

GENERAL CONTRACTS.

During the year the contract system has been further extended. Each contract provides for the requirements of all Departments, which means that Departments using only small quantities of any particular line are able to purchase at the best wholesale rates. All quotations are obtained ex store in New Zealand, thus ensuring, other things being equal, the local manufacturers obtain the full benefit of the Customs tariff. Competition, with a few exceptions, has continued keen and prices satisfactory. The stores required are classified into sections and subsections, and contracts are in operation for the supply of the following lines :—

Ironmongery.
Plumbers' and sanitary stores.
Disinfectants.
Candles, soap, and soda.
Locks, keys, lock fittings and furniture.
Chain.
Non-ferrous metal rods, sheets, tubes, &c.
Brushware—painters' and general.
Cooking-utensils, cutlery, and hollowware.
Wire.
Paints, colours, oils, varnishes, &c.
Cordage.
Indiarubber goods.
Glass—sheet and plate, &c.
Bricks, fireclay, earthenware pipes, fittings, &c.

Steam cocks and valves, gauge-glass, and packings.
Lamps, lanterns, gas fittings, &c.
Glue and size.
Polish, metal, floor, boot, &c.
Tinware.
Hose, canvas.
Coal.
Motor-spirit.
Motor-tires.
Lubricating-oils.
Typewriters.
Pianos.
Iron and steel.
Electric lamps.

The schedules cover some thousands of items, and the tenders are dealt with "line-by-line"—that is to say, each item is 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. Every precaution is taken to ensure that contract stores are of suitable and good quality.

PRINTING-PAPER AND STATIONERY.

During the year attention has been devoted to the methods of buying the printing-paper, stationery, and office requisites required by all Departments. With the object of achieving greater efficiency a Printing and Stationery Committee has been constituted. The Government Printer has been appointed Chairman, and with him act representatives of the Post and Telegraph and Railways Departments, which two Departments are much the largest users of these classes of stores. The principal function of the committee is to ascertain and combine the requirements of all Departments and invite tenders for supplies, thus ensuring the benefits of bulk buying. In addition standardization of office requisites will be effected wherever it is practicable to do so.

PREFERENCE TO LOCAL AND BRITISH INDUSTRIES.

The policy of granting preference to local and British industries has been maintained and strengthened.

As a rule the tender schedules specify that the goods offered must be of British manufacture, and the exceptions to the rule are rare and negligible in value. New Zealand manufacturers receive a greater degree of preference than other British manufacturers, and as regards prices are in a very favourable position when competing with overseas suppliers. They must, of course, satisfy the Board as to the quality of the stores they offer and the service they can render. Textiles for uniforms, all brushware, soap, candles, glue and size, polishes (metal and floor), nearly all mixed paints and red oxide of iron, rope, twine, tinware, and many plumbers' sundries are purchased solely from New Zealand manufacturers.

TESTING STORES.

Whenever it is deemed necessary to do so, tenderers are required to submit samples of the goods they offer to supply, and prior to any tender being accepted all relative samples are chemically analysed and/or tested for their physical properties. The results are tabulated for the guidance of the Board when a decision is being made. Analyses and tests are also made at irregular intervals during the currency of the contract, thus ensuring that the goods delivered are always up to the specified standard. These tests are often of value to local manufacturers. When either the analytical or physical tests disclose a fault the manufacturer, if established within the Dominion, is confidentially informed, and full particulars made available for his guidance. This practice has undoubtedly led to the improvement of some local products.

CONTRACTOR'S SERVICE.

The service rendered by contractors during the year has been efficient and satisfactory. Where the number of items dealt with is so large complaints are inevitable. They have not been numerous, and the majority have on investigation proved to be due to causes over which the contractor had no control.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (500 copies), £2 5s.

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