

Of course, the fact that the Minister of the day must, under our system of government, be held responsible for all appointments to the Public Service, cannot be ignored. I am not a politician, and may perhaps be pardoned if I suggest that the Minister who inaugurates such a system as will secure the greatest degree of efficiency at the smallest cost will best discharge his responsibility. To do that effectually, it is necessary to thrust aside all political influence that tends to cast a doubt on the certainty of promotion going by merit.

A satisfactory solution of the problem appears to require a system which shall insure, with reference to persons first entering the Service: That they shall not have passed a stated age, that they shall be in the enjoyment of good health, and that they shall have a reputation for sobriety, integrity and industry; and, although these qualities cannot be tested by examinations, their presence or absence may nevertheless be determined with reasonable certainty by suitable regulations respecting applications for admission to examination and probationary appointment. The Government, like all other employers, must take some risk on these points.

Having advanced this first step it must next be determined what qualifications are most necessary for properly filling existing vacancies in the probationary class. To explain my meaning more fully it may be convenient to state a hypothetical case. Let us then suppose ten vacancies—five to be employed in statistical work and five as copyists. It is not difficult to determine what subjects the candidates for such employment should be examined in. Writing grammatically, spelling, writing neatly and with due despatch, tabulating figures, expertness in picking out and classifying quantities, proficiency in addition, multiplication and subtraction. All these qualities can be readily tested and valued by examination; and assuming that we have fifty candidates who comply with the conditions as to character, &c., first stated, it seems only reasonable to assume that the ten who showed the greatest proficiency in such an examination would, as a rule, be the best men to appoint.

It is quite possible that of the ten so selected, some one or even more might, on being submitted to the probationary test, turn out somewhat different to what was expected, and a different estimate may then be formed of his capabilities. He may not possess the necessary application to work, or removal from his home and new associations may act injuriously on his habits. These are risks which must, under any circumstances, be taken. But the especial value of the probationary appointment lies in the opportunity it affords of testing these things.

In this Department appointments have, during the past three years, been usually of a probationary character, and considerable advantage has been derived from the practice, though there have been influences at work which have to some extent neutralised those advantages. If a probationary appointment were made in defiance of, or without reference to political influences, and the appointee proved to be unsuitable, there could be no difficulty in dealing with him as he deserved. But if the appointment is made through political influence, it is apt to be as difficult to deal with the appointee as it would be if he were permanently appointed. For this reason, I think it is important that the probationary class should be open to those who have first passed the ordeal of some such examination as I have sketched, and that such examinations shall be open.

Examinations for probationary appointments should, in order to give all eligible aspirants a fair opportunity, be held in various parts of the Dominion; but candidates would necessarily incur some expense which as it would deter the notoriously incompetent from competing, would be rather an advantage than otherwise. Among the advantages of competitive examinations an important one is that the mere fact of having to pass such an examination will usually deter those who are incompetent from submitting themselves to the ordeal. The result of the several examinations, must, of course, be so taken and recorded that a just comparison can be made.

Having made provision for recruiting the lower grades of the Service, it becomes necessary to consider how its internal economy is to be regulated, especially with reference to promotions.