

PUBLIC WORKS.

The sums expended under this head and chargeable to Consolidated Fund amounted last year to \$1,937,000, whilst on Capital Account there was spent \$515,000. Before noticing the different sub-heads of this expenditure, your Commissioners would draw attention to the fact that whilst the cost of the staff of the department charged to Civil Government amounted to \$42,872.46, in addition 164 people were more or less employed during the year in the department at Ottawa at a cost of \$106,700 charged to 65 different outside votes. The charges included in this large sum of \$106,700 vary from the salary of \$3,000 paid to the Superintendent of Telegraphs, to the payment of \$2.80 for copying 56 folios at 5 cents each. One temporary employee received \$1,011, and his special remuneration has been spread over 19 different votes. Passing from this, your Commissioners have now to point out that the repairs and construction of works under this department are virtually divided into two branches, viz.: that under the Chief Architect for the construction of public buildings, furniture, heating, repairs, &c., costing \$1,038,000, and that under the Chief Engineer, who administered an expenditure of \$562,000 for harbours and rivers. The remainder of the total outlay is spread over various services, including dredging \$153,000, slides and booms, roads and bridges, telegraph lines, experimental farms and miscellaneous items.

Public Buildings.—Reverting to the cost of public buildings, your Commissioners find that out of the \$1,038,000 before referred to \$479,000 were spent on repairs, furniture, heating, &c., the balance of \$560,000 having apparently been spent for purposes of construction. Of the sum of \$479,000 your Commissioners find that \$105,000 were paid to 316 labourers and artisans employed for various periods during the year in and upon the Ottawa buildings. The sums chargeable as repairs to these same buildings aggregate over \$137,000, a large portion of which is made up of sums paid for desks, chairs, cabinets, &c., obtained from various dealers at retail rates, and your Commissioners would suggest whether an arrangement could not be effected whereby desks, &c., of some specific patterns could not be supplied by wholesale houses at wholesale rates. With regard to the coal supplied for heating, your Commissioners notice that the price charged for some years past has been very little below the ordinary retail prices, and they further notice that the gas supplied has been charged at the same rates as paid by ordinary consumers, and they suggest for the consideration of the Government whether the system of electric lighting could not be extended throughout the whole buildings with advantage.

In connection with sums spent on construction of public buildings, your Commissioners, in calling attention to the system pursued of erecting buildings for post offices in comparatively small places, would point out that in such cases the cost of the building is not the only expense involved. The ordinary country postmaster under the present system is paid a comparatively small salary, which is generally augmented by the profits of store-keeping or similar means, and the Deputy Postmaster General stated in his evidence in answer to a question, that the department was beginning to suffer inconvenience arising out of the fact that the postmasters, in a number of places where public buildings are situated, have no means of adding to their salaries, as they cannot be allowed to carry on another business in a Government building, and accordingly pressure is brought to bear for increased allowance to enable them to live. In addition to the interest on the cost of the buildings, and the increased rate of remuneration to the postmasters, must also be mentioned the cost of a caretaker and the expense of fuel and light, and at the same time it must be remembered that these additional charges bring no corresponding increases in the revenue collected. Your Commissioners would submit this matter for the consideration of the Government, so that some system may be adopted limiting the erection of such structures to places only where the revenues collected warranted the outlay.

Your Commissioners would further call attention to the large proportion of the sums paid out under the head of Public Works for wages of labourers, and they would recommend that enquiry be made to ascertain whether a reduction could not be effected in this direction.