

HER MAJESTY'S GENERAL REGISTER HOUSE, EDINBURGH.

The examination of the mode of keeping the records in Scotland was so strongly urged, that, although I had no specific instructions to that effect, I thought it better to delay my return for a few days with that object, rather than leave the report incomplete. Mr. Hardy, Deputy Keeper of the Records in London, furnished me with a letter of introduction to Mr. William Fraser, Deputy Keeper for Scotland, under whose guidance, and with the help of Mr. Stair Agnew, Deputy Clerk Register, and Registrar General for Scotland, as well as of the gentlemen at the head of the various branches, I had an opportunity of obtaining a satisfactory view of the system in its practical working. The remarks already quoted from the Committee of 1836 do no more than justice to the admirable regularity to be found in the administration of this most important department of State. In the Register Office are concentrated the records of the great interests of the Scottish people, divided into twenty-three branches—legal, historical, landed, commercial (including bankruptcy), vital statistics, &c. There is one great advantage possessed by Scotland over England in respect to many of these branches, arising from the fact that the system was begun at a much earlier period in the former than in the latter Kingdom, and carried on continuously, and that although in times of war or tumult the records were repeatedly taken to the Castle of Edinburgh for safe keeping, they were transferred in an orderly manner and taken back to their usual repositories in such condition that a short time only was necessary for their restoration to their former state. In the narrative of the steps taken with respect to the English Records, it will be seen that in 1617, James VI. projected a State Paper Office and an office for a general remembrancer for all matters of record in England. Long before that, the Parliament of Scotland had made provision for the same thing, although imperfectly, and in that year (1617) what was only a project in England became a fact in Scotland, the present system being then established, supplemented by Acts passed in 1693 and 1696 by the Scottish Parliament.

Under our Constitution, with the particular distribution of powers between the Federal and Provincial authorities, not to speak of the difference in the laws affecting, for instance, land, there must be a great dissimilarity in many respects between the objects of the work of a Public Record Office in Canada and in Scotland. But, apart from the details, the system by which efficiency, expedition and confidence in the correctness of the records can be secured, is worthy of being studied. Should it be determined to create a Public Record Office in Canada, this is one essential point to which attention should be directed. In conducting the operation of such an office, the question of system is not so much with respect to the particular records to be preserved as to the best mode of doing so, and of rendering them accessible.

Till recently, the registers of Scotland had been, from a remote period, committed to the charge of the Lord Clerk Register, or as he is styled in the earlier statutes, the Clerk of the Register. He was one of the great officers of the State, like the Keeper of the Records in England, and up to the union of the Kingdoms had, in virtue of his office, a seat and vote in the Scottish Parliament. He was the Superintendent and legal custodian of all the registers, with very large powers. He was presiding Clerk of the Privy Council, of the Court of Sessions and Court of Exchequer, and of every Commission issued by the Crown or Parliament—the records of all which were in his charge and keeping, and since the Union the election of representative Peers of Scotland takes place under his presidency as returning officer. There were other important duties, and the patronage of various offices in the Court of Session, the Register House and several Departments throughout the country was in his hands. These powers, however, have been greatly restricted by the operation of subsequent statutes.

A Deputy Clerk Register was appointed in the year 1806. He was highly qualified for the office, and, in co-operation with successive Lord Clerk Registers, many valuable improvements in the mode of keeping the registers were introduced by him during his long tenure of office. His successor, Mr. Pitt Dundas, C.B., also held