

During the year apprentice-instructors were appointed in the four large workshops of the Locomotive Branch. These officers are in charge of classes of apprentices, who are given technical training in the Department's time for a number of hours each week in subjects pertaining to their various trades. It is expected that the knowledge imparted and the experience gained will be of great benefit to the apprentices, and will result in a larger proportion of highly efficient tradesmen being available than has been the case in the past, owing to the more limited opportunities for technical training formerly enjoyed by apprentices.

The Classification Committee mentioned in last year's report as being engaged in reviewing all First Division positions has now completed its report, and the recommendations of the committee as to the grading of the various positions are being given effect to.

As it is recognized that owing to the nature of his calling a railway employee is very liable to personal accident, the Department has embarked on a comprehensive scheme of ambulance training for all members who so desire. Classes have been formed all over the Dominion, the Department bearing the cost of equipment, examination fees, &c. A very large number of members have enrolled, and the training in this direction will be of material benefit both in case of personal accidents to their fellow-employees and also in any case of accidents to passengers, which are inseparable from railway working.

Two officers of the Department were sent to Australia to study the latest system of train-control, which it is proposed to put in operation shortly.

As foreshadowed in last year's report, the proposal to send officers abroad for training will be given effect to during the forthcoming year, and it is confidently anticipated that the experience gained by these officers will prove of great value to the Department.

During the year the death took place of Mr. A. K. Harris, General Superintendent of Transportation, and the Board desires to place on record its appreciation of his long and faithful service with the Department.

CORRESPONDENCE CLASSES.

The activities of the correspondence school at Wellington have been enlarged during the past year.

Courses of instruction in practical railway work have been prepared for officers in the Traffic, Stores, Locomotive, and Maintenance Branches.

The total number of students enrolled is 1,947, of whom 483 are members of Division II.

In addition to the correspondence classes, 134 cadets have during the year undergone a course of training in telegraphy and practical railway work.

A suitable private residence has been acquired in Wellington for use as a hostel for the accommodation of cadets during their period of training in the Training School. The charge for board is kept as low as possible, being based on actual cost including interest on the invested capital.

The hostel, which fills a long-felt want, is under the management of the Officer in Charge of the Training School, and gives promise of being a valuable adjunct to the Railway Service.

STORES BRANCH.

The amount expended in connection with the purchase of stores and material totalled £2,121,927 16s. 3d.

Payments were divided as follows :—

	£	s.	d.
To merchants, manufacturers, and others in New Zealand ..	755,854	18	7
Through High Commissioner, London	333,670	11	1
For material manufactured in railway workshops	169,176	16	10
For used material recovered from other branches	59,241	13	1
For coal and coke	755,186	5	7
Stationery	48,797	11	1
Total	£2,121,927	16	3

Purchases within the Empire represented an expenditure of £2,072,116 16s. 3d., and from other countries (mostly the United States of America) £49,811.

During the year contracts were let for workshops machinery and electrical equipment totalling £186,800, of which £152,940 were placed within the Empire, and £33,860 in other countries, chiefly the United States of America.

The quantities of New Zealand coals purchased during the year showed an increase of 102,400 tons over the previous year, and the quantities of oversea coal purchased during the same period showed a decrease of 84,913 tons.

The following table gives a comparison of the purchases during the last three years ending the 31st March, 1927 :—

Year.				New Zealand.	Imported.	Total.
				Tons.	Tons.	Tons.
1924-25	..	..	..	94,351	313,107	407,458
1925-26	..	..	..	85,393	278,076	363,469
1926-27	..	..	..	187,793	193,163	380,956