

GOVERNMENT PURCHASING.

The present system of Government purchasing is a tremendous advance over the system of ten years ago. It is only within recent years that there has been such an official as Purchasing or Contract Agent in any of the Departments. Formerly the several branches were allowed to do their own buying, often by employees who were not competent to judge the quality or fairness of price of the material bought—having no standards of quality nor records of prevailing prices at different points. At present, however, there are six Departments who have Official Purchasing Agents, through whom all purchases are centralized. These men are held responsible for both quality and prices of all materials purchased for their Departments, and no invoices can be paid without their certificate to this effect. The remaining Departments who have no Purchasing Agent are sadly in need of an official to act in this capacity, and there can be no doubt whatever that this will come in time.

The system of purchasing supplies for the Government must be carried on in an essentially different manner to the routine generally adapted by the ordinary mercantile firm. One of the first qualities to be looked for in a Departmental Purchasing Agent is that of Tact. His official position as a Public servant demands that he treat the trade with uniform courtesy and fairness, bearing in mind that his branch of the service is the main connection between the trade and the Department, and on his manner of handling public business depends, to a great extent the good or bad repute of his Department. He must so systematise his work that should a question be made in public, or otherwise, his records must be complete in writing of all action taken from the time the demand for material

originated, until the material is delivered and paid for.

On whatever lines the present system is carried out it is far from ideal, inasmuch as each Department is keeping records each of which is practically a duplicate of the other, also purchases are being made by each in small quantities, thus necessitating the paying of a higher price than would be necessary if all Government Departmental requirements were purchased together. As an instance one Department will have a requirement for a certain description of paint, tenders are called for with the request that samples be submitted for test. After each sample has been put to either a practical test or to analyses the contract is awarded. At the same time one Department is going through this routine, five or six other Departments are going through exactly the same thing, paying a higher rate for their material purchased in small quantities as well as bearing the unnecessary expense of the extra testing or analyses.

It is rumored that the Government authorities are considering the establishment of a Purchasing Commission to do all the buying and to arrange all the contracts for all Departments and branches of the service. The greatest point in favour of such a step would be the probable abolition of patronage—or at least patronage would be extremely unlikely if the Commission is composed of men whose integrity is unquestioned. There are, however, a great many arguments against such a step, the necessary lack of close relationship which would exist between a Departments receiving and using branches and the Commission would be perhaps the greatest difficulty. There would be a possibility that the standardization of materials might be carried too far, and one Department be thus compelled to bear the expense of material of a higher quality than necessary for