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“Everyman,” a publication of the United Kingdom, printed in its issue of Sept. 5th a prize essay on “The Civil Servant,” which is reproduced in part herewith:—

“Such a steady young fellow! He is going in for the Civil Service.”

Everyone knows the air of finality with which the maiden aunt, of legend and of life, sums up everything and everybody that come within her line of observation. In a word or a phrase she crystallises character, capability, and destiny; and the queer part of it is that her summing up, having regard to the limitations of language, is often admirably apt.

For generations maiden aunts have dubbed Civil Servants and would-be Civil Servants “steady,” and for generations obedient nephews have lived up to the designation. No other word epitomises so neatly the capabilities and limitations of the Government clerk; no other word praises him so cautiously or damns him so gently.

A single word may appear, at first sight, a trifle inadequate to sum up a vast body of individuals; and to venture on a survey of the characteristics of an imaginary “average” Civil Servant might seem to be about as profitable as to attempt to describe the size and weight of an “average” piece of coal. The frock-coated secretary, the tweed-clad junior, and the uniformed messenger are such essentially different types, drawn from points on the social scale so diverse, that generalisation cries its own warning. Each class and each grade, one would imagine, must be examined apart and judged on its own merits. The chiefs must be described as discreet, gentlemanly, and cautious; the juniors as methodical, courteous, and

careful; the messengers as obedient, respectful, and attentive; and so on. But, no matter how minutely the analysis is conducted, the net result tends to show that, whether there be an “average” Civil Servant or not, the traits of all Civil Servants are remarkably constant. To be discreet, methodical, or obedient is to be but one thing, called by a different name according to one’s place in society; to be gentlemanly is to be courteous, and to be courteous is no more than to be respectful; and one may not be cautious except by being careful and attentive. There is not one of the nine adjectives that is not included in the word “steady,” and there is no class of Civil Servant that escapes that word’s praise and condemnation.

Aspersions on the ability of the Civil Servant, his acumen and his energy, have been part of the stock-in-trade of the humorous journals ever since there have been humorous journals. They are not intended maliciously. Their authors realise, perhaps, how impossible it is to judge of the industry of the units in a Department from their output in Bluebooks and statistics.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted by those “in the know” that there is a basis for this humour. It is sad to relate, but it is true, that there are many Civil Servants who could use much more ink than they draw in official rations, and much more brain. But it is infinitely more sad (and no less true) that there are many who would be glad to do so. It is not