

## The Problems of Filing.

### Practical Suggestions on a Subject of Primary Interest to Civil Servants

An interim report just published by President Taft's "Economy and Efficiency" committee is of particular interest to a large body of civil servants. It deals with the subject of methods of filing correspondence, always a large and important item of work in a government department. We print below a few instructive extracts from the report.

#### Nature of the Problem.

The problem of devising filing systems which will meet all conditions is not a simple one. There is no ideal way of filing correspondence which can be followed with success in all offices with their diversified business and needs. Methods perfect in one office might be loose for another and too elaborate for a third. The system must be adapted to the conditions of each particular office.

It appears the main distinction to be made between the average filing system in the government and those in commercial concerns is that in most branches of the government too great effort seems to be made to devise a system which will provide against every contingency, no matter how remote. Commercial concerns surround their affairs with proper safeguards, and keep sufficient records of their business transactions to provide against those embarrassments which under a reasonable estimate of probabilities may occur, but they do not waste their time in devising systems so elaborate as to provide against every contingency which might by ingenious conjecture be conceived as possible.

The inquiry of the commission included every office of the nine executive departments in the District of Columbia and a number of services outside the departments. It has also gone into the practices of certain pri-

vate corporations, some of which handle as many as 15,000 pieces of correspondence a day. The commission has also had access to the data collected in connection with previous government inquiries on the subject. The conclusions arrived at, therefore, are based on a consideration of a wider range of data than has been brought together in the past.

#### Requirement of a Filing System.

The essential requirements of a filing system, in the approximate order of their importance, may be stated as follows:

(a) Certainty of obtaining a particular paper or of obtaining all the papers relating to a particular subject; and this certainty to be independent of the time that has elapsed since the filing of the paper.

(b) Rapidity of obtaining a particular paper or of obtaining all papers relating to a particular subject; and this rapidity to be only slightly affected by the time which has elapsed since filing.

(c) Rapidity with which documents may be filed.

(d) Cheapness of operating the system.

(e) Simplicity.

(f) Reduction to a minimum of the space required for documents.

(g) Miscellaneous minor requirements and desirable features, such as cross references, numbering, etc.

#### Recommendations.

As the result of the inquiry, and after a study of the needs of the various offices in the executive departments and other establishments, from the standpoint of an economical and efficient dispatch of the public business, the commission arrived at