

The Modern Mercury.

A QUANTITATIVE ACCOUNT OF POST OFFICE WORK.

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WHEN Mr. Fawcett was Postmaster-General, so closely did he identify himself with all branches of Post Office work, that the popularly accepted idea was that he did everything himself. For example, Mr. F. E. Baines, C.B., late Inspector-General of Mails, tells us, in his "Forty Years at the Post Office," that a vestryman "sitting next to me at Hampstead once remarked: 'My four o'clock letters sometimes do not come till five. I mean to write to Mr. Fawcett about it.'"

Before, and since, the time of Mr. Fawcett's generalship of the Post Office army (1880-1884) there has been a fairly widespread habit of growling at the management when any trivial irregularity occurs in the working of the vast business of the Post Office. Perhaps if we take a bird's-eye view of the quantity of work done, we may come to the conclusion that the quality of the work is no less remarkable than its bulk. We will use the official reports, for the Post Office annually supplies us with a summary of its work, that may, with entire justice, be used to show what a gigantic social and commercial machine daily grinds for us at St. Martin's-le-Grand.

At the present time there are nearly 140 thousand persons in the service of the Post Office. This means that

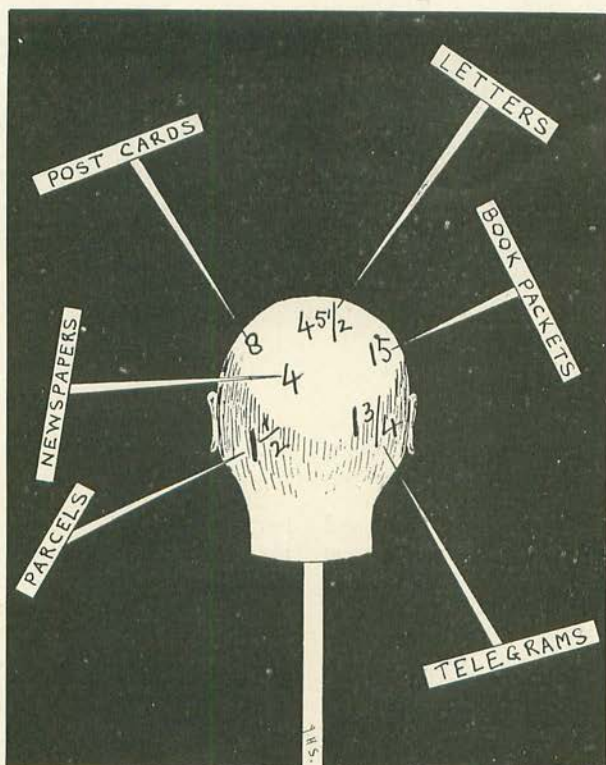
one in every 280 of the population of the United Kingdom assists in the all-important work of postal communication—a vital factor of our social life and of our national activity and development. The wages bill is nearly $6\frac{1}{2}$ millions per annum, over £120,000 per week, or, say, £20,000 per day!

For this little wages bill, each member of our population (say, 39 millions), from the youngest to the oldest, has delivered to him, or her, on the average, the assortment of postal items mentioned in diagram No. 1. Here you see the allowance of postal matter which should fall to you as your share of the mighty total of 2,979 millions of letters, etc. (including telegrams), delivered during the year; if you have not received all your share, do as Mr. Baines's vestryman did, and write to the Postmaster-General.

As regards the wages and salaries of the Post Office servants, it may be interesting to

say that the various revisions (eight) made from 16th June, 1881, to 17th August, 1894, have entailed an average yearly cost to the taxpayer of just on £750,000; evidently Post Office men are adepts in the art of going for a rise, for an advance of nearly £25,000 per week is worth having.

The financial result of a year's work at the Post Office is now, in round numbers, $10\frac{3}{4}$ millions spent on the postal and telegraph services, and $13\frac{3}{4}$ millions received; leaving a yearly



No. 1.—The Postmaster-General says that the annual "Number per Head of Population" of letters, post-cards, book-packets, etc., dealt with by him, is as set out in the above diagram.

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The Number of Letters (only) delivered yearly in the United Kingdom per Head of Population—

Year	Number	Year	Number
1894-95	46	1869-70	26
1893-94	47	1868-69	26
1892-93	47	1867-68	25
1891-92	46	1866-67	24
1890-91	45	1865-66	24
1889-90	43	1864-65	23
1888-89	42	1863-64	22
1887-88	41	1862-63	21
1886-87	40	1861-62	20
1885-86	39	1860-61	19
1884-85	38	1859-60	18
1883-84	37	1858-59	18
1882-83	36	1857-58	17
1881-82	35	1856-57	17
1880-81	34	1855-56	16
1879-80	33	1854-55	16
1878-79	32	1853-54	15
1877-78	32	1852-53	14
1876-77	31	1851-52	13
1875-76	31	1850-51	13
1874-75	30	1849-50	12
1873-74	29	1848-49	12
1872-73	28	1847-48	11
1871-72	27	1846-47	11
1870-71	27	1845-46	10

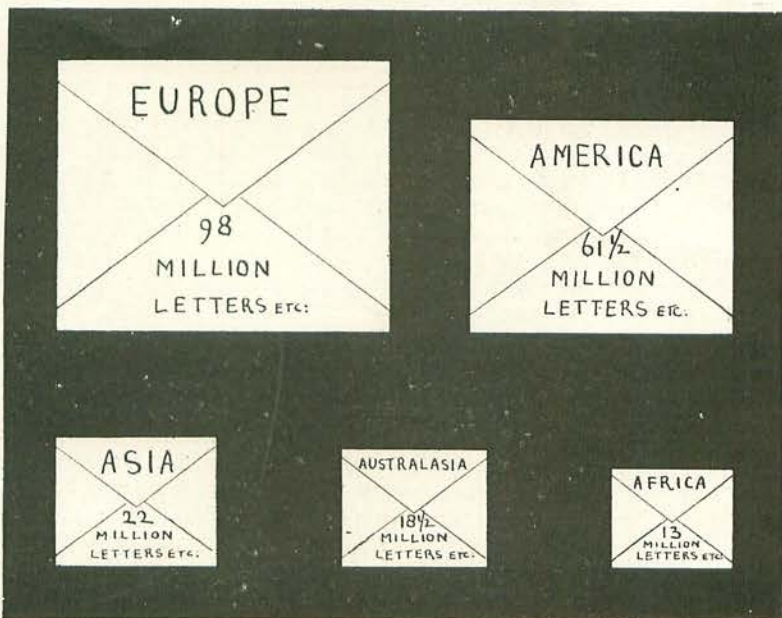
No. 2.—The Increase in letter-writing during the last fifty years. [The decrease for 1894-95, as compared with 1893-94, is more apparent than real: the Postmaster-General says it is mainly due to a change in the method of estimating the number of letters delivered.]

jects. When we think of all that letters mean to us, their conveyance to and from us of the successes and failures, the tragedies and comedies of life, the thousand chances and accidents brought about by the receipt of a letter and by the intelligence it brings to us—when we think of these, and of the infinite development of social life that exists only by the receipt and despatch of letters—why, then we must realize that a growth from ten to forty-six or forty-seven letters per person during the last fifty years is an achievement of which the Post Office and the public may both be justly proud. This remarkable proof of social and commercial activity has, so far as I know, never before been dug out of the official blue-books, and, without doubt, this growth in letter-writing has been to no slight degree a factor in the vast development of the country's life during the past half-century, both as a cause and as an effect of that development.

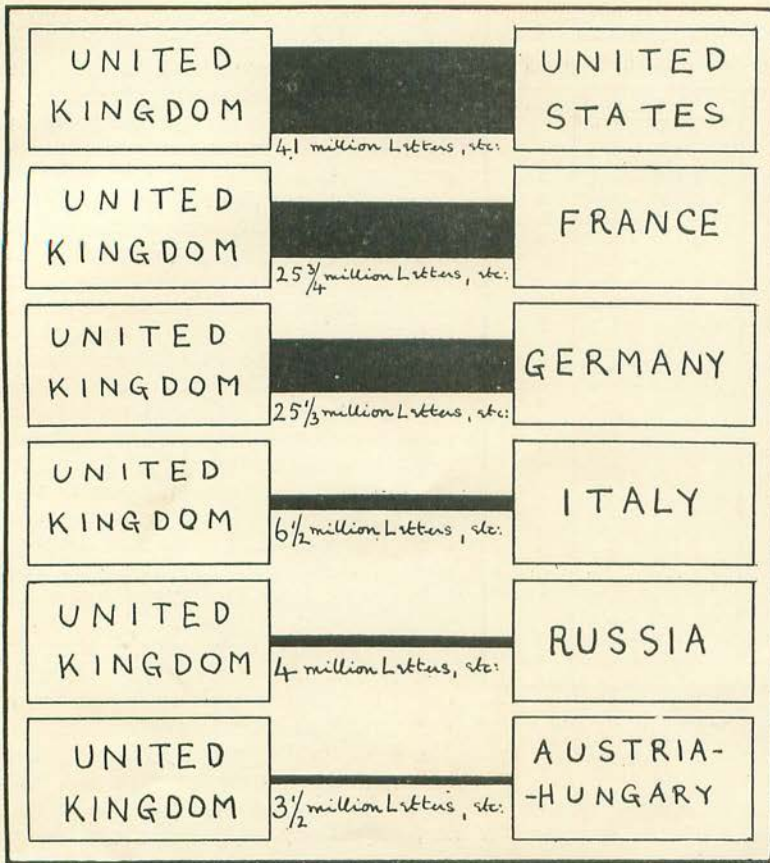
We will now look outside of these islands and see what our Post Office is doing for us as regards intercourse with the continents of the world. Diagram No. 3 shows the quantity of our postal correspondence, exclusive of parcels, with Europe, America, Asia, Australasia, and Africa, respectively. [Including parcels ex-

profit of three millions sterling—promptly annexed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Gradual growth does not arrest public attention to the degree that scientific discovery or mechanical development strikes upon the country's sense. But, in No. 2, I show a tabular statement I have made by aid of all the reports of Postmasters-General—since a report has been issued—which, by aid of a little reflection, will show us that not the smallest marvel of Queen Victoria's reign is the growth of letter-writing among her sub-



No. 3.—A graphic illustration [drawn to scale] of the yearly Amount of Correspondence to and from the United Kingdom and the other parts of the World; viz.: Europe, America, Asia, Australasia, and Africa, respectively. Total, 213 million letters, post-cards, circulars, book-packets, patterns, and newspapers.



No. 4.—The comparative "Bond of Union" between the United Kingdom and the United States, and between the United Kingdom and each of the Great Powers of Europe: illustrated by the yearly exchange of letters, post-cards, circulars, book-packets, patterns, and newspapers between the United Kingdom and each of the countries named. *The thickness of the black connecting link is in proportion to the number of letters, etc., exchanged.*

changed, during the last postal year, with foreign countries and with British possessions abroad, we add over a million and a half to the grand total of 213 million letters, etc., set out in diagram No. 3. Aden and Zanzibar are the two extremes of the long Post Office list of places with which are exchanged parcels, worth on the average £1 6s. 1d. each.]

Our correspondence with the five continents works out in the order that most of us would expect to see: Europe, of course, takes the first place, and Africa the last, America being second to Europe.

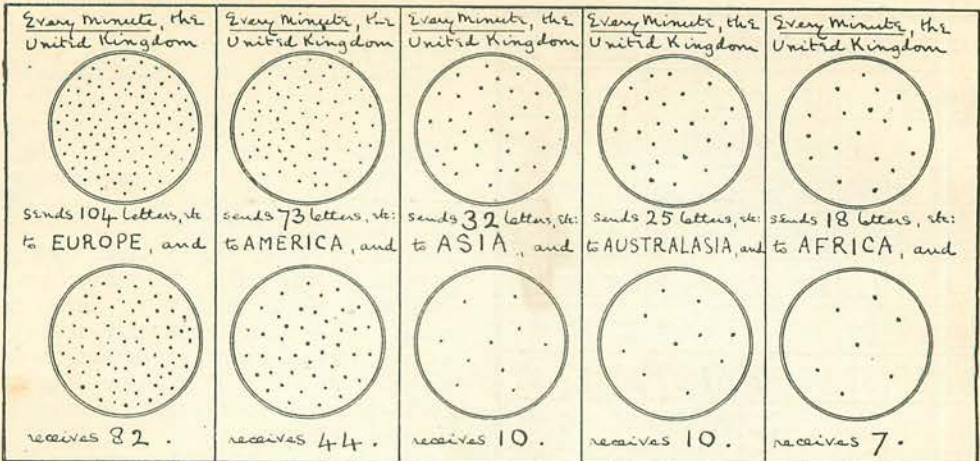
Even more important, perhaps, than a statement of our correspondence with the five continents is the matter of our exchange of letters, etc., with each of the six great powers of the world, which, with England, make up the seven powers that practically "run the show." Accordingly, in No. 4 I show a diagram which I call the "Bond of

Union" (?) between Great Britain and each of the six powers there mentioned. The dead black connection between each pair of labels is the "Bond," and it has been computed and then drawn to the true scale of correspondence with the quantity of letters, etc., exchanged by us with each of the powers.

If letter-writing goes for anything, and perhaps it does, why, then, the strong connection between us and the United States which is seen at the top of No. 4, ought to render the two nations allies for all time. We are also strongly held to France and Germany, and, by a curious coincidence, the bond of

union in No. 4 is just a shade thicker between us and France than between us and Germany; a state of things that now exists politically as well as postally. Our intercourse with Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungary is very small when compared with our exchange of letters with the other three powers which head the list in No. 4.

It occurs to me that when, just now, I showed you the big figures on the face of No. 3, they were too large to convey to your mind a clear idea of what they really mean. So, in No. 5, I show our postal correspondence with the five continents, translated into the much smaller figures which suffice if we consider only *one minute of time*, instead of one year, as in No. 3. Moreover, this No. 5 also tells us how this correspondence of ours is split up into letters sent away per minute, and letters received per minute. The facts, in this form, are rather startling, and so I respectfully commend diagram No. 5 to your



No. 5.—The Postal Correspondence between the United Kingdom and the other parts of the World, shown for each minute of the day and night throughout the year; letters, etc., sent from the United Kingdom being distinguished from letters, etc., sent to the United Kingdom.

notice. You will observe that in each of its five sections we send away many more letters, etc., than we receive.

Having briefly glanced at the "outside" work done by the Post Office, we will come back home and notice in No. 6 a very graphic illustration of facts which, in a less striking way, have been otherwise dealt with in No. 2. Here, in No. 6, we have a carefully drawn diagram of the growth during the last fifty years, in the actual number of letters (only) delivered in the United Kingdom; the figures being:—

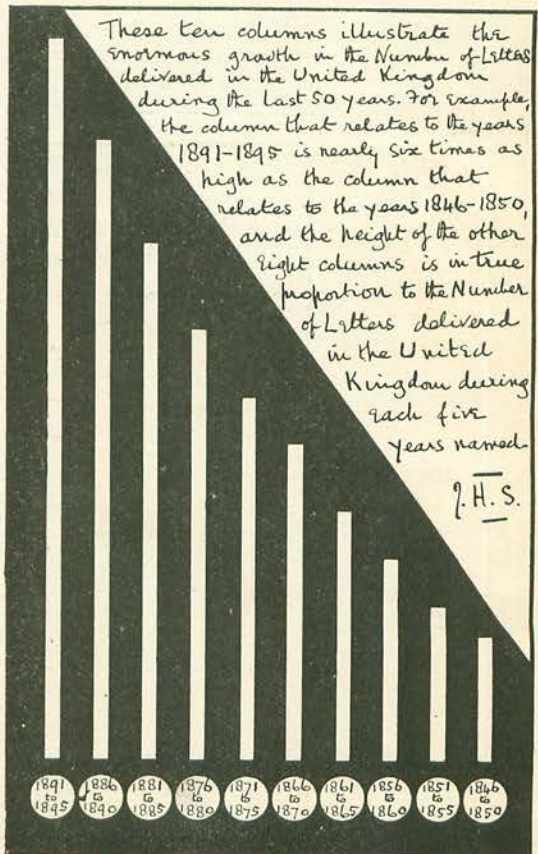
1846-50...	1,559 millions, or a yearly average of	312 millions
1851-55...	1,942	388
1856-60...	2,507	501
1861-65...	3,084	617
1866-70...	3,885	777
1871-75...	4,486	897
1876-80...	5,310	1,062
1881-85...	6,358	1,272
1886-90...	7,584	1,517
1891-95...	8,847	1,769
45,562		911

What a stupendous result! More than 45 thousand million letters (only) have been delivered in the United Kingdom during the last fifty years; 911 millions per annum, on the average, or (say) 1,732 per minute of the day and night for fifty years incessantly.

I have said that these results refer to letters: as No. 7 shows, letters now form only 61 per cent. of all the postal matter delivered in the United Kingdom, the other items being as set out in No. 7.

It is not easy to convey an idea that can be readily grasped, of the huge masses of correspondence that are now being dealt with by our Post Office;

but, in No. 8, I have attempted to do so, by enlisting, for this purpose, the whole population of the world. By means of calculations



No. 6.—Fifty Years' Growth of the number of letters delivered in the United Kingdom. Letters only.

Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett	Lett
Lett	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.
B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.	B.P.
B.P.	B.P.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	P.C.
P.C.	P.C.	P.C.	N.S.W.	N.S.W.	N.S.W.	N.S.W.	N.S.W.	N.S.W.	Par.	Par.

No. 7.—Every hundred Postal Items delivered in the United Kingdom is made up of 61 letters, 21 book-packets, circulars and samples, 11 post-cards, 5 newspapers, 2 parcels: total 100.

full significance of the facts in the last two columns of No. 8 will be clearly defined. Twenty years ago, the activity of a tiny spot in the tiny spot marked London annually delivered 72 letters in the United Kingdom for every 100 persons living on the area of the whole world: a sufficiently remarkable performance, even then. But now, this wonderful Post Office machine delivers in these little islands only, a number of letters that suffices to provide each unit of the world's population with nearly 1¼ letters annually, and this without including any of the other considerable item of postal matter, such as book-packets, post-cards, newspapers, circulars, telegrams, etc.

The item of returned correspondence is of interest to its senders: this is dealt with in No. 9. Nearly 19 million letters, etc., were last year thus treated by the Post Office, the figures being:—

Book-packets, circulars, samples, patterns	10,803,152 or 57 per cent. of the total.
Letters	6,101,950 ,, 32 ,, ,, ,,
Post-cards	1,281,595 ,, 7 ,, ,, ,,
Newspapers	580,860 ,, 3 ,, ,, ,,
Parcels	143,096 ,, 1 ,, ,, ,,
Total number of returned items dealt with	18,910,653 ,, 100 ,, ,, ,,

based on two separate estimates made by population-specialists, I have obtained column (2) of the table in No. 8. The column (1) has been taken from the reports of the Postmaster-General, and incidentally I may say that Mr. Arnold Morley states that the decrease for the year 1894-1895 as compared with 1893-1894 is more apparent than real, it being mainly owing to a change in the departmental method.

I call the twenty years' records in No. 8 a "race between the Post Office and the population of the world," because, up to the year 1886-87, there was a race between the growth of the world's population and the growth in the number of letters delivered in the United Kingdom.

YEAR	LETTERS delivered in the UNITED KINGDOM (1) [millions]	POPULATION of the WORLD (2) [millions]	RATIO between columns (1) and (2).	
			LETTERS (1)	POPULATION (2)
1894-95	1771	1496	118	100
1893-94	1812	1491	122	100
1892-93	1790	1486	120	100
1891-92	1768	1480	119	100
1890-91	1706	1474	116	100
1889-90	1650	1469	112	100
1888-89	1558	1464	106	100
1887-88	1512	1458	104	100
1886-87	1460	1453	101	100
1885-86	1404	1447	97	100
1884-85	1360	1442	94	100
1883-84	1322	1437	92	100
1882-83	1281	1432	89	100
1881-82	1229	1427	86	100
1880-81	1165	1421	82	100
1879-80	1128	1416	80	100
1878-79	1097	1411	78	100
1877-78	1058	1406	75	100
1876-77	1019	1401	73	100
1875-76	1008	1396	72	100

No. 8.—The Race, for the last twenty years, between the Post Office and the Population of the World: the Post Office won in the year 1886-87, and now has a long lead. [Letters only are referred to here, no post-cards, book-packets, etc., being included in column (1) above.]

Look at a map of the world, and then the

BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP
BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	BP	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt
Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt
Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt
Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	Ltt	PC
PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	Nw	Nw	Nw	Par.

No. 9.—Every hundred Postal Items dealt with as returned correspondence is made up of 57 book-packets, etc., 32 letters, 7 post-cards, 3 newspapers, 1 parcel: total 100. [There are one hundred "returned" items to about every 15,400 items delivered by the Post Office: say, one item is dealt with as "returned" to every 150 items that are delivered.]

Taking the 6 million letters returned to the Post Office, these were ultimately dealt with as follows:—

Re-issued to corrected addresses	115,697	or 2 per cent. of the total.
Returned to the senders	5,267,433	86 " " "
Returned unopened to foreign countries	245,756	4 " " "
Neither re-issued nor returned	473,064	8 " " "
Total	6,101,950	100 " " "

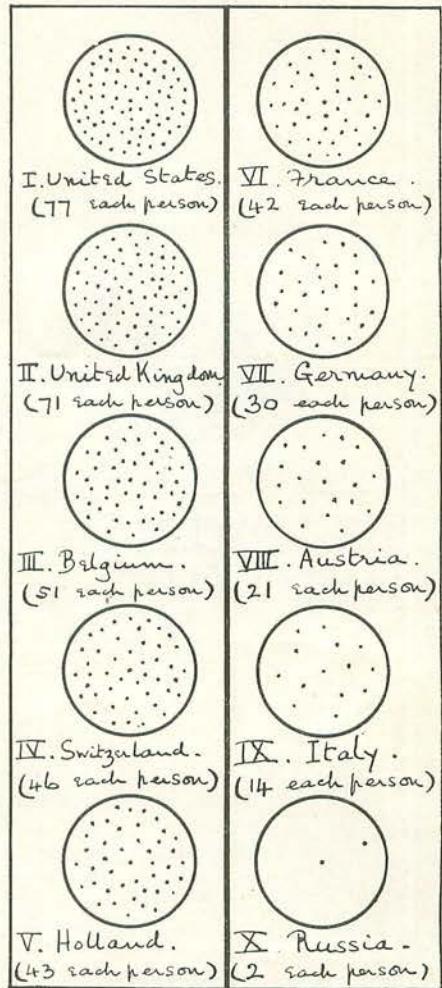
If we take the different items of postal correspondence, and consider the sporting chances that each item has of reaching its destination without being dealt with by the Post Office as a returned item, "the odds" are:—

A book-packet, circular, sample, or pattern	56 to 1	"on."
A post-card	243 to 1	"on."
A newspaper	260 to 1	"on."
A letter	289 to 1	"on."
A parcel	398 to 1	"on."

The just stated odds for each item form the sequence that might be expected: Book-packets, circulars, samples, and patterns, being the most often dealt with as returned, and parcels being the safest to reach their destination, of any non-registered postal items sent. The cost of this "returned" work is very heavy: in London alone the cost is over £18,000 a year to return undelivered letters and parcels to the senders.

I will end with some international com-

parisons of postal activity which are rather striking—the number of letters, etc., delivered per head of population. In No. 10, I show this comparison of international progress for ten States.



No. 10.—A comparative diagram which shows for each of the principal countries of the world the annual number of letters, post-cards, postal packets, etc., delivered per head of the respective populations of the ten countries named.

The two English-speaking countries are far and away ahead of all the others, and, as letter-writing means activity, and, to some extent, enterprise also, we shall not perhaps overstrain the logic of facts if we accept this result in No. 10 as an index of the great social and commercial activity of these two mighty English-speaking races.

[NOTE.—In my article *The Silver Greyhound*, last April, I omitted to say that I am indebted to the *Quarterly Review* for April, 1892, for the incident mentioned on page 405 of my article—see col. ii., lines 10 to 12 from bottom—and for many other anecdotes, etc., used to supplement those told to me personally by gentlemen visited during the preparation of *The Silver Greyhound*.—J. H. S.]