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— OTTAWA —

Hints From Washington.

The following letter from Hon. John Wanamaker, late United States Postmaster-General, is well worth careful perusal, and may not have reached all our readers, though probably the members of the department resident in Ottawa have already seen and read it.

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL,
 WASHINGTON, D. C., 25th March, 1892.

SIR,—I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 21st instant, stating that you have been appointed by the Government of Canada Chairman of a Commission to enquire into the workings of the Civil Service. You request information as to the workings of a similar system in the United States. Of course I cannot undertake to answer for any other department than my own. I may say with reference to open competitive examinations for original appointment, that so far as the clerical force is concerned they result, in this main, in securing honest, capable clerks. However, it has been found preferable to put into operation lately a plan by which all vacancies in the central department at Washington are to be filled, not directly from the eligible list of the Civil Service Commission, but through transfer from the railway mail service, or from one of the 52 large city post offices, of clerks who have had some previous postal experience.

"This plan has two advantages: 1st. The one to which I have alluded, by which only experienced postal clerks are secured for the Washington department; 2nd. That better service is obtained through the inducement held out to the clerks in these 52 offices and in the railway mail service of promotion to Washington, if they deserve it.

"So far as the railway mail service is concerned, the appointments made from the lists of the Civil Service Commission are not so satisfactory; and this arises, I conclude, after enquiry, chiefly from the fact that there is not a sufficient physical test required from the applicants. That point for the railway mail service should be carefully provided for.

"I beg furthermore to say that these remarks are best borne out by the statement that while the cases are rare in which candidates are dropped from the central department force during probation, a large proportion of the probationers in the railway mail service are dropped, the number failing to do their work properly in that service having for a long time been from a quarter to one-third of those certified as fit for appointment. If we could come into personal contact with the candidates, and require adequate physical examination, so many of our probationers would not be men of imperfect sight, or weaklings unfit for the work.

"In regard to your enquiry as to how to promote a business-like spirit of work in the offices, keep out laziness, loafing, and inefficiency, as well as how to manage promotions so that the competent and able men will get on and the other men be left behind; and how to get rid finally, in defiance of political influence, of men who prove of no use after trial, and of those who have fallen into confirmed bad habits, I have the honour to state that the desired ends, it is believed have been fully met by a plan of competitive examinations upon merit, inaugurated in this department 1st July last, and on 30th November extended to each of the 52 large city post offices. Immediately upon the occurrence of a vacancy in this department, the clerks in the next lower grade are entitled by right to compete in a written examination for the promotion, which written examination counts as for 40 points only in a schedule of 100. The remaining 60 points are embraced in a daily office record of efficiency, kept in every division of the department, so that practically each clerk is passing an examination

daily. The averages made by the candidates in the written examination and in the daily office record are combined, and upon this basis alone are promotions made. They are removed absolutely from every other influence.

"The benefits of this system it is difficult to over-estimate; it has resulted in a reduction of petty absences and derelictions, and in securing a greater quantity and a better quality of work through the entire department. Each clerk seems to feel that his advancement depends entirely upon himself.

"A somewhat similar system is in vogue in the railway mail service. Once each quarter the records of efficiency in the department and the post offices are reviewed by the departmental Examining Board, and if any of the clerks are found to be below a fair average of efficiency, they are admonished that unless an improvement be made on the succeeding quarter the question of reduction of salary will come up for consideration; if there be no improvement for two or three successive quarters, there is strong probability that a dismissal will be recommended.

"I send you herewith, for information, copies of two orders upon this subject."

"Yours respectfully,

"JNO. WANAMAKER,
Postmaster-General.

"GEORGE HAGUE, Esq.,

"Care Merchants Bank of Canada,
 "Montreal, Canada."

A Board of Examiners.

Among the witnesses examined by the late Civil Service Commission was Mr. John J. McGee, clerk of the Privy Council, and early in his evidence comes the following question and answer:

How should the Board of Civil Service Examiners be constituted, and what should be their powers?—I am of opinion that the appointment of an independent Civil Service Commission such as obtains in England or the United States would, at the present time be inopportune, and as the best substitute I suggest that deputy heads of the several departments should be constituted a Civil Service Board and should be the Board of Examiners as well, having a permanent secretary. The deputy heads, understanding the requirements of the service, are in a position to know the kind of men needed and the best means of testing the ability of applicants. They, too, are of all men most interested in securing good material for the service. The bringing of them together as an organized body would have a most beneficial effect. They could settle any clashing and make general rules on general principles to apply to all the departments. No men could do more for the good of the service than they, provided that they were thoroughly in accord and in earnest in the work. Some may object to this arrangement, on the ground, as it may be alleged, that it would throw too much work on the deputies.

Like many other suggestions, these have not hitherto received much attention, and are open to considerable criticism. This subject is one of vital interest to the service at large, and also one on which many members of the service, who had not an opportunity of giving their views on the matter before the Commission, are well qualified to speak. As it is probable that a new Civil Service Act will be introduced at the next Session of Parliament, now is the time to submit any hints for the consideration of the Government.

Mr. George Johnson, Dominion statistician, has returned from Halifax, whither he was called a few days since by the fatal illness of his mother.