

extent during the year. Noticeable economies, however, have resulted in many ways through the development of modern methods, &c., and in addition there are other economies of an unseen character arising as a reflex of those methods, which will continue to prove beneficial. The principal influence that has exercised a negative effect, in so far as economy is concerned, has been the necessity for filling the vacancies caused by members of the Service volunteering for the Expeditionary Forces, and rendering necessary at short notice the employment of a temporary staff; besides which it was considered inadvisable to disturb the work of Departments too severely by conducting inquiries at a critical period.

This critical period, however, is one in which economy in method should be practised. A case may be instanced in which proposals originated by the Public Service Commissioners, and which met with the approval of Parliament, have not been taken advantage of.

In the Public Revenues Act, 1913, provision was made for dispensing with individual receipts for wages when payments are made in the presence of and certified to by two officers that they were present when the wages were paid. The proposal had the approval of the Audit and Treasury Departments, yet up to the present time no Department, so far as can be ascertained, has adopted the system. At ordinary times this saving would be large; but when it is considered that individual receipts continue to be taken for payments to soldiers, the cost of maintaining an adequate staff must be represented by a very large sum indeed, to say nothing of the loss of valuable time to military officers owing to the unnecessarily prolonged absences of their men on pay-days.

The Commissioners, on the general question of economy, after two years' experience, are now able to say with certainty that given prudent and careful administration, the development of initiative, a closer application to duty by officers and stricter insistence on their punctual attendance, the prevention of unnecessary travelling, the exercise of proper care in the use of stores and stationery (in which great waste occurs), the use to the fullest extent of mechanical devices, the introduction and extension of modern methods, and a judicious absorption of some of the smaller Departments, a saving of a sum not far short of £100,000 per annum could be brought about in the expenditure of the Public Service without curtailing services, impairing efficiency, or incurring the slightest risk; in fact, it is considered that many interests would be more completely safeguarded than at present, and the public better served.

CENTRALIZATION OF STATISTICS.

With a view to ascertain the possibility of effecting improvements and economy in the compilation of statistics prepared by the Departments, the Government Statistician, at the instance of the Commissioners, made an examination of the methods and practices followed in the principal Departments. This report has for some time past had the careful consideration of the Commissioners, who are convinced that the present method of preparing statistics should be recast. At present there is little regard to uniformity and the purposes for which the statistics are required.

Further, as the result of inspection it has come repeatedly under notice of the Commissioners that statistical information has been prepared at regular intervals simply because a request for information in that form had been received some years ago. Returns, of which no use whatever is made, are obtained with regularity, and needless labour entailed upon senior officers whose time could well be occupied in other directions.

In other cases it has been found that information on subjects of vital interest to the community, which ought to be immediately available on request, has not in some cases even been collected, while in other instances, where collected, the information was incomplete and of little value. It has been a source of embarrassment during the last few months that information concerning primary products was not readily available.

If the statistics of the Dominion are to be of greatest value, both from a local point of view and for purposes of comparison with other parts of the world, some radical changes in the present methods must be adopted. The current statistics