

Department in Wellington (the Department of Agriculture) we found in existence five separate recording and correspondence systems, one for each of the four main divisions into which the Department is divided, and the fifth for the Secretary's office; and each of these five systems was worked on entirely different lines from the others. The Record Clerk in one division knew little or nothing of the method adopted in another division, and would be quite lost for a while if he had to take it up. When a letter reaches the Head Office of the Department and requires to be attended to by one of the divisions, the process gone through is to acknowledge the letter from the Secretary's office, stating that it is being passed to a certain division for attention. It is then recorded on their files and sent on to the division which has to attend to it, together with a copy of the acknowledgment that has already been sent out. This process takes a day or so, and when the letter arrives at the division which has to attend to it the whole round of recording, filing, and replying is done over again. This Department would be much better if it had one recording and corresponding branch for the whole Department. It would mean economy, prevent delays, and give increased efficiency all round.

What is required is a uniform standardized system of recording, filing, and dealing with correspondence that should be adopted throughout the whole Government Service. We think a thoroughly qualified officer should be selected (and we may say that we have met in the Service men well fitted for the work), and he should be turned loose amongst the various recording and corresponding systems carried out by the Public Service throughout the Dominion, and after he has gone into them thoroughly he should devise a proper standard system for the whole Service. Such a system would require slight modifications for special Departments, but in the main it could be a standard system, so that if a Record Clerk were transferred from one Department to another he would understand the system of his new Department at once. We are sure that if this were done it would not only simplify the whole method of dealing with correspondence throughout the Service, and reduce largely the work of attending to it, but it would also enable the Board of Management to keep some check on the size of the different staffs employed on this work in the various Departments and branches. We may add that the system adopted by the Defence Department is well carried out, and appeared to us to have some admirable features.

CUSTODY OF RECORDS.

This is a matter that requires immediate attention, especially in connection with the main Government Buildings, where the bulk of the records are kept, and which are built entirely of wood. The more important records are, of course, stored in strong-rooms. There are two kinds of strong-rooms in the Buildings, those built in the early days when the Buildings were first constructed, which have walls 2 ft. thick, and those which have been built within the last ten years, having walls approximately 3 ft. thick. The evidence we obtained from those who should be qualified to know was almost unanimously to the effect that the old strong-rooms would be quite unfit to resist a fire, and some of the expert evidence which we received also condemned the new strong-rooms, inasmuch as they would be quite unable to withstand the intense heat that would be set up by the burning of such a large block of wooden buildings. These two classes of strong-rooms contain all the most important records of the Dominion, as well as all the securities of the State-guaranteed Advances Department, and it would be a serious national loss if they were destroyed. It seems to us that they should be stored in strong-rooms about which there is no possible doubt, and no risk whatever should be incurred of their destruction. In addition to the records stored in the strong-rooms, there are, stored merely in wooden cupboards, a large number of records which are not of such great value, but the loss of which would involve very serious inconvenience; and these must inevitably be burnt if the Buildings took fire.