

IMPORTANT BUILDINGS UNDER CONSIDERATION.

Amongst important new buildings that have been contemplated but not authorised, and in connection with which certain office-work has been done during the year, are those following:—

Parliamentary Library and Alterations to Parliament Buildings.—The designs for a new library for the Parliament Buildings were prepared and tenders called for in 1887. This was for a detached fireproof building; but it is thought the library might be accommodated within the present building, and drawings have been prepared to facilitate the planning of this, and of improvements to the buildings generally.

Archives Buildings.—The possible loss to the colony should any disaster by fire occur in the Government Buildings has long been recognised, and the accumulation of State papers, documents, and registers now severely taxes the accommodation of the safes, and crowds out many records, plans, and papers which should not be exposed to risk. Designs for two archives buildings, connected by flying galleries to the back wings of the Departmental offices, were prepared some years ago, the estimated cost being £15,000; but funds have not yet been made available. The necessity for some such repository for State papers will soon become quite undeniably urgent.

Lunatic Asylum.—The existing asylums cannot any longer accommodate the yearly influx of patients, and a design has for some time been in course of preparation for a new central asylum at Porirua, on a plan thoroughly thought out in England, approved by the Commissioners in Lunacy, and easily applicable to New Zealand conditions.

Museum.—The Museum is becoming too small for the collections gathered and work done within it, and additions have repeatedly been asked for by the Director.

Dunedin Gaol.—Complete plans for rearrangement and extension of Dunedin Gaol were some time ago prepared under the Prisons Department, and have lately been provisionally considered; but no instructions have been given as to seriously undertaking the work.

GOVERNMENT DOMAINS.

The vote for Government domains is somewhat generally supposed to be solely for the advantage of Wellington, and to be expended in keeping up the gardens of Government House, with an idea that the Botanical Gardens are included in some way or another. In reality, it covers expenditure over a much wider field. Amongst other items the gardens and grounds of Government House and Admiralty House, and the shrubberies and beds round the Supreme Court, Auckland; the gardens and plantations and fences of all the Ministerial residences, Parliament buildings, and Government House, Wellington; of the old Departmental Buildings, Christchurch; and the compounds of the many blocks of public offices, the enclosures of which comprise more or less extensive shrubberies, lawns, or flower-beds, are all upkept out of this vote. The wages of gardeners and occasional labourers, and cost of gravel, tools, manure, seeds, plants, shrubs, flowers, &c., employed in these operations are also defrayed out of it. It will be seen from this that there is a good deal of ground to be covered, and that, far from being extravagant, the vote of £900 is not sufficient to enable the enclosures of public buildings throughout the colony to be kept in that degree of neatness and order which should distinguish them.

SCHOOL-BUILDINGS.

The vote for school-buildings is only nominally under the Public Buildings Department. It is really administered by the Education Department, and particulars will be found in the Education Report. This office occasionally advises on technical or professional points which may arise between the Education Department and their architects; and, when required, provides drawings and specifications, performs occasional inspections, and advises with regard to Native schools. But the amount of this work is not very large.

DESIGN.

It may be said in general of the public buildings of the colony that, although so largely constructed in wood, they are of substantial and neat design, and well adapted for the requirements of the public service if maintained in condition and appearance to the point that is reasonable and desirable; which can only be done by the allotment of sufficient funds to the department intrusted with their control. As a rule they are constructed more solidly and strongly than would be required in the specifications of private architects, cut down to the lowest possible limit by proprietors; and the inspection and supervision under which they have been and are erected is certainly more continuous and rigid under the Government than in private practice. The colony therefore obtains good value for the money expended on its public buildings.

There are, of course, many buildings and offices as to which these remarks do not hold good. To this class belong rented or purchased tenements occupied for the public service, the need for which at the time of their acquisition may have been peremptory, and prohibitive of the delay required for new buildings; and some of the older offices, which, owing to the demands of other places, have continued to be utilised because they were available, when really they should have been replaced with others better designed and more suitable.

In the cities and large towns, where building in brick is made compulsory by the municipal by-laws, the Crown, although not legally bound thereby, almost invariably complies with advantage. This principle of building in more durable material than wood might well be given greater expansion: the additional cost is not heavier, even in country places, than is represented by the annual value of the more rapid depreciation of wooden buildings.

Naturally, owing to various circumstances, there is considerable diversity of design; but the rule of later years has been to adopt styles which are rather serviceable and useful than beautiful, and, while conserving such picturesque piles as the Parliamentary Buildings and the old Provincial Buildings, Christchurch, to do so more as memorials of the past than examples for the future.