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The Adaptability of the Merit System

Extracts from a Paper Read by Hon. Lewis H. Van Dusen, Philadelphia, Civil Service Commissioner, Before the Baltimore City Club on February 14, 1914.

In order that you may gain some idea of the scope of the work of the Civil Service Commission in Philadelphia, permit me to indulge for a moment in figures.

During the two years that I have served as a commissioner, viz., 1912 and 1913, there have been examined in the competitive class 18,000 persons, of whom 10,000 persons have passed and 8,000 persons have failed to qualify. In those two years there have been held 619 different examinations in the competitive class, and there have been 3,000 appointments to positions as a result of these examinations, while in the labour class there have been, during the same period of time, a slightly greater number of appointments. The annual appropriation to the Commission has grown in these years from \$30,000 in 1911 to \$61,800 in 1913. The office force of the Commission has grown from 17 employees in 1911 to 36 at the present time. So much for the scope of the work of the Commission of which I am a member.

There is in the minds of many excellent citizens a genuine feeling that the methods of the merit system are not practical and not conducive to the best service in government. But the merit system must be correct, for its foundation is laid on the undebatable principle that the best fitted men should be appointed to public office. Possibly the methods of applying the system in the past have created in the minds of men the feel-

ing suggested a moment ago. I have thought, therefore, to confine myself largely to an exposition of the proposition that the merit system is completely adaptable to the filling of most, if not all, public positions, and that success in administering the system lies largely in the devising of the proper plan or method of examination to suit the position to be filled. Let me describe certain methods of examining used by the Civil Service Commission of Philadelphia:

First, the non-assembled, of which there are various types. In filling positions of comparatively high order the Commission has found that to secure the highest grades of applicants it is advisable to hold non-assembled examinations. There is something about the ordinary assembled examination which does not appeal to men who have attained prominence in business or profession. They seem to have an idea that men of less experience and inferior ability will be able to outrank them in the ordinary written examinations; therefore, the Commission makes it a practice not to assemble the applicants for positions of a high order. Let us take, for example, the examination for chief of the bureau of city property, salary \$4,300 per annum, which was held January 15, 1913. The chief of this bureau is charged with the management, repair and control of the real estate possessed by the City of Philadelphia, including the largest city hall,