

## GENERAL CONTRACTS.

During the year the contract system has been very much extended, and now covers practically all stores in general use. This system was followed by the larger Departments prior to the war, each Department arranging its own contract. Now one contract covers all Departments, which means that Departments requiring only small quantities of any particular line are able to purchase on the best available terms. All quotations were obtained ex store in New Zealand, thus ensuring, other things being equal, that local manufacturers obtained the full benefit of the Customs tariff. Competition for the business was keen and prices satisfactory. The stores required were classified into sections and subsections, and contracts have been completed for the following lines:—

|                                            |                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Ironmongery.                               | Bricks, fireclay, earthenware pipes, fittings, &c. |
| Plumbers' and sanitary stores.             | Steam cocks and valves, gauge-glass, and packings. |
| Disinfectants.                             | Lamps, lanterns, gas fittings, &c.                 |
| Candles, soap, soda, and tallow.           | Crockery and glassware.                            |
| Locks, keys, lock-fittings, and furniture. | Glue and size.                                     |
| Chain.                                     | Polish—metal, floor, boot, &c.                     |
| Non-ferrous metal rods, sheets, tubes, &c. | Tinware.                                           |
| Brushware—painters' and general.           | Hose, canvas.                                      |
| Cooking-utensils, cutlery, and hollowware. | Coal.                                              |
| Wire.                                      | Motor-spirit.                                      |
| Paints, colours, oils, varnishes, &c.      | Motor-tires.                                       |
| Cordage.                                   | Lubricating-oils.                                  |
| Indiarubber goods.                         | Typewriters.                                       |
| Glass—sheet and plate, &c.                 |                                                    |

The schedules covered some thousands of items, and the tenders were dealt with "line by line"—that is to say, each item was treated as a separate tender. In the great majority of cases the stores are purchased to standard specifications; where this is impracticable, to standard samples. Great care was taken to ensure that the contract stores would be of suitable and good quality. The services of the Dominion Analyst were freely availed of to determine the physical properties and constituents of the stores offered. In addition, records of the results obtained by tests made under actual working-conditions were available for the guidance of the Board when tenders were being considered.

## SERVICE BY CONTRACTORS.

The service given by contractors during the year has been efficient and generally of a high standard. Despite the large number of contracts now operative, the complaints recorded have been few in number and rarely serious. In only two instances has it been necessary to take the extreme step of cancelling the contract, the cause in each instance being the failure of the contractor to maintain quality equal to the sample submitted with his tender. In such cases the contractor is always fully advised of the nature of the complaints regarding his product, and prior to final action being taken is given an opportunity of satisfying the Board that he can and will comply with the contract terms.

## PREFERENCE TO LOCAL AND BRITISH INDUSTRIES.

During the year the Board's policy of preference to local and British industries has been maintained. Exact figures are not available at the time of writing, but a close estimate indicates that less than 4 per cent. of the total expenditure went to foreign manufacturers.

## HIGH COMMISSIONER'S TRADE AND PRODUCE SECTION.

In addition to organized buying branches throughout the Dominion, the Board has at its service the Trade and Produce and Indents Section of the High Commissioner's Department in London. This section arranges the purchase, inspection, and shipment of stores and material required by Government Departments, and, being in close touch with the actual manufacturers, is in a position to buy on the best terms. As in New Zealand, tenders are invited for all requirements. Careful and competent inspection is carried out by the High Commissioner's Office. Where necessary—as, for example, in the manufacture of high-quality iron and steel products—the whole of the process from the first treatment of the raw materials until the finished article has passed the prescribed tests is subject to inspection by qualified technical experts. The section also arranges for special reports required by the Government, such as that on the carbonization and distillation of brown coal.

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