

PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

In my Statement of last session I showed that a decrease had been effected in expenditure on this class of works as compared with previous years; and I am happy to say that during last financial year a still further decrease in this class of expenditure has been effected. Thus, the expenditure for the year 1885-86 has been only £86,859, as against £117,361 for 1884-85, £164,376 for 1883-84, and £153,072 for 1882-83.

A very large number of buildings have been dealt with during the year to a greater or less extent, but most of the work has consisted of small additions and repairs chiefly to police-stations and courthouses in the out-districts, and the only works of sufficient magnitude to call for special mention are the prisons at Auckland and Mount Cook.

Plans have been completed for the Printing Office in Wellington, and alternative tenders in brick and timber respectively have been called for, but have not yet been dealt with pending the requisite amount being authorized by the House.

In the Estimates, which will shortly be laid before honourable members, I have included amongst amounts for which authority is asked a sum of £13,000 for a portion of this building proposed to be undertaken at present, but of this amount, if granted, only about £5,000 will probably be expended during the current financial year.

Competitive designs have also been obtained by the Government for Departmental Buildings in Auckland, and have been considered by the Engineer-in-Chief, who has selected the one which he considers the best for adoption. The sum of £12,000 has been provided for this building in the Estimates, and of this sum £2,000 would probably be required during the current year.

The other important buildings proposed to be undertaken during the current year are considerable additions to the Auckland and Sunnyside Lunatic Asylums, and some further additions in the shape of outbuildings, &c., to the Lunatic Asylum at Seacliff, all of which are reported to be absolutely necessary works in order that the asylums may be anything like adequate to present requirements. A sum of £2,000 has also been provided on the Estimates for a building on the Lunatic Asylum reserve at Porirua, of which about £1,000 would probably be expended during the year.

HARBOUR DEFENCES.

During the past twelve months considerable progress has been made in the scheme of defence. The works commenced in April last year, and which were designed to temporarily accommodate the guns already in the colony, have been in almost all cases carried to completion. At the same time they have been made of a thoroughly durable and substantial, instead of a temporary, nature.

Additions have been made where necessary to accommodate the guns now being constructed for the colony in England, and fresh works have also been added, so that, provided there is no further delay in shipping the guns, two-thirds of the number can be mounted in the next few months, and the batteries in which they will be mounted completed.

Submarine mining stations are being constructed in each of the four ports, and arrangements are also being made for lighting the harbours with very powerful electric lights. The contracts for the delivery of all these appliances are approaching completion, consequently within two or three months the colony will possess all the necessary equipment for providing a suitable submarine system of defence to supplement its other defence works.

Owing to the delay in supplying the guns, submarine mines, and other material, a sum of £72,833 out of the amount voted last year has remained unexpended. The total amount required to carry on the works during this year, including the sum above mentioned, will be £120,000.

The work was carried out last year principally by the Armed Constabulary, but the large amount of cheap labour which has become available since the commencement of the year has decided the Government to provide work for the unemployed on the batteries, and at the same time to make a considerable reduction in the Constabulary Force.