

damp, and over-crowded rooms will be replaced by more commodious and healthy premises. In the machine, press, cutting, and engine rooms gas lights have to be kept almost continually burning to enable the men to perform their duties, while the damp arising from the springs in the bank at the rear of the stationery store is a source of annoyance and damage to the stock.

The freedom hitherto experienced from accidents by fire is remarkable, considering the construction of the building, the number of fireplaces in use, and the various operations carried on within it which necessitate the constant use of gas. The risk incurred by allowing the building and plant to remain totally uninsured should not be lost sight of, and I trust that prudential considerations will lead to steps being taken to effect an insurance without delay. The valuable machinery and printing material comprised in the plants of the printing and lithographic offices, and the extensive stock of stationery and printing papers stored on the premises, would cost many thousands of pounds to replace; and I think the risk incurred is too great without being partially, at least, covered by insurance so long as the present premises are occupied.

THE STATIONERY DEPARTMENT.

The operations of the stationery store have been satisfactorily carried on during the past year. The number of requisitions received show an increase of 725, and the number of items dealt with 7,938, over those of last year, being 10,860 against 10,135, and 51,196 against 43,258, respectively. The receipts from the sale of Government publications amounted to £1,489 15s. 11d., or about £10 under the estimate. The quantity of waste paper exported shows a slight decrease, 36 tons having been shipped against 40½ tons last year. Arrangements have lately been made for disposing of most of the waste paper to the Otago paper-mills, instead of exporting it to England as hitherto.

The wrapping papers manufactured at Dunedin and Maitāwhiri mills are gradually being introduced, and will in time almost entirely supersede the imported article. I have likewise much pleasure in reporting favourably on the Dunedin manufactured parchment. The specimens submitted for inspection were of good even quality, free from spots, and quite equal to the parchment usually supplied under contract from England. When the manufacturers are prepared to turn out a regular supply, I propose to exclude the item from the annual order sent Home. The parchment is offered at a slight reduction on English contract prices, which is also a recommendation in its favour. It costs about £500 to meet the annual requirements of the Government for this article.

Messrs. Bowron Bros., of Christchurch, have also submitted some very fair samples of binding and upholstering leathers, which are offered at slightly below English prices. The overseer of the binding branch, who at my request reported on these leathers, remarks: "Nearly all the skins are cut away at the shoulder; and, consequently, when used for bookbinding, cut to waste. An average skin of roan or skiver should furnish six octavo covers, whereas most of these only cut five; hence a loss. This, I think, is the fault of bad butchering. In the operation of glazing, the skins are scratched, and in one instance cut. The colour and grain are good, and quite equal to the imported article, except the 'hard grain' samples, which are not suitable for bookbinding. The prices per dozen average about the same as English."

The supply of twine is still obtained from the manufactory of Mr. R. Gould, of Christchurch, and that item is entirely omitted in the Home order.

Reference was made in my report last year to the fact that a substantial saving could be effected by purchasing stationery direct from some respectable house, instead of submitting the same to competition through the Agent-General's Office in London. I have obtained price-lists, accompanied by samples, from three or four firms of high standing, and was struck with the favourable character they bore as compared with prices paid under contract. In a memorandum dated the 11th February last I submitted a schedule of these offers to the Government, and recommended the acceptance of one which appeared to be the most favourable, and under which, in the first division of the order—for printing and writing papers, &c.—the prices are about 18 per cent. lower than the present contract, or, in other words, would effect a saving of about £986 on the annual order.

The order, accompanied by the memorandum referred to, was sent to the Agent-General to be dealt with at his discretion; and on the 19th April he reported as follows: "With regard to Mr. Didsbury's suggestion that the first division of the stationery order should be obtained from Messrs. James Spicer and Sons, I think it will be well to give it a trial. Indeed, I am disposed to think that in the matter of stationery it will always be best to procure that part of your annual supplies by direct order, and without a contract. The system of tenders, whether by invitation to certain firms or by public notice, is not, in my opinion, suited to stationery; and, as Mr. Didsbury is not only satisfied with the samples submitted to him by Messrs. Spicer, but is of opinion that a saving of 18 per cent. over the present contract prices can be made, I see no reason why that firm should not get the order." The Agent-General has therefore decided to dispense with the usual inspection on that side, and retain 10 per cent. of the invoice price pending the receipt from the Government of a report certifying that the papers supplied are in accordance with samples submitted, and not injured by improper packing; and concludes his report by hoping that this shipment of stationery may prove successful in its results, as in that case it would favour the adoption of a system under which the expense and trouble of an inspection on that side could be entirely dispensed with, and the responsibility of executing orders to the satisfaction of the department in the colony could be thrown upon the contractors, who, of course, under such a system, must be firms of tried reputation.

The value of the last annual order sent to England for stationery, &c., was £8,685, being £2,283 less than for the preceding year.

I have, &c.,

GEORGE DIDSBURY,
Government Printer.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.