

EXTENT OF DUTIES.

While the duties of the Patent Office, which is attached to the Justice Department, are for the most part well defined by law it is not clear how far it is responsible for the carrying-out of certain provisions of the Act. In the case of the wrongful marking of goods, for instance, the Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks Act, 1908, embodying the Imperial Merchandise Act, defines and provides penalties for such offences, but no special provision is made for inspection and the detection of them, nor does the duty appear to be placed on any one of seeing that the necessary action is taken in the matter. Steps are taken under another Act to ensure the proper marking of food and drugs, but no adequate control appears to be at present exercised over the descriptions applied to other goods. It seems to be desirable to ensure as far as possible, among other things, that any mis-description of the manufacturer of the goods or the place where such goods have been made or manufactured should be detected and subjected to the penalty prescribed.

PROVISION FOR EXAMINATION, ETC.

The Act prescribes that the Office shall examine specifications in order to (1) ascertain that the invention is fairly described, (2) see that the invention described in the complete specification is substantially the same as that disclosed in the provisional specification; and also provides for the Office making such further investigation as it may see fit for the purpose of ascertaining whether the invention is new and otherwise a proper subject for letters patent. No special provision has yet been made for this work, for which an examining staff is employed in other countries, and the searching, &c., that can be done is regulated by the ability of the Office to carry it out.

LIBRARY.

At a time when accommodation generally is restricted and the need of economy so urgent it is perhaps somewhat inopportune to refer to the necessity for more space. The relation, however, that the Office should bear to the application of science to industry, which is receiving such general attention throughout the Empire at the present time, affords a strong reason for urging the necessity for increased room, not so much for staff purposes, but for the accommodation of the library, so as to enable the public to have the freest possible access to it. Knowledge of what has already been done is the basis of profitable invention, and unless the fullest opportunity is afforded inventors of becoming acquainted with the prior inventions on the subjects with which they are concerned our patent laws do not do much more than encourage them to waste their time and money in working over old ground. Printed specifications and other publications are supplied free to this country on the understanding that they are available for public inspection, and both in the premises formerly occupied and those now in use accommodation was provided for them. The growth of the Office has, however, necessitated the utilization of the room used as a library for ordinary staff purposes, and the books are now kept round the walls of the office, in the basement, or anywhere else room can be found for them.

It is satisfactory to know that there is a likelihood of something being shortly done in the direction of providing this much-needed accommodation.

PATENTS.

Applications, Specifications, and Revenue.

The number of applications received during 1916 was 1,261, being 62 less than in 1915, and the lowest number received in any year since 1901. Provisional specifications were left with 784 (873) applications, and complete with 479 (426), while 220 (254) complete specifications were lodged in respect of applications with which provisional specifications had been previously filed, making a total of 1,483 applications, as compared with 1,553 in 1915, and 1,773—the greatest number received in any one year—in 1913.

The total number of applications received up to the 31st December last was 38,319, and the number of patents then in force 4,471.

The amount received in patent fees was £5,841 18s., £439 5s. 5d. less than in the previous year. Sealing fees totalled £1,164, as compared with £1,322 in 1915. Renewal fees produced £3,138, £128 less than in the previous year. Renewal payments during the last few years were as follows:—

Year.	Under Act of 1908.				Under Act of 1911.		Total Amount.
	£5 (before End of Fourth Year).		£10 (before End of Seventh Year).		£3 (before End of Third Year).		
	Number payable.	Number paid.	Number payable.	Number paid.	Number payable.	Number paid.	
1912 ..	679	258	231	106	..	..	£ 2,350
1913 ..	735	265	234	100	..	..	2,325
1914 ..	844	293	239	113	..	34	2,697
1915 ..	805	274	258	120	396	232	3,266
1916 ..	390	136	265	124	771	406	3,138