

THE CIVILIAN

VOL. IV.

JULY 28th, 1911

No. 7

How to Run a Department.

Account of an Interesting Experiment in Analysing the Work and Promoting the Efficiency of any Branch of the Public Service.

The City of Milwaukee has a "Bureau of Economy and Efficiency," which is engaged in a municipal survey very much along the lines of the Pittsburgh Survey, but of somewhat broader scope. The survey has two principal objects, the first, a study of the social and economic conditions within the city; the second, a study of the methods and efficiency of the municipal departments.

The social survey inquires widely into the conditions of living within the city, and need not concern us here. The survey of business efficiency inquires into the organization, administration, accounting, finance, business practice, construction, and operation work performed by the various departments of the city government, and is hoped to work out improved systems for these departments. It is in this direction that the work of the Bureau becomes of special interest to all public servants.

The "Efficiency Survey."

The "efficiency survey" of the Bureau is a thorough study of the work performed by departments for the city, to be followed by a reorganization of procedure along lines of the greatest economy and efficiency. In the conduct of its executive departments the city is regarded as a business corporation, and efficiency in the work of these departments is to be secured by exactly the same general methods as in private corporations. The bureau is, therefore, following the lines of investiga-

tion and reorganization that have been developed in the efficiency work of business experts and efficiency engineers for the most progressive private corporations.

A city or state or federal department and a private corporation operate, of course, under considerable differences of conditions—differences that render successful work for the former more difficult. A government department is governed and limited in its activities by a mass of legal requirements, complex in their nature, frequently confusing, built up from a number of non-coordinated sources, but which the department is compelled to follow implicitly. Transactions are attended by large amounts of ceremony and "red tape," a considerable part of which is unavoidable, at least without fundamental changes in methods of control. The activities of different departments differ widely in nature and many of them are of a peculiarly complex kind. The task of their reorganization is comparable to the problem of reorganizing half a dozen manufacturing plants of widely different types at the same time, and of combining them into one perfectly adjusted and cooperating whole.

The Problems of Efficiency.

As to what "efficiency" means let the bureau itself (in its first bulletin on the subject) speak: "High efficiency in a department requires effective operation, proper business procedure, good accounting, thorough organization, and capable ad-