

TRADE WITH SOUTH AFRICA.

It will be within the recollection of honourable members that during the recess Government called for tenders from steamship-owners for a service between the colony and South Africa. The results were not very encouraging, the amount of subsidy demanded being too high for the service offered; and the scale of freights was also unsatisfactory. This being the case, and seeing that the Shaw-Saville, New Zealand Shipping, and Tyser Line Companies had decided to establish a six-weekly service as an experiment, it was decided at the time to take no further action, but to await results. I regret to state there has been little or no improvement, and the condition of affairs is not to any extent improved. Small producers and traders have no chance whatever. Freights, as compared with those from Australia, are very high, and there is no regularity. We have therefore come to the conclusion that to be a success it is essential that a line of steamers trading with South Africa should not go beyond South African ports, but should return to New Zealand; and the authority of the House will be asked to provide the necessary subsidy to authorise a contract being entered into for a period of not less than three years, and to invite public offers therefor. As illustrating the present situation and its drawbacks, I may state that offers were invited for a large order of oats from the Imperial authorities, with the result that offers came in from three large traders only: owing to the conditions farmers or small traders could not tender, and the Government were unable to obtain the oats within the price limited, and the order was probably lost to the colony. Such a condition of affairs is not in the best interests of the farmers. It is impossible for the Government itself to take small parcels of grain from the producers, but an opportunity of obtaining suitable freights should be given them to conduct their business as they think best.

OUR BOYS AT THE FRONT: RETURNED TROOPERS.

It will be seen on reference to the Defence estimates that there is a large reduction this year as compared with the amount voted last year under the head of "Contingents." The cost of the First, Second, and Third Contingents was borne by the New Zealand Government, with the exception of the amount paid to them at Imperial rates whilst serving in South Africa. The Fourth and Fifth Contingents were on different terms, and were wholly paid by the Imperial Government. The First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Contingents have returned home. At the present time we have two contingents in South Africa—the Sixth and Seventh. They have taken the place of the Fourth and Fifth. It would be superfluous for me to say more than that our brave sons have worthily represented this colony, and have earned the commendation of each and every one of those commanding in South Africa. An attempt has been made, without just ground, to show that prompt payment has not been made to the returned troopers. There is no real foundation for this statement whatever. The Fourth and Fifth Contingents were practically Imperial soldiers. On leaving South Africa certain moneys were given to paymasters, and, on the arrival of the "Tagus" in Otago, we sent down our paymasters with about £800 for the officer commanding the Otago District, Colonel Webb, and since then other moneys have been forwarded, with instructions to pay the men on the officer commanding certifying that the amounts were due. At the present time Colonel Davies and his staff are making out accounts, and as fast as certificates are obtainable the moneys are paid. We have already advanced over £3,000. What has caused some confusion has been the fact that some of the men were not paid by the Imperial authorities before leaving South Africa. We are only trustees acting on behalf of the Imperial authorities; we cannot pay away moneys unless the certificates are forthcoming that the amounts are due. I have it on the authority of Captain Jackson, who was in charge of the D Squadron of the Fifth Contingent, that he brought money with him from South Africa, and that he has paid all his men. To show how unjust the allegations made are, I will give a case in point. A trooper got one of the members of the House to interest himself on his (the trooper's) behalf, and the trooper telegraphed to know when his pay would be