

*Advertising.*—The restrictions introduced as a war-time measure have now been relaxed so far as Railway advertising is concerned, and the advertising will in future conform more to ordinary business practice. In connection with shows, race meetings, and other fixtures the Department will also supply the organizers with full information regarding train services, &c., in connection therewith, so that such information may be incorporated in their official programmes, advertisements, &c. A commencement has already been made in this direction, and the secretaries of shows, race meetings, &c., have responded admirably to the Department's wishes.

*Tours of Business Men.*—During the year the matter of inaugurating tours for business men was taken up by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce, and suitable arrangements made between that body and the Railway Department. The object of the tour was to give facilities for parties of business men to look round their own country, and meet other local bodies *en route* and discuss subjects of mutual interest with them. It was intended that an opportunity would be taken to inspect the various Government developmental schemes, including railway extensions, hydro-electric, roads, bridges, water-supplies, harbours, and wharves. Owing, however, to the season being too far advanced before the proposal was mooted, it was decided to hold the matter over until next spring.

*Exhibition Trains.*—The possibilities of running exhibition trains in the North and South Islands have been considered in collaboration with the Department of Industries and Commerce and representatives of the commercial community. The proposal is, briefly, that the exhibition train will consist of about ten carriages with the internal fittings removed and fitted up with stalls containing exhibits of the manufactures of the Dominion. The train will stop for a day and a night at various towns, and the exhibits will be thrown open to the public. Suitable cinematograph displays will be given, and the attendants in charge of the exhibits will give lectures on New Zealand products. It is proposed that the train will contain an exhibition of New-Zealand-manufactured goods, and if business men take up the scheme it will give residents of the Dominion an opportunity they would not otherwise have of obtaining a general survey of the high standard that has been attained in local industry.

*Dunedin Exhibition.*—Proposals are being formulated for catering for the travelling public in connection with the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, which opens in Dunedin in November next. It is hoped the facilities and conveniences that will be offered will induce the public to travel not once but many times to the Exhibition. The services of the members of the Commercial Branch will be available for assisting in organizing excursions if so desired. The Railway Department's court at the Exhibition will give the public an opportunity of becoming acquainted with various phases of railway-working.

*Railway Advertising Branch.*—The work done by the Railway Advertising Branch is increasing rapidly. The high standard of the work turned out in highway signs, hoardings, posters, and carriage-signs has won the approval of the business people, who have come to recognize that not only are the railways the best medium of advertising, but that the excellence of our productions gives the best value for their outlay. In the printing section work is increasing also, and all Railway work of which the machines are capable is being done on the premises.

*Public Bodies, Chambers of Commerce, &c.*—Very helpful assistance and information has been furnished by the various bodies, and their co-operation with us has been valuable. It is found in most instances that these bodies regard it as their duty to fully consider all requests before submitting them to the Department.

*Revenue.*—The activities of the Commercial Branch are to a great extent reflected in the returns of traffic for the year ended 31st March, 1925. Notwithstanding that the year commenced with a Railway strike and closed with a serious epidemic of infantile paralysis during the usual period of holiday traffic there has been an increase in revenue of £128,314. Nearly a million and a half less passengers travelled than during the previous year, and this must be very largely attributed to the epidemic.

*Staff.*—Before concluding its comments on the matters affecting the Commercial Branch the Board desires to say that it cannot too strongly commend the action of the staff generally in connection with the efforts to restore traffic. Members (First and Second Division alike) have responded admirably to the many calls made on them. They have recognized that their personal efforts are required to ensure the success of the many innovations, and they have acted accordingly. They are interpreting the various instructions with judgment, and treating our clients with understanding; these are very gratifying features of their co-operation. Many expressions of appreciation of the attitude of the staff are heard from the public.

*General.*—Summed up, the Commercial Branch has, by keeping in close and personal touch with all sections of the community, by enlisting the whole-hearted co-operation of the staff, and by the cultivation of a spirit of *esprit de corps*, succeeded in removing anomalies, instituting reforms, and in rendering more cheerful and efficient service. By judicious propaganda and the employment of practical methods, traffic which had been lost to the Department has been regained and the Railway trade fostered. The Commercial Branch has striven to put the Railways on a business footing, ever bearing in mind that the interests of the Department are closely correlated to those of the Dominion as a whole, and that if the Department prospers the people of New Zealand, to whom the railways belong, will reap the benefit.

*Central Booking-offices.*—A central booking-office has been opened at Christchurch. At the commencement the office was available for the booking of passengers and the receipt from consignors of parcels to be carried by rail. The activities of the office have since been further extended in the direction of receiving luggage from intending passengers for checking. The business that has been done at the office indicates that it is meeting a real want and that it is bringing more closely under the notice of the public the facilities which the Department has to offer.

The opening of a central booking-office at Auckland is also contemplated, and investigations are now in hand with a view to securing a suitable site.