

THE CIVILIAN

VOL. IX.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1916.

No. 12

Efficiency Records.

Address delivered before the National Assembly of Civil Service Commissioners of the United States at Ottawa, June, 1916, by Colonel Rice, during the discussion of a Report on Efficiency Records that had been submitted by a sub-committee of the Assembly.

I do not know of anything that made me more anxious to come to this Conference than the very fact that this question of efficiency was to be discussed, and discussed by men who had had so much experience with it and who had looked so carefully into the different systems by which it might be ascertained and recorded. It is no child's play, as anybody sees who tries to put on paper a definite estimate of the capabilities of a man to do work, and especially to do work that is not something of the nature of the piece-price unit. The very fact that the New York City Commission with two such able men as Mr. Birdseye and Mr. Saxton long connected with it have, up to the present time, never been able to put in force in its own force, consisting of forty or fifty people, any kind of an efficiency record, shows the difficulty of the proposition. And the new commissioners coming in a little over a year ago were rather surprised to find that there was not any such thing there. Mr. Ordway, President of the Commission, whose experience is as wide as that of any man in the operation of the law, also attached great importance to this phase of the progress of the competitive idea as a means of ascertaining the qualifications of members of the Civil Service. We have in our Constitution in the City of New York a declaration that all appointments and promotions shall be for merit or fitness, to be ascertained by examinations so far as practicable, which examination, so far as practicable, shall be competitive. It is as much an obligation to put that into effect if practicable, so far as the promotions are concerned, as it is to put into effect any system of ascertaining the qualifications for entrance into the Service. Therefore our Commission is going to take a go at it somehow and we are going to put into effect on the 1st of July some kind of system in our own office. We hope that the men who have had so much more experience with the practical operations of the office than the commissioners have had will devise some system which will be fairly effective; but whether it is effective or not we are going to make some kind of a go at it because we feel that we have been very much hampered in going before legislative committees and in discussing efficiency and having the question arise: Why do you not try it out yourselves? I can conceive no better way for us to ascertain the difficulties of this thing in its application to the smaller offices, those that do not consist of hundreds of employees, than for every Commission here to make up its mind that in its own office it will try to establish a definite method of recording efficiency; and if that is done I believe that at the next session we shall have still greater light thrown upon this subject than has been presented to us by the admirable report before us and by the application of their long experience and the study