

It appears that at present every department sends its work to the Printer when and how it chooses, with, of necessity, an entire absence of any feeling of responsibility as to the cost of what is ordered. So loose a system must produce carelessness; and we were not surprised to learn that copy is sent to the printer in a very unprepared state, the authors, in too many instances, appearing to formulate ideas for the first time under the inspiration of the printer's type. The needless waste of money arising from this want of system is much to be regretted.

The value of the work turned out by the office is very considerable, although in some cases work done, of good value in itself, is rendered useless by sudden changes in policy, or, as alluded to above, from work being sent to the Printer in an unprepared state. The Land-Tax and Property-Tax forms, struck off in great quantities during the past year, have been a source of great loss, and afford a convenient instance of loss through changes of policy. As an example illustrating in some measure what we mean by loss incurred from want of system in the transmission of work to the Printer, we may instance a case mentioned to us, where an official in the Government service condemned many thousand copies of a printed form, for the sole reason that the paper was blue instead of white. In this case the work had to be done again and the paper first used had to be thrown aside.

The Printer has furnished us with a return, which we append to this report, showing the value of work done during the past four years for the several departments. We also append a return similarly furnished, showing the value of the binding done for a like period. An approximate estimate of the value of printing plant in use is also appended. Mr. G. S. Cooper has furnished us with an estimate of expenditure for the past four years, which will be found attached hereto. For the year 1879, for some reason, the expenditure for stationery is thrown into the printing vote, and thus swells the apparent expenditure by a sum of £15,000. It is gratifying to note that the value of work performed is steadily increasing in a greater proportion than the expenditure for a corresponding period.

The revenue received by the Stationery Office should be credited to the Printing Department, as also the revenue received by the Post Office for the Postal Guide, about £200, and by the Land Transfer Department for advertisements. The value of paper is not included in the return showing value of work done. We have not thought it necessary to obtain a return of the value of paper used during the last few years, considering it sufficient to show such value for the year ending 30th June, 1880. While the cost price of the paper used does not affect the calculation as to the profitableness or otherwise of the Printing Office, yet it should not be entirely overlooked that the stationery is bought at the lowest prices in the London market, and that private offices would charge a profit upon their purchasing price of all paper used in work performed by them.

In some cases, work of a clearly unprofitable nature, not rendered necessary by the circumstances of Government, is cast upon the office, which should, we think, be avoided as much as possible. We might instance a work upon Polynesian Mythology, just completed by order of the late Government, from which no adequate return is to be expected. We recommend that in this case the copies of the work struck off should be offered to the trade, so that the best return possible under the circumstances may be obtained.

We have submitted the Printer's estimate of values for work done to a searching analysis, bearing in mind what, in our opinion, similar work could be done for in private offices. We are not able to say, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that these values are excessive. In some cases where such values appear high, it must be borne in mind that in the case of all work done in the Government Printing Office a stricter economy as to space in making-up and paper used is followed than would be the case were the work done at contract prices. In the Government Office, also, a much closer attention to careful revision has to be paid in order to insure accuracy than is the custom in private offices.

In the estimate of value for the annual Appropriations and the Postal Guide, we have suggested to the Printer that some reduction in price ought to be made in consideration of the fact that the type is kept standing throughout the year. It will be seen in the suggestions which we have the honor to make, that we attach considerable importance to the returns of value for work done for the various departments being rendered as accurate as possible.