

which means with us the Cabinet. The Privy Council refers it to the Minister at the head of the department to which it relates, who causes to be prepared a reply in the form of a report to the Privy Council thus:

'The undersigned to whom was referred a despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies dated . . . on the subject of . . . has the honour to report that . . .'

That report, when it reaches the Privy Council, is turned into a Minute, preserving the sense, and even the phraseology unchanged. It has, as it were, merely been given a head and tail, thus:

'The Committee of the Privy Council have had under consideration a despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies dated the . . . The Minister of . . . to whom the said despatch was referred, reports that (here follows the Minister's report verbatim).

'The Committee concur in the foregoing observation of the Minister of . . . , and advise that a copy of this Minute, if approved, be transmitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies for the information of His Majesty's Government.'

This Minute, when approved by the Governor General, is forwarded to England. If it is an important despatch, the policy of the Government in regard to the principle involved is, no doubt, discussed and agreed to in Council; but the terms of the report are almost invariably left to the department to which the despatch was originally referred. Under this mode of dealing with official correspondence there is no uniformity of system or continuity of plan.

The preparation of despatches is a technical acquirement, attained only after special study of the questions involved, and by assiduous practice in drafting. It may happen; it must sometimes happen; that the official to whom these Imperial despatches are referred (for it cannot be expected that a busy Minister has time to attend to such matters personally, calling for much study, and a large acquaintance with intricate details) while fully competent to deal with the merits of the question in its present aspect, is not familiar with the past history of the controversy or skilled in the framing of State papers. There are moreover certain questions which relate partly to one department and partly to another, so that it may not be easy to tell at first sight to whom a new despatch should be referred. The earlier communication may have related to one department, and a later despatch on the same subject to another. Neither department having any knowledge of what has been referred to the other, the consequence is that both departments, *quoad* this particular subject, are working more or less in the dark.

In the early years of Confederation, when these questions were few, the inconvenience of which I speak was not so greatly felt, as the Prime Minister of the day kept them pretty much in his own hands; but with the growth and development of the Dominion this is no longer possible.