

8 June, 1911.]

INTERCHANGE OF CIVIL SERVANTS.

[5th Day.]

Mr. BATCHELOR: You mean an exchange of officers in the Public Services?

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Yes, the Public Services.

The CHAIRMAN: I entirely sympathise with Sir Joseph Ward's wish—I will not use the word “interchange”—for greater knowledge of administration work at Home by the Dominions, and in the Dominions by our own services. There are very great difficulties in the way of making a formal interchange—difficulties as to pension, salary, status, and other things would arise—but I think we may be able to overcome the occasional ignorance of one another's affairs by doing something not so formal as an actual interchange. For instance, if there were an interchange between the Post Office in Australia and the Post Office in London, there would be likely to be little gain to either. We, with a very large population greatly concentrated, have necessarily a totally different postal service to that of Australia. We can learn probably nothing from Australia, nor could Australia learn anything useful from us in such a matter as that. But I should be very happy to arrange—I have authority for saying that I could arrange—with the Board of Trade and other Departments of the British Government that, if representatives were sent over from the Dominions and were attached for a time to your High Commissioners' Offices, they could be given full facilities to be taken into any Department they wished to see, and given two or three months' work in one or even more Departments. I would make individual arrangements, which I think would be far better than allocating an individual, say, for a whole year to a single Department, which might not be of the slightest use to him on his return.

Then there is the question of what we should do ourselves in keeping our staff better informed as to life and policy in the Dominions. It is not now a question of the administration work in the Dominions for guiding better the Secretary of State at Home. What comes before him in regard to the Dominions are, as a rule, questions of high policy, and not of internal administration, which is your own affair. I have made special efforts—and my predecessors have too—in order that the staff of the Colonial Office shall by degrees acquire greater knowledge at first hand of the general work of government in the Dominions. Mr. Malcolm, who belongs to the staff of the Colonial Office, is now serving with Lord Grey in Canada, and he was previously with Lord Selborne in South Africa. He will return to the Colonial Office with an intimate knowledge of the system of government in both those Dominions. Mr. Griffin, a member of the Colonial Office, is now serving with Lord Gladstone in South Africa, specially for the work of the Protectorates. I am just releasing Mr. Vernon, of the Colonial Office, to go with Lord Denman to Australia as his secretary. All this is primarily or partly for the assistance of the persons to whom they are attached, but largely in order that we shall have the value of their knowledge when they return to the Colonial Office after having done two or three years' service, or whatever it may be.

I need only further allude to the visit paid by Mr. Just to Canada, and previously to South Africa, and the visit paid by Sir Charles Lucas to Australia and New Zealand. Those are all examples of the way in which we are endeavouring to keep permanent civil servants here in touch with the actual work of the Dominions, and to get detailed knowledge of general policy, though not of actual administration. If there are any other ways which can be suggested in which we can enlarge that knowledge, and especially any method by which we can afford facilities to any of your public servants or permanent officials to acquire knowledge of any of our Departments here, I shall be delighted to carry them out. I merely suggest to you that the best method of doing it is not to try and effect an exchange, which would be difficult, but rather to attach a man to your High Commissioner's Office, and let me secure facilities for his entrance to any Department.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: The idea involved in the proposal of Sir Joseph Ward seems to me a most excellent one, and, for my part, I absolutely approve of it. It might perhaps be improved in the manner in which it should be applied, but as far as the idea itself is concerned I heartily agree with Sir Joseph Ward.