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Efficiency Records.

Text of an address delivered by Prof. Adam Shortt, Civil Service Commissioner, Ottawa, during the discussion of Mr. Murray's Report on Efficiency Records before the National Assembly of Civil Service Commissioners, at Ottawa, June 1916.

Mr. Chairman, I have listened with great interest to the discussion. I have not had the privilege of listening to your discussions before. I feel like following up the line opened partly by Mr. Moskowitz in emphasizing the difference between what might be called mechanical and mathematical records, and the intangible records which must go with these and particularly rise above them. The experiments that have been made, and some of them recorded, strike me as very desirable indeed even if they are not productive of successful results. Carlyle in the preparation of his history of Frederick the Great, after wading through a dozen or two of volumes occupying a week or two would say: "At least that proves there is nothing there." There is some satisfaction in proving that there is nothing there because you have always an uneasy feeling that if you had only gone into that field you might have got something very valuable. I think the experimenting is showing how much and how little can be got out of the mathematical process. But it has fallen to my lot in the eight years I have been connected with the Civil Service Commission in Ottawa to deal with promotions. To our Commission is assigned by Act of Parliament the issuing of certificates for appointment and for promotion. Therefore we have been forced to deal with this question of relative efficiency as best we can. We have found that the individual ratings for which provision was made are sometimes useful and sometimes not. The most mechanical, such as the number of days absent, the cause of absence, the times late and so on, are about the most reliable; but when it comes to the element of judgment the variation of the individual comes in immediately. Some of the records are most inefficiently done, some are most painfully and accurately done; and some of those in charge of them come down asking that we add other sheets of refinement so that they could go into further detail. The next man may neglect the thing almost entirely, and unfortunately we have no legal capacity to enforce the proper keeping of these records. What I want to emphasize is that even if you had an absolutely perfect mathematical method of rating the routine work in respect to quantity and even to a certain extent in respect to quality, you are very far from getting at the real root of efficiency. We take two clerks and assign them to two different offices, just as you take two soldiers and assign them to two different commanders. One of these commanders will take the soldier and march from one end of the country to the other, downing everything, and the other commander may remain at home and his soldier remains absolutely inefficient. Efficiency is something intangible in the individual apart from the commander, apart from the director. Therefore the question of direction makes all the difference to the State in salary, in economy, in efficiency, in anything