frames,