

The remarks made by Sir Theodore Morison, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., C.B.E., Vice-Chancellor University of Durham, speaking on the subject of Civil Service traditions, are also of interest in this connection :—

To be strong and efficient a Service, whether military or civil, must have great traditions, and by traditions I mean simply this : that conceptions of the duty of a Civil servant and of the way of carrying out that duty must be handed down from one office-bearer to another. These conceptions will necessarily increase in volume and complexity with the sæcular experience of affairs, and it is important that the new traditions should be added to the old and the entire corpus be transmitted intact from one generation to another. . . . The Civil Service in Whitehall grew up in the course of the nineteenth century, and though still less than a century old it is firmly established in the esteem and confidence of the country. . . . The first observation that I am tempted to make is that the Civil Service in Whitehall has attained its great position by severely restricting its ambitions ; it has defined the place of the Civil Service in the Government of the country, and it has scrupulously refrained from overstepping those limits ; I say that the Civil Service has defined the limits of its legitimate authority because it has accepted those limits whole-heartedly and made them part of the Civil Service tradition. Perhaps it would historically be more accurate to say that the jealousy of Parliament imposed from the first very strict limits upon the ingercence of the Civil Service ; but the historical point is now of no importance, because both the Civil servants and their parliamentary chiefs accept the obligations which follow from that limitation.

The theory and practice of parliamentary government is that decisions are taken by Ministers and that the Civil servants supply the Minister with the information necessary for coming to a right decision.

From this general proposition there follow certain consequences which have become maxims in Whitehall :—

(1) The Civil servant must place before his chief the arguments on both sides of the case, fully and fairly. Whatever his own sympathies may be, he must put before his chief all the arguments which may be urged against the view which is taken in the office.

(2) When the decision is once taken he must loyally carry out the policy chosen, even though he may have preferred a different one.

(3) The Civil Service is responsible for continuity of policy, or such continuity as is possible under our system of party government. . . .

(4) The Civil servant must observe absolute silence and discretion as to what occurs in the office. The decision when once taken is that of the Minister or of Cabinet, and it is contrary to tradition for a Civil servant to take credit for any measure accepted by Parliament, though he may in fact have been the author of it. Self-effacement, therefore, at least in the eye of the public, is one of the conditions required of the Civil servant, and there follows from this effacement a correlative obligation upon the Minister. As the decision is his, the Minister must take full responsibility for it. If the decision happens to be wrong, he must not shield himself by blaming his officials, and it is expected that he should defend his officials if they are attacked in public ; if he cannot defend them he must resign. Sir Austen Chamberlain has shown a noble sensitiveness upon this point of honour. During the war he was Secretary of State for India, and, therefore, had a titular responsibility for the campaign in Mesopotamia. Sir Austen could not be, and was not by any one expected to be, cognizant of all the details of the administration ; but when a public inquiry had revealed the insufficiency of the military hospitals in Mesopotamia he resigned because he was no longer able to defend his subordinates.

. . . Upon the permanent officials there rests, therefore, the responsibility of—

- (a) Knowing all the relevant facts ;
- (b) Stating all the relevant facts clearly and fearlessly ;
- (c) Marshalling the arguments for both sides without prejudice and without prepossession.

The duties which I have attempted to indicate are certainly too high for ill-educated men, but they are not beyond the reach of men who have received a good education. You can make reasonably sure of securing the qualities I have postulated if you recruit educated men. . . . It was by insisting on a high standard of education that these qualities were obtained in Whitehall. The greatness of our national Civil Service dates from the day on which a competitive examination was made the portal for admission. There are many theoretical arguments against recruitment by competitive examination ; a written examination, it is said, is no test of character, and character in an administrator is at least as important as intellect. These hypothetical objections are of little weight when balanced against the testimony of experience. Considered objectively, as a mere matter of history, competitive examinations have given results immeasurably superior to any other form of recruitment for the public service.

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Experience shows that to bring together for any service a good field of candidates two conditions must be satisfied :—

- (1) The competition must take place every year at a known date.
- (2) The competition must coincide with the termination of a stage in the scholastic career. Roughly speaking, this means in England that the ages for admission to the different services or employments should be so fixed as to attract candidates just after they have passed either (a) the School Leaving Certificate Examination, (b) the Higher School Certificate Examination, or (c) have taken their degree at a university.