

efforts have only been able to cover a portion of the more urgent requirements, and the year closes with the knowledge that very numerous buildings throughout the colony cry aloud, but in vain, for maintenance, repairs, painting, and other works and improvements.

It is hoped that during the coming year this number will be reduced; but it must again be repeated that the position cannot be met without much more liberal funds than the customary vote affords, the average lowness of which is chiefly responsible for it.

The total value of the public buildings and offices of the colony, exclusive of railway-buildings and school-buildings, may be set down as about £2,250,000, of which £1,600,000 represents the value of buildings erected under the General Government, and £650,000 the value of those taken over from the Provincial Governments. Allowing for additions and extensions, and for the fact that the State is both landlord and tenant, and consequently has to pay for everything, including gas, water, furniture, &c., a reasonable figure at which charges for general annual maintenance can be put is 5 per cent. Applying this rate to the value above, £2,250,000, the result is £112,500 as the proper annual vote for maintenance. The usual vote is about £22,500, excluding gas and water and such services, or 1 per cent. These comparative figures speak for themselves. It is not to be wondered at that the public buildings and offices are, so many of them, in a condition in which they ought not to be. Any large private owner of house property who ventured to try and maintain the same at a rate of 1 per cent. on cost would find his tenants deserting him, and dilapidations staring him in the face in a very short time.

EXTERNAL PAINTING.

From a general point of view a comprehensive step in the direction of improving public buildings, in appearance at least, can be taken by painting them externally in a proper and substantial manner with a sufficient number of coats. Such an operation does not alone effect an improved appearance, but also materially helps towards the preservation and durability of the structure, and is, perhaps, in most cases more necessary on this ground than on that of appearance. This subject has received careful consideration, and a strictly-worded standard general specification has been prepared and printed which, amongst other essentials, provides for a preliminary thorough overhaul of exterior of the building, and of its outbuildings, fences, and other dependencies, and of windows, roofs, and gutters, &c., and for the subsequent substantial painting of them with the best class of material and labour.

Although it has not previously been the practice, except in the Railway Department, there appear to be no reasons against, and many strong reasons for, the establishment of uniform standard tints and colours for all Government buildings throughout the colony. Sample-sheets, exhibiting the colours decided upon, and giving also the nature and proportion of the ingredients used in producing them—with regard to which care has been taken to include those only which are in common painters' use, and are readily obtainable at all country stores, as well as city warehouses—are in preparation for issue to all post-offices in both Islands; and by the agency of the specification and these sample-sheets it is proposed to ensure that, whenever the authority is issued for the painting of any public building, wherever situated, the work shall be done in an unusually complete manner, so that gradually the offices of the Government throughout the colony may present a durable and uniform and easily distinguishable, but not unduly conspicuous, appearance and colour. This method, of course, will mean somewhat larger expenditure in each instance than is involved in the usual rather perfunctory ideas of repainting a building, but its intrinsic merits outbalance the additional cost. The diversity of colours in the public buildings at present, even in the same town, affords no indication of their purpose, and it will surely be an advantage to invest them with so usefully distinctive a character. There may be, with advantage, occasional exceptions to the rigid exercise of the standard specifications as far as regards a definite and uniform colour in the large cities, where the public offices are extensive and have special requirements in this respect, but in the country districts it will both facilitate work and establish a desirable system and results.

INTERNAL WORK.

As regards internal work, the nature and requirements of this are of so very varied a character, and present so many different phases, that it is not possible to deal with them in the same general spirit, but it is intended in this branch also to endeavour to arrive at a fair standard and degree of uniformity.

SANITATION.

There is another general subject of the first importance in regard to public buildings and offices which calls for serious attention, and that is their sanitary condition. A revolution—for it is nothing less—has taken place in civilised communities, and more especially in England, within quite recent years, and particularly the last two, upon this vital question. In the professional journals, architects have been even eager to condemn themselves, and to humbly acknowledge their past faults and those of their brethren, and ask remission for their sins, against sanitation. To-day there is advancing with great strides an enthusiastic movement throughout Great Britain to establish a rigid system of registration of plumbers, and to prevent any but those who have attained that registration after passing through a severe and trying examination from liberating their ignorance in endangering the health, if not the lives, of householders by work of their trade unguarded by proper or sufficient knowledge of sanitary requirements. The plumbers, like the architects, instead of defending themselves, come up in repentant crowds for examination and registration. The pages of the trade journals are covered with advertisements of sanitary appliances; the inventor is at work all over the field improving these or devising new ones; the sanitary inspector, who can only attain his rank by test examination, is the most important of all municipal officials—the medical officer of health of country and district officers; the Government, through the local Government Board, is legislating upon and exercising an unwontedly vigorous and earnest influence over sanitary matters; and the