

## CONTRACTORS' ESTIMATES.

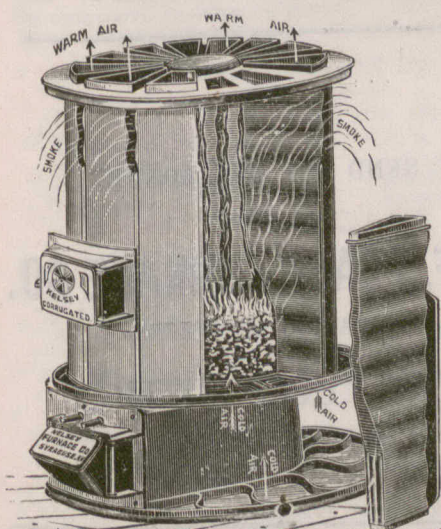
OMISSION of items in figuring contracts is probably the most common cause of disaster prevalent in building contracting, and many a good man who has intended well enough has been brought to grief because of having left out some things in his bill of estimates that ought to have been figured on. Every man who is desirous of succeeding as a contractor, should prepare a complete and minute schedule of all the items that could possibly be included in any manner of building construction. These should be classified and arranged under sub-heads, according to the different building industries or trades, and prices, where possible, should be added. By having a schedule as suggested, and consulting it closely when making up an estimate, the possibility of an omission would be reduced to a minimum.

Many careful contractors follow some such system as this in estimating, but the majority fail to see just where it would be to their interest to assist in educating other contractors to greater accuracy in figuring. It is forgotten that a contractor's ignorance or mistakes are a thousand times more to be feared in a bidding competition than accurate competency in making estimates. We know of a case in point. Bids were asked for an ordinary building. A half dozen bids were grouped closely together, varying only from \$3,500 to \$4,000. Then came in a bid for twenty-eight hundred dollars. In the language of the architect, "that fellow probably left off the roof, and forgot there were any floors in the building." More than one fellow has actually done such things.

If the architect could convince the owner of the advisability of rejecting such bids, when the possibility of an error is so very obvious, the demoralizing element

might be thus removed, but the owner is usually hot on the trail for a bargain. He can see nothing but the price on the paper, and he thinks if the contractor has blundered that that is not his affair, and it will give him an opportunity to get something for nothing, which is generally a great mistake on his part, for in nine cases out of ten the owner gets mulcted in one way or another before the work is completed. Even when slight omissions are made in figuring the result is very unsatisfactory, for special orders for extras must be added, and these are not usually obtainable at the same rates as is paid on the main contract, and all this leads to confusion and bickering. There should be a uniform system of figuring adopted by builders in every community. Its main object should be to avoid the omission of items in figuring, and to prevent such glaring discrepancies in contractors' estimates.

Tenders for work that are not based on correct quantities, or where omissions exist, do infinite harm in many ways, and this is one reason why men who have not the requisite knowledge, should refrain from tendering for work of which they have had no previous experience. In country places, and in our villages, there are very seldom works of such magnitude that the local builder cannot encompass, but he should not forget that even in buildings of similar size, and built of similar materials, the style of finish may cost anywhere from ten to fifty per cent. more or less, so that the method of estimating by "comparison" is no more reliable than estimating by cubing, unless the estimator has a thorough grasp of all the conditions surrounding the work. There are instances, however, when estimating by "comparison" may prove fairly correct, but they are few, and in any case where one building should be contracted for at the price that a former and similar building was completed for, we should prefer to figure up the cost of the new building, item by item. There never was, there never will be, any "royal road to estimating," and the successful contractor is the man who figures up everything, and figures them up correctly.



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