

REPORT
ON THE
ORGANISATION
OF THE
PERMANENT CIVIL SERVICE,
TOGETHER WITH A
LETTER FROM THE REV. B. JOWETT.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

HOUSE OF COMMONS



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ON THE ORGANISATION OF THE PERMANENT CIVIL SERVICE.

WE now proceed to comply with that part of our instructions which states that, in connection with the inquiries which we were directed to make into each particular office, it is highly necessary that the conditions which are common to all the public establishments, such as the preliminary testimonials of character and bodily health to be required from candidates for public employment, the examination into their intellectual attainments, and the regulation of the promotions, should be carefully considered, so as to obtain full security for the public that none but qualified persons will be appointed, and that they will afterwards have every practicable inducement to the active discharge of their duties.

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It cannot be necessary to enter into any lengthened argument for the purpose of showing the high importance of the Permanent Civil Service of the country in the present day. The great and increasing accumulation of public business, and the consequent pressure upon the Government, need only to be alluded to; and the inconveniences which are inseparable from the frequent changes which take place in the responsible administration are matter of sufficient notoriety. It may safely be asserted that, as matters now stand, the Government of the country could not be carried on without the aid of an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of the Ministers who are directly responsible to the Crown and to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability, and experience to be able to advise, assist, and, to some extent, influence, those who are from time to time set over them.

*Importance of
the Permanent
Civil Service.*

That the Permanent Civil Service, with all its defects, essentially contributes to the proper discharge of the functions of Government, has been repeatedly admitted by those who have successively been responsible for the conduct of our affairs. All, however, who have had occasion to examine its constitution with care, have felt that its organisation is far from perfect, and that its amendment is deserving of the most careful attention.

*Its merits ge-
nerally so-
known.*

Its defects.

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It does not attract the ablest men.

Nature of its inducements.

It would be natural to expect that so important a profession would attract into its ranks the ablest and the most ambitious of the youth of the country; that the keenest emulation would prevail among those who had entered it; and that such as were endowed with superior qualifications would rapidly rise to distinction and public eminence. Such, however, is by no means the case. Admission into the Civil Service is indeed eagerly sought after, but it is for the unambitious, and the indolent or incapable, that it is chiefly desired. Those whose abilities do not warrant an expectation that they will succeed in the open professions, where they must encounter the competition of their contemporaries, and those whom indolence of temperament or physical infirmities unfit for active exertions, are placed in the Civil Service, where they may obtain an honourable livelihood with little labour, and with no risk; where their success depends upon their simply avoiding any flagrant misconduct, and attending with moderate regularity to routine duties; and in which they are secured against the ordinary consequences of old age, or failing health, by an arrangement which provides them with the means of supporting themselves after they have become incapacitated.

It may be noticed in particular that the comparative lightness of the work, and the certainty of provision in case of retirement owing to bodily incapacity, furnish strong inducements to the parents and friends of sickly youths to endeavour to obtain for them employment in the service of the Government; and the extent to which the public are consequently burdened, first with the salaries of officers who are obliged to absent themselves from their duties on account of ill health, and afterwards with their pensions when they retire on the same plea, would hardly be credited by those who have not had opportunities of observing the operation of the system.

It is not our intention to suggest that all public servants entered the employment of the Government with such views as these; but we apprehend that as regards a large proportion of them, these motives more or less influenced those who acted for them in the choice of a profession; while, on the other hand, there are probably very few who have chosen this line of life with a view to raising themselves to public eminence.

The result.

The result naturally is, that the public service suffers both in internal efficiency and in public estimation. The

character of the individuals influences the mass, and it is thus that we often hear complaints of official delays, official evasions of difficulty, and official indisposition to improvement.

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There are, however, numerous honourable exceptions to these observations, and the trustworthiness of the entire body is unimpeached. They are much better than we have any right to expect from the system under which they are appointed and promoted.

The peculiar difficulties under which the Permanent Civil Service labours, in obtaining a good supply of men, as compared with other professions, are partly natural and partly artificial. Difficulties of the Civil Service.

Its natural difficulties are such as these:—

Those who enter it generally do so at an early age, when there has been no opportunity of trying their fitness for business, or forming a trustworthy estimate of their characters and abilities. This to a great extent is the case in other professions also, but those professions supply a corrective which is wanting in the Civil Service, for as a man's success in them depends upon his obtaining and retaining the confidence of the public, and as he is exposed to a sharp competition on the part of his contemporaries, those only can maintain a fair position who possess the requisite amount of ability and industry for the proper discharge of their duties. The able and energetic rise to the top; the dull and inefficient remain at the bottom. In the public establishments, on the contrary, the general rule is that all rise together. After a young man has been once appointed, the public have him for life; and if he is idle or inefficient, provided he does not grossly misconduct himself, we must either submit to have a portion of the public business inefficiently and discredibly performed, or must place the incompetent person on the retired list, with a pension, for the rest of his life. The feeling of security which this state of things necessarily engenders tends to encourage indolence, and thereby to depress the character of the Service. Again, those who are admitted into it at an early age are thereby relieved from the necessity of those struggles which for the most part fall to the lot of such as enter upon the open professions; their course is one of quiet, and generally of secluded, performance of routine duties, and they consequently have but limited opportunities of acquiring that varied experience of life which is so important to the development of character. Youth of those who enter it. Absence of competition. Feeling of security. Limited experience of life.

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Effects of patronage on first appointments.

First appointment of junior clerks.

Routine character of their duties.

Promotion by seniority.

Superior appointments

To these natural difficulties may be added others arising from what may be called artificial causes.

The character of the young men admitted to the public service depends chiefly upon the discretion with which the heads of departments, and others who are entrusted with the distribution of patronage, exercise that privilege. In those cases in which the patronage of departments belongs to their chief for the time being, the appointments which it commonly falls to his lot to make are either those of junior clerks, to whom no very important duties are in the first instance to be assigned, or of persons who are to fill responsible and highly paid situations above the rank of the ordinary clerkships. In the first case, as the character and abilities of the new junior clerk will produce but little immediate effect upon the office, the chief of the department is naturally led to regard the selection as a matter of small moment, and will probably bestow the office upon the son or dependant of some one having personal or political claims upon him, or perhaps upon the son of some meritorious public servant, without instituting any very minute inquiry into the merits of the young man himself. It is true that in many offices some kind of examination is prescribed, and that in almost all the person appointed is in the first instance nominated on probation; but, as will presently be pointed out, neither of these tests are at present very efficacious. The young man thus admitted is commonly employed upon duties of the merest routine. Many of the first years of his service are spent in copying papers, and other work of an almost mechanical character. In two or three years he is as good as he can be at such an employment. The remainder of his official life can only exercise a depressing influence on him, and renders the work of the office distasteful to him. Unlike the pupil in a conveyancer's or special pleader's office, he not only begins with mechanical labour as an introduction to labour of a higher kind, but often also ends with it. In the meantime his salary is gradually advancing till he reaches, by seniority, the top of his class, and on the occurrence of a vacancy in the class above him he is promoted to fill it, as a matter of course, and without any regard to his previous services or his qualifications. Thus, while no pains have been taken in the first instance to secure a good man for the office, nothing has been done after the clerk's appointment to turn his abilities, whatever they may be, to the best account. The result naturally

is, that when the chief of the office has to make an appointment of visible and immediate importance to the efficiency of his department, he sometimes has difficulty in finding a clerk capable of filling it, and he is not unfrequently obliged to go out of the office, and to appoint some one of high standing in an open profession, or some one distinguished in other walks of life, over the heads of men who have been for many years in the public service. This is necessarily discouraging to the Civil Servants, and tends to strengthen in them the injurious conviction, that their success does not depend upon their own exertions, and that if they work hard, it will not advance them,—if they waste their time in idleness, it will not keep them back.

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given to strangers.

It is of course essential to the public service that men of the highest abilities should be selected for the highest posts; and it cannot be denied that there are a few situations in which such varied talent and such an amount of experience are required, that it is probable that under any circumstances it will occasionally be found necessary to fill them with persons who have distinguished themselves elsewhere than in the Civil Service. But the system of appointing strangers to the higher offices has been carried far beyond this. In several departments the clerks are regarded as having no claim whatever to what are called the staff appointments; and numerous instances might be given in which personal or political considerations have led to the appointment of men of very slender ability, and perhaps of questionable character, to situations of considerable emolument, over the heads of public servants of long standing and undoubted merit. Few public servants would feel the appointment of a barrister of known eminence and ability to some important position, like that of Under Secretary of State, as a slight, or a discouragement to themselves; but the case is otherwise when some one who has failed in other professions, and who has no recommendation but that of family or political interest, is appointed to a Librarianship, or some other such office, the duties of which would have been far better discharged by one who had been long in the department, and to whom the increased salary attached to the appointment would have been a fair reward for years of faithful service.

Staff appointments.

One more peculiarity in the Civil Service remains to be noticed. It is what may be called its fragmentary character.

Fragmentary character of the service.

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Unlike the Military and Naval, the Medical, and the Commissariat Services, and unlike even the Indian Civil Service, the public establishments of this country, though comprising a body of not less than 16,000 persons, are regulated upon the principle of merely departmental promotion. Each man's experience, interests, hopes, and fears are limited to the special branch of service in which he is himself engaged. The effect naturally is, to cramp the energies of the whole body, to encourage the growth of narrow views and departmental prejudices, to limit the acquisition of experience, and to repress and almost extinguish the spirit of emulation and competition; besides which, considerable inconvenience results from the want of facilities for transferring strength from an office where the work is becoming slack to one in which it is increasing, and from the consequent necessity of sometimes keeping up particular departments on a scale beyond their actual requirements.

How best to obtain proper men for the public service.

Having thus touched upon some of the difficulties with which the public service is beset, we come to the consideration of the problem, What is the best method of providing it with a supply of good men, and of making the most of them after they have been admitted?

The first question which here presents itself is, Whether it is better to train young men for the discharge of the duties which they will afterwards have to perform, or to take men of mature age, who have already acquired experience in other walks of life?

Better to train young men than take them from other professions.

Our opinion is, that, as a general rule, it is decidedly best to train young men. Without laying too much stress on the experience which a long official life necessarily brings with it, we cannot but regard it as an advantage of some importance. In many offices, moreover, it is found that the superior docility of young men renders it much easier to make valuable public servants of them, than of those more advanced in life. This may not be the case in the higher class of offices, but is unquestionably so in those where the work consists chiefly of account business. The maintenance of discipline is also easier under such circumstances, and regular habits may be enforced, which it would be difficult to impose for the first time upon older men. To these advantages must be added the important one of being able, by proper regulations, to secure the services of fit persons on much more economical terms. A young man who has not made trial of any other profession.

will be induced to enter that of the Civil Service by a much more moderate remuneration than would suffice to attract him a few years later from the pursuit of one in which he had overcome the first difficulties and begun to achieve success; while to attempt to fill the ranks of the Civil Service with those who had failed elsewhere, and were on that account willing to accept a moderate salary, would be simply to bring it into discredit. It cannot be doubted that, even in the absence of proper precautions for securing good appointments, it is more probable that a fair proportion of eligible men will be found among a number taken at their entrance into life, particularly if pains be bestowed upon them after their appointment, than among an equal number taken after some years of unsuccessful efforts to open another line for themselves. The temptation to jobbing, and the danger of decidedly improper appointments being made, is also considerably less in the case of the selection of young men than in that of persons more advanced in life.

The general principle, then, which we advocate is, that the public service should be carried on by the admission into its lower ranks of a carefully selected body of young men, who should be employed from the first upon work suited to their capacities and their education, and should be made constantly to feel that their promotion and future prospects depend entirely on the industry and ability with which they discharge their duties, that with average abilities and reasonable application they may look forward confidently to a certain provision for their lives, that with superior powers they may rationally hope to attain to the highest prizes in the Service, while if they prove decidedly incompetent, or incurably indolent, they must expect to be removed from it.

Principle on which the public service should be recruited.

The first step towards carrying this principle into effect should be, the establishment of a proper system of examination before appointment, which should be followed, as at present, by a short period of probation. The necessity of this has been so far admitted that some kind of examination does now take place before clerks are admitted into any of the following offices:—The Treasury, the Colonial Office, the Board of Trade, the Privy Council Office, the Poor Law Board, the War Office, the Ordnance Office, the Audit Office, the Paymaster General's Office, the Inland Revenue Office, the Emigration Office, and some others. These examinations vary in their cha-

Examination and probation.

Examinations already held.

Report. racter; in some offices more is required than in others, and in some cases what is required will be more rigidly enforced by one set of Examiners than by another.

Necessity for a central system, of examination.

The preliminary examination of candidates for civil employment, however, cannot be conducted in an effective and consistent manner throughout the Service, while it is left to each department to determine the nature of the examination and to examine the candidates. Some on whom the duty of examining devolves feel no interest in the subject; others, although disposed to do their best, are likely to entertain erroneous or imperfect conceptions of the standard of examination which ought to be fixed, and to be unable to apply it properly after it has been settled. The time and attention of the superior officers are fully occupied in disposing of the current business of their respective departments. To do this in a creditable manner will always be their primary object; and as the bearing of the subject under consideration upon the efficiency of their departments, although very important, is not of a direct or immediate kind, and is not likely to have much effect during their own tenure of office, what has to be done in reference to it will either be done by themselves in a hurried and imperfect manner, or will be left by them to their subordinate officers to be dealt with at their discretion. In a large department, in which numerous candidates have to be examined, want of time will prevent the superior officers from giving the subject the attention it deserves; and other matters, although of infinitely less real consequence, will have the precedence, because they press, and must be disposed of at the moment. Moreover, a large proportion of the persons appointed to a public department usually consists of young men in whose success the heads of the office or the principal clerks take a lively personal interest, owing to relationship or some other motive connected with their public or private position; and an independent opinion is hardly to be expected from an examiner who is acting under the orders of the one, and is in habits of daily intercourse with the other. A public officer ought not to be placed in a situation in which duty might require him to make an unfavourable report under such circumstances. Lastly, even supposing every other circumstance to be favourable, it is impossible that each department, acting for itself, can come to such just conclusions in regard to the nature of the preliminary examination, or can conduct it in such a fair, and effective,

and consistent manner, as would persons having the advantage of a general view of the subject as it affects every public department, and who should have been selected for the duty on account of their experience in matters of this description.

We accordingly recommend that a central Board should be constituted for conducting the examination of all candidates for the public service whom it may be thought right to subject to such a test. Such board should be composed of men holding an independent position, and capable of commanding general confidence; it should have at its head an officer of the rank of Privy Councillor; and should either include, or have the means of obtaining the assistance of, persons experienced in the education of the youth of the upper and middle classes, and persons who are familiar with the conduct of official business. It should be made imperative upon candidates for admission to any appointment, (except in certain special cases which will presently be noticed,) to pass a proper examination before this Board, and obtain from them a certificate of having done so.

We are of opinion that this examination should be in all cases a competing literary examination. This ought not to exclude careful previous inquiry into the age, health, and moral fitness of the candidates. Where character and bodily activity are chiefly required, more, comparatively, will depend upon the testimony of those to whom the candidate is well known; but the selection from among the candidates who have satisfied these preliminary inquiries should still be made by a competing examination. This may be so conducted as to test the intelligence, as well as the mere attainments of the candidates. We see no other mode by which (in the case of inferior no less than of superior offices) the double object can be attained of selecting the fittest person, and of avoiding the evils of patronage.

For the superior situations endeavours should be made to secure the services of the most promising young men of the day, by a competing examination on a level with the highest description of education in this country. In this class of situations there is no limit to the demands which may ultimately be made upon the abilities of those who, entering them simply as junior clerks, gradually rise to the highest posts in them. To obtain first-rate men, it is obvious that recourse should be had to com-

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Central Board
of Examiners
recommended.

Nature of the
examination
Competition
should be
introduced.

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petition. It would be impossible to impose upon each candidate for a clerkship, as a positive test of his fitness for the appointment, the necessity of passing an examination equal to that of first-class men at the universities ; but if, on the occurrence of a vacancy, it is found that a number of candidates present themselves, of whom some are capable of passing such an examination, there can be no reason why the public should not have the benefit of such men's services, in preference to those of persons of inferior merit. It may be repeated that no other means can be devised of avoiding the evils of patronage, which, if, in this case, less objectionable because of the comparatively small number of superior appointments, is much more objectionable in its effects on the public business of the country.

The examinations should be so conducted as to secure the special attainments required in particular branches of the public service.

Our proposal is not inconsistent with the appropriation of special talents or attainments to special departments of the public service. In the case, for example, of the subordinate grades from which collectors, surveyors, secretaries, junior commissioners, and other superior officers of the Revenue departments are usually selected, the nature of the examination should be adapted to the object of securing the scientific and other attainments which are so important to the efficiency of these great national establishments. In the same way provision might be made for securing the peculiar attainments to be required of persons to be employed in the Foreign Office, and in the diplomatic and consular services ; and in respect to offices of account, arithmetic and book-keeping will be principally insisted on.

The competition should not be for specific appointments.

It next becomes a question, whether the competition which we have proposed should take place on the occasion of each vacancy, or whether there should be periodical examinations. We are of opinion that it would be desirable to adopt the latter alternative. There are peculiar advantages in a system of periodical examinations. It economizes the number, and also the time of the examiners, who, instead of being overworked half the year, have their employment regularly distributed. It is also more convenient to the candidates themselves. We propose, therefore, that examinations should be held at stated times ; that an average having been taken of the number of situations of the class contended for, which periodically fall vacant, it should be announced, before the commencement of each trial, how many gentlemen were

Mode in which periodical examinations may be turned to account.

to be elected for admission into the public service on that occasion. The election having taken place, those who have succeeded should be distributed among the offices to which appointments are to be made, on the footing of probationers. The precise mode in which the successful candidates should be allotted to the several departments will require some consideration; but there will be no difficulty in it which may not easily be overcome. One obvious course of proceeding would be to send to each department a list of those who are selected for appointments, leaving to the head of each office to choose from among them as vacancies occur. Or it might be thought desirable that the Board of Examiners should recommend particular men to particular departments, according to their capacities, the head of the department in each case exercising his discretion in accepting them or not; or the choice might be given to the candidates themselves, some restriction being imposed to prevent any from choosing offices for which their peculiar education had not fitted them. If more have been elected (in order to maintain the average) than there is immediate demand for, they should be sent as supernumerary clerks to the offices in which the work happens to be the heaviest, unless there is any special service upon which they can with advantage be temporarily employed, or they might wait to take their turn. As vacancies occur from time to time before the next general examination, the supernumeraries should be appointed to them, and, if the whole have not been placed before that time, it will only be necessary to make the next batch the smaller. It would be desirable to retain the probation as at present, rendering it more efficient by precise reports of the conduct of the probationers.

Probation to be retained. —

In the examinations which we have recommended, we consider that the right of competing should be open to all persons, of a given age, subject only, as before suggested, to the necessity of their giving satisfactory references to persons able to speak to their moral conduct and character, and of producing medical certificates to the effect that they have no bodily infirmity likely to incapacitate them for the public service. It is only by throwing the examinations entirely open that we can hope to attract the proper class of candidates.

Competing examination to be open to all.

The choice of the subjects to be comprehended in the examination, as well as the mode in which the examina-

Subjects of the examination.

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—

tion should be conducted, so as to diminish the labour by eliminating such candidates as have obviously no chance of success, should, of course, be left to the Board of Examiners. We will therefore only indicate the advantage of making the subjects as numerous as may be found practicable, so as to secure the greatest and most varied amount of talent for the public service. Men whose services would be highly valuable to the country might easily be beaten by some who were their inferiors, if the examination were confined to a few subjects to which the latter had devoted their exclusive attention ; but if an extensive range were given, the superiority of the best would become evident. Besides, an opportunity would be afforded for judging in what kind of situation each is likely to be most useful ; and we need hardly allude to the important effect which would be produced upon the general education of the country, if proficiency in history, jurisprudence, political economy, modern languages, political and physical geography, and other matters, besides the staple of classics and mathematics, were made directly conducive to the success of young men desirous of entering into the public service. Such an inducement would probably do more to quicken the progress of our Universities, for instance, than any legislative measures that could be adopted.

It would probably be right to include in the examination some exercises directly bearing upon official business ; to require a précis to be made of a set of papers, or a letter to be written under given circumstances ; but the great advantage to be expected from the examinations would be, that they would elicit young men of general ability, which is a matter of more moment than their being possessed of any special acquirements. Men capable of distinguishing themselves in any of the subjects we have named, and thereby affording a proof that their education has not been lost upon them, would probably make themselves useful wherever they might be placed. We have before us the testimony of an eminent public officer, who was for many years connected with one of the chief departments of the State. He writes thus :—
 “ During my long acquaintance with the — Office, I
 “ remember four, and only four, instances of young men
 “ being introduced into it on the ground of well-ascertained fitness. I do not venture to mention any names,
 “ but I confidently affirm that the superiority of those
 “ four gentlemen to all the rest was such as to extert

“ the acknowledgment of it from their rivals, and to
“ win the high applause of each successive Secretary of
“ State.” *Report.*

We feel satisfied that by the measures which we have suggested for ascertaining the fitness of each person before his appointment, the most marked and important improvement may be introduced into the public service.

We must remark that there will be some cases in which examination will not be applicable. It would be absurd to impose this test upon persons selected to fill the appointments which have been previously spoken of (under the name of staff appointments (see p. 7), on account of their acknowledged eminence in one of the liberal professions, or in some other walk of life. We think, however, that the circumstances under which any person is appointed to such an office should always be placed on record by an official correspondence between the department to which he is assigned and the Board of Examiners; and we would also suggest for consideration the expediency of making an annual return to Parliament of the names of persons who may be so appointed.

Cases in which examination will not be applicable.

In dealing with the lower class of appointments, it will be necessary to make provision against the difficulty that if the examinations were all held at one place, a large proportion of those who might reasonably become candidates would be deterred from presenting themselves by the expense of the journey. If the scheme of examinations were more favourable to one locality than another, there can be no doubt that it would soon be set aside as unjust. We propose, therefore, that an arrangement should be made for holding examinations in various parts of the United Kingdom. A staff of assistant examiners might be formed; or the services of competent men might be engaged from time to time, or recourse might be had to the machinery of the Education Department of the Privy Council, for the purpose of holding district examinations at stated periods. Due notice should be given of the times and places at which such examinations are to be held, and all persons intending to compete should be required to send in their names by a certain day. The examinations should all take place on the same day,—the examination papers being sent to each locality by the same post, as is done in the examinations conducted by

The examination for the lower class of appointments should be local.

Report. the Education Department; and the papers, with the work of the candidates, being returned to the Central Board, which would cause them to be examined in the manner adopted at the Privy Council Office.* The required number should then be selected as probationers for the various appointments to be filled. The precise arrangements will, however, require much consideration, and we are of opinion that they cannot properly be determined otherwise than by experience, such as the proposed Board of Examiners, acting in concert with the Chiefs of the several Departments, would speedily acquire. We have satisfied ourselves, by communications with persons whose official position enables them to form sound opinions on the subject, that there will be no formidable difficulty in making the necessary arrangements to meet the vast majority of cases. Mr. John Wood, the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, has, as far as he was able, acted on these principles in the selection of Excisemen; and the experiment has succeeded in a manner which is highly encouraging to further attempts in the same direction.

The first proposal to subject public appointments to competition made by the Government of Lord John Russell in 1846.

A suggestion to bestow a proportion of the inferior appointments in the public service upon the Pupils in Schools connected with the Privy Council, was made by the Government of Lord John Russell in 1846, and a Minute was passed by the Education Committee upon the subject. No effect having been given to this Minute, it was repealed by the Education Committee under Lord Derby's Government, as being inoperative. It is obvious that no mere Minute of a Committee of Privy Council could give effect to such a scheme unless taken up as a part of the general policy of the Government.

Age of admission.

With regard to the age of admission, we are of opinion that in the case of candidates for superior situations the

* As the process adopted by the Education Department of the Privy Council may not be generally known, it is well to state that the papers of the candidates in all parts of the country are sent to the Central Office, where they are sorted according to subjects, and sent to different Inspectors, e.g., all the papers in Arithmetic to one, all in History to another, and so forth. Each Inspector assigns a number of marks to each paper, according to its merit. The papers are then returned; those of each candidate are put together again; the total number of marks which he has obtained is ascertained; and the candidates are finally arranged according to the result of the comparison.

limits should, as a general rule, be 19 and 25 ; in the case of candidates for inferior offices, 17 and 21. *Report.*

Having thus completed our suggestions as to the best mode of obtaining a proper supply of public servants in the first instance, we have next to offer some remarks on what appears to us to be the best mode of regulating their employment, and their promotion, so as to maintain the efficiency of the office at the highest point. *Best mode of maintaining the efficiency of an office.*

As we have already spoken of the importance of establishing a proper distinction between intellectual and mechanical labour, we need offer no further observations on this most vital point. The proper maintenance of such distinction depends more upon the discretion and management of the chiefs of offices and those immediately below them, than upon any general regulations that could be made by a central authority. We consider that a great step has been taken by the appointment in several offices of a class of supplementary clerks, receiving uniform salaries in each department, and capable therefore of being transferred, without inconvenience, from one to another, according as the demand for their services may be greater or less at any particular time ; and we expect that the moveable character of this class of officers, and the superior standard of examination which we have proposed for the higher class, will together have the effect of marking the distinction between them in a proper manner. *Separation of intellectual from mechanical labour.*

We are aware that a measure has sometimes been recommended, which, if adopted, would have the effect of establishing to a certain extent the separation which we have spoken of ;—we mean the creation of a general copying office, common to the whole or most of the departments in the neighbourhood of Whitehall, at which all of them might get their copying work done at a certain rate of payment by the piece. *Question of a copying office.*

We are, however, not prepared to recommend the adoption of such a measure. Copying is not the only work of a mechanical, or nearly mechanical, character which is performed in the public offices. A great deal of work of various kinds, such as registering, posting accounts, keeping diaries, and so forth, may very well be done by supplementary clerks of an inferior class under the direction of a small number of superiors. Such work, however, could not be sent out of the office ; and even with regard to copying, it would be found that several *Measure not recommended.*

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offices, which would be included in the proposed arrangement, would object to sending out a large proportion of their letters for that purpose, and that a great deal of copying is done in books which could not conveniently be parted with. Hence, it would be necessary, even were the copying office established, to maintain a class of supplementary clerks in each office in addition to it, or else the clerks would be employed nearly in the same manner as at present, that is to say, without a proper distinction between intellectual and mechanical duties.

Transfer of clerks from one department to another.

Another point to which the attention of the chiefs of offices should be called is, the importance of transferring the clerks from one department of the office to another, so that each may have an opportunity of making himself master of the whole of the business before he is called upon, in due course of time, to take a leading position. A proper system of transfers, according to fixed rules in each office, and insured by periodical reports to the chief, must exercise a beneficial influence both upon the clerks themselves, and upon the general efficiency of the establishment. Periodical reports upon the manner in which each clerk has been employed, should be made to the chief of the office.

Promotions, and increase of salary.

The advance of salaries in the public service is regulated upon a twofold principle. Each man, on being appointed to a clerkship in a particular class, receives for the first year, and in some cases for the first two or three years, what is called the minimum salary of that class, after which his salary increases, by a certain annual increment, to what is called the maximum salary; that is to say, if the minimum be 100*l.* a year, the maximum 300*l.*, and the annual increment 15*l.*, the clerk receives 100*l.* in the first year, 115*l.* in the second, 130*l.* in the third, and so on till his salary reaches 300*l.*, at which point it must remain stationary unless he is promoted to a higher class. He may, however, at any time, whether before or after attaining the maximum salary of one class, be promoted to a higher on the occurrence of a vacancy, if he is considered deserving of such promotion, and he will immediately thereupon begin to receive the minimum salary of the higher class, and to advance therefrom by annual increments, without reference to the amount he was previously receiving. The theory of the public service is, that the annual increase of salary from the minimum to the maximum of the class, is given as matter of course as the reward of service, and with no reference to the comparative merits

of the individuals; but that promotion from class to class is the reward of merit, or rather that it is regulated by a consideration of the public interests, and that those only are to be transferred from one class to a higher who have shown themselves capable of rendering valuable services in it. This salutary principle is, however, in practice often overlooked, and promotion from class to class, as well as the annual rise within the class, is more commonly regulated by seniority than by merit. The evil consequences of this are too obvious to require lengthened comment: it is, perhaps, more important to point out some of the difficulties which lie in the way of amendment.

If the opinions of the gentlemen engaged in the Civil Service could be taken on the subject of promotion, it would probably be found that a very large majority of them would object strongly to what is called promotion by merit. The reason they would assign would be, that promotion by (so called) merit would usually become promotion by favouritism. The effect of the system of departmental patronage has been to inspire the clerks in each office with a feeling of jealousy towards any one who is supposed to enjoy the especial favour of the chief of the department, or, still more, of the principal permanent officer in it. Constituted as our official system now is, men feel, and not unreasonably, that the recognition of their merits, even within their own departments, is extremely uncertain, and that there is no appeal to any public tribunal if injustice is done them there. Even in an open profession a consciousness of unrecognized merit will sometimes weigh a man down, though he has always the hope that the justice which is denied him in one quarter will be done to him in another. In an office, if a clerk fails to please his immediate superior, he is probably condemned to obscurity for his whole life. The Parliamentary chief who presides over the department for a few years, and who is overwhelmed with business, can, as a general rule, know nothing of the merits of individual clerks in the lower ranks of the office, except through the permanent officers at its head. Now, setting aside cases of actual favouritism, there must be many instances in which the chief permanent officers fail to perceive, and properly to bring into notice, the valuable qualities of those beneath them. A man may be timid and hesitating in manner, and on that account may be passed over as dull, in favour of some one by no means his superior in real

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Objections
entertained
against promc
tion by merit.

Report. — worth, but having more address in recommending himself ; or, on the other hand, the chief officer may have taken a particular fancy to some young man on his first entrance into the department, and may have thrown in his way special opportunities of advancing himself, which others have not had. All such cases are watched with jealousy even now, and if promotion by seniority were wholly set aside, without the introduction of proper safeguards, they would be the cause of still more discomfort.

Regulations
respecting it
proposed.

It ought, therefore, to be a leading object with the Government so to regulate promotion by merit as to provide every possible security against its abuse ; and for this purpose we are of opinion that the following system should be adopted : On the occurrence of a vacancy in any class, the Chief Clerk, or other immediately superior officer, should furnish the Secretary of the department with a return of the names of a certain number (in no case less than three) of the Clerks at the head of the class below, accompanied by a special report upon the services and qualifications of each. In case there should be in the lower ranks of the class any man of merit decidedly superior to those above him, his name, with a note of his qualifications, should be added. The Secretary should make what remarks he thinks proper upon the list, and should then submit it to the Head of the Office, who should select the person to be promoted, and should make out and sign a warrant for his promotion, setting forth the grounds upon which it is made. A book should be kept in every office, in which should be entered the name and age of each Clerk or other officer, at the time of his appointment, the dates of his examination, first appointment, and subsequent promotions, together with notes of all the reports made upon him from time to time, either on the occasions afforded by the occurrence of vacancies, or at other times, in consequence of some special instance either of good or ill behaviour. A reference to this book on the occasion of promoting to vacancies will enable the Head of the Department to form a tolerably correct estimate of the merits of each individual. It may be noticed that such a book is kept, with very good results, in the Commissariat Department.

Annual increase
of salary to be
given on certi-
ficates.

With regard to the annual increase of salary, we are of opinion that it would be right to require that each clerk, before becoming entitled to receive the addition, should produce a certificate from his immediate superior, that he

has been punctual in his attendance, and has given satisfaction in the discharge of his duties, during the preceding year. Such certificates are required from the heads of rooms in the Ordnance Department, and from each Inspector in the Audit Office. They would ordinarily be given as a matter of course, but the knowledge that they might be withheld would be useful in maintaining discipline, and in enforcing regularity of attendance, which in some cases is a matter of difficulty, the only penalties which can at present be imposed for irregularity being those of suspension and dismissal, which are too severe to be applied unless in aggravated instances.

The subject of pensions and retired allowances is one intimately connected with the matters treated of in this paper. We are aware that it is receiving separate consideration from the Government, and we therefore abstain from entering upon it so fully as we should otherwise have done. We desire, however, to call attention to the importance of establishing an uniform and consistent system of regulating the amounts to be granted to superannuated public servants, with reference to the character of their service. Whatever decision may be taken as to the maintenance of the superannuation deductions, or of the present scale of retired allowances, we presume that the course now followed in the Treasury, of apportioning the pension of each individual with some reference to the character he has borne and the abilities he has displayed, will still be pursued. As, however, the Superannuation Committee in the Treasury changes with every change in the Administration, and as no systematic record of the merits of public servants is kept at the Offices to which they are attached, the application of the principle, which has been rightly laid down, is attended with much difficulty, and with an amount of uncertainty which deprives it of much of its value.

Superannuation allowances, good service pensions, and honorary distinctions.

The want of encouragement in the form of good service pensions and honorary distinctions, is also severely felt in the ordinary Civil branch of the public service, which is the only one in which these classes of reward are not dispensed.

It is obvious that the proposed Board of Examiners might be turned to good account in supplying these defects. Duplicates of the books which we have recommended to be kept in the separate Offices should be transmitted to the Department of Examination, which should also be furnished with all information relating to promotions and

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other matters bearing on the services of the officers in each department. No grant of superannuation allowance or good service pension should be made by the Treasury without a previous report from the Board of Examiners embodying this information.

By this system, not only would greater certainty be introduced into the superannuation business, but a degree of consistency would be given to the whole scheme of promotion by merit, which would, we think, ensure its success. It would also have this further advantage, that it would serve to direct the attention of the Government to the merits of individual clerks,—now seldom known beyond the sphere of their own offices,—and would thus enable it to select deserving persons from the ranks of the public service to fill important situations which might become vacant. It is to be hoped that in future, if any staff appointment falls vacant in an office in which there is a deserving clerk well qualified to fill it, his claims will not be passed over in favour of a stranger; but this principle might advantageously be carried further, by filling the appointment with a person from another office, if there is no one in the department itself qualified to take it; and there might often be occasions in which the advantages of encouraging public servants, and at the same time introducing fresh blood into an office, might be combined; as, for instance, by filling a staff appointment in office A by the transfer to it of a meritorious staff officer from office B, and then supplying the vacancy caused in office B by the appointment to it of one of the most deserving clerks in office A. The extent to which this principle could be carried into effect must, of course, depend upon circumstances, and upon a careful observation of its working; but we do not see why it should not be tried.

Summary of
our recommen-
dations.

Upon a review of the recommendations contained in this paper it will be seen that the objects which we have principally in view are these:—

1. To provide, by a proper system of examination, for the supply of the public service with a thoroughly efficient class of men.

2. To encourage industry and foster merit, by teaching all public servants to look forward to promotion according to their deserts, and to expect the highest prizes in the service if they can qualify themselves for them.

3. To mitigate the evils which result from the fragmen-

tary character of the Service, and to introduce into it some elements of unity, by placing the first appointments upon an uniform footing, opening the way to the promotion of public officers to staff appointments in other departments than their own, and introducing into the lower ranks a body of men (the supplementary clerks) whose services may be made available at any time in any office whatever.

It remains for us to express our conviction that if any change of the importance of those which we have recommended is to be carried into effect, it can only be successfully done through the medium of an Act of Parliament. The existing system is supported by long usage and powerful interests; and were any Government to introduce material alterations into it, in consequence of their own convictions, without taking the precaution to give those alterations the force of law, it is almost certain that they would be imperceptibly, or perhaps avowedly, abandoned by their successors, if they were not even allowed to fall into disuse by the very Government which had originated them. A few clauses would accomplish all that is proposed in this paper, and it is our firm belief that a candid statement of the grounds of the measure would insure its success and popularity in the country, and would remove many misconceptions which are now prejudicial to the public service.

Necessity for
an Act of Par-
liament.

November 23, 1853.

STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE.

C. E. TREVELYAN.
