

28. It would hardly follow that it would be our business to take up a thing like that?—But you know the institute did bring the matter under the notice of the Minister, and the Minister made a certain promise which you say he never carried out. Well, the instruction was in operation at the time, and the promise of the Minister was carried out, and attention was pointedly directed to the instruction issued in 1903. As we heard nothing further from the institute we concluded naturally that the instruction was being carried out and that everybody had knowledge of it.

29. Well, in regard to the system, Mr. McVilly, is not the difficulty this, that there are so many different officers reporting on other officers that you have variable standards of efficiency; one man has a very high standard and will hardly recommend any one for promotion, and another man has a very low standard and will recommend any one?—I have just explained that the object of sending round the head of the branch every year—I think that practice has been in force for about nine or ten years—is to insure a common standard. At the outset what you say was perfectly correct. Before we introduced the system of sending the head of the branch round we knew there were different standards, and we were constantly taking the matter up, but what we do now is that whenever a man is transferred, if he works under half a dozen superiors, all the reports are taken into consideration. I do not see what more can be done to bring in a common or uniform standard: it does not matter what steps you take, I do not see how you are going to arrive at a common standard of efficiency where you have got a large number of officers reporting on the men in any other way than by sending some one round who goes into the matter personally with them on the spot, and that is done every year. The standard at the present time ought to be on an absolutely uniform base, and I understand it is so, because I have raised this question myself with the heads of the branches, and they say every man on every section is reviewed as far as they are concerned on the same common ground, and they lay down in regard to each man in charge of the staff they are discussing that the requirements are so-and-so, and, in view of that, so-and-so. If one man does not agree, they take the requirements seriatim. They say, What is his conduct?—Satisfactory. What is his work?—Satisfactory. What is something else?—That is satisfactory or unsatisfactory; and the whole thing is gone through in that way categorically in respect of each of the men under review and with the men who are responsible and immediately in control.

30. But if there is a common standard, I suppose it is not suggested that every officer neglects his duty when reporting on the staff?—I am not suggesting that.

31. You read out some letters of officers neglecting their duty, but you do not mean to suggest that some would not be carrying out their duty to the satisfaction of the Head Office?—The cases I am dealing with are specific cases we have taken up, and they are only a drop in the bucket. They bear but a small proportion to the number of cases that do occur and are dealt with.

32. But I suppose there are some officers who do conscientiously report on the staff?—Yes; you put a general statement and I am dealing with particular cases. We know we have got conscientious officers in the Department who do the square thing. We know that others are too much inclined to be easy-oozy and not look for too high an efficiency. I think myself, when a man is not recommended, or when an officer is not satisfied with a man, that, instead of letting him slip, they should pull him up sharp and simply say that it does not suit them, and they would find that he would be a very much better man and the officers' duty would be rendered very much easier. The trouble is that the majority do not like to do the unpleasant thing. It is very much like having to go and kick up a row with a man on a private matter.

33. Would not that state of affairs exist while such a system is in operation? You will always get some men who do their duty exceedingly well, while you have other men who vary in other ways; you will get infinite varieties, and the more men you have the more different reports you will get?—As long as the world has been created there have been different varieties of men, and so long as that continues you will have different varieties of reports. That is where human equation comes in.

34. Would not the system be improved if the number of officers reporting was narrowed down?—I do not think so. I am speaking with some experience on the subject. If you narrow down the system, then eventually you have got to appoint a man to go round and take charge of every man from time to time during the year in order that he may personally acquaint himself with the individual qualifications of the various men. Now, how is a system of that kind going to work? You could not do it—it is impracticable.

35. Of course we might be able to suggest something in that direction if requested, but it is hardly worth while going into that here?—I should like to say that the Department is open to receive suggestions that will improve the service, and if the institute or anybody else can make a suggestion or suggest a system which is going to help towards greater efficiency, which is going to wipe out any of the troubles which you say now exist, and which I do not see we are going to overcome, then you can rely on it that the Department is quite prepared to give it honest consideration, and, if the scheme is found practicable, to adopt it; provided, of course, that the cost is not going to be so great as to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

36. Do you not think, on the whole, that the system is not satisfactory?—No, it is not the system—it is the way it is carried out.

37. Seeing that all these irregularities can occur and will occur for all time, do you not think it is an unsatisfactory system?—No matter what system you have, the human equation comes in, and as long as the world is the world and different people are on it you will have these irregularities and troubles, because different men take diametrically opposite views of every subject under the sun.

38. Well, in the cases quoted the other day of Nos. 3, 11, 9, and 15, the four officers on D.—3, 1906. In 1907 Nos. 11 and 15 had gone ahead of Nos. 3 and 9; then again in 1908 the two men who were superseded were again put ahead of the two men who had previously passed them. Does