

aside to be opened last, as if indeed he would rather not have them; nor was it at once that we perceived his reasons, though, as the reader shall see, he had good enough grounds for objecting to all letters written on the kind of paper ordinarily in use in all unofficial communications.

When he had arranged his letters to his own satisfaction, he began to open them with a rapidity which shewed that this had long been his daily employment. With his left hand he flattened the letters out, and with his right threw the envelopes into the huge waste-paper basket by his side. He had soon a formidable pile of communications to digest, and it was easy to see that some would occasion more trouble to him than he thought should fall to the share of the receiver of the letter, or the correspondent to whom it is addressed. "This," he said, "is a troublesome class of communication, here is a letter written on two sides of half-a-sheet of foolscap. There are enclosures with it. This writer is carrying out the saving system of M'Culloch, which the Treasury has sanctioned, but which the Treasury does not, however, wisely enough, in its own case follow out, and which nearly all efficient Government officers are thoughtful enough to break through. Now, I have to pin these papers together, and before they are returned to me they will be riddled with pin-holes; whereas, if the communication had been made on a full sheet of paper, I should have placed the enclosures in the centre of the letter without a pin, and thus, if a full sheet instead of a single sheet had been used by this paper-saving correspondent, a little world of convenience, and even of security would have been gained to your humble servant and to the public as well."

When his letters were all flattened out with their faces to the desk he took them to an adjoining table, and the messenger, with a hand-stamp, stamped every letter in the left-hand corner with an oval-shaped stamp, containing the name of the office and the words "received 17th of August, 1852." He now took them again to his own seat, and proceeded to number every letter with a separate number placed in large characters in the middle of the first page and close to the top. He then took a red ink pen, and wrote the service or account to which the letter related—immediately below the office stamp, and beneath the head of service, as briefly as possible, the subject of the communication. This done, he proceeded to mark with a strong black-lead pencil the particular reference in the several letters to the letters sent from his own office, to verify dates, to fill in the dates and numbers of previous communications, and then to deliver to a messenger all letters referring to office letters, with instructions to "get the drafts"—meaning the drafts of the letters referred to by the several correspondents. This getting the drafts engrossed some time; but our friend was not idle. He had now opened his register of letters received, and proceeded to enter the letters not relating to any previous correspondence, making the number on the register agree with the numbers he had placed upon the letters.

This book or register is rather a ledger-like affair, ruled with faint blue lines, divided into columns, each column having a separate printed heading. Thus:—"No. Name of Accountant Party or Office. Date of the paper. Nature or Subject of Paper. Date of Board's Minute. Date of Board's Order not on the Minutes. Substance of Board's Orders on Paper not Minuted. Proceedings. When disposed of. No. of Former Communication. No. of Subsequent Communication. No. [The same No. a second time for convenience of reference.] Mark of Deposit and Notation of Paper sent. Of course it was only a portion of these headings that he was as yet enabled to fill up; but his entries, we observed, as far as he could go, were precise and full. As soon as he had done his entries, he threw into a basket—labelled outside "Letters for the Board," all those letters which it was requisite that the Commissioners should see; while the others he placed in a basket on his left for delivery to the several inspectors and examiners to whose business they related—a task of selection requiring great nicety of the whole duties of the several departments of the office. This labour over, he now rang his bell, and handed to a messenger the basket of Board Letters for delivery to the secretary.

Having done with to-day's letters—as far as he was concerned, he now took up such of the letters of yesterday, as had come out from the Board with the directions of the Board upon them, and entered the substance of the orders in his register. He then took down a "Delivery Book" containing numbers corresponding to those in the register, against which he wrote the names of the officers to whom the letters were to be delivered. The book and letters were then handed to a messenger, who carried them to the several officers, and obtained their initials against the names in proof of delivery. Thus another portion of his day's work was done, and we had received information of moment for ourselves and others.

His next work was to attack the contents of a basket, labelled "Letters to be cleared." These he first of all sorted numerically, and then proceeded to enter in his register the number and date of the letter of the report which the out-letter clerk had marked upon the in-letter. When he had done this he pinned a piece of paper to several letters, with these words upon it: "Mr.—, fix initials to letter, if

done with;" and gave them to a messenger for delivery. With some letters we observed, it was not necessary to take this course, as the inspector or examiner had already affixed his initials, and thus lessened labour attached to the teasing and responsible duty of the registrar.

He now took (and yet a Government clerk!) to another labour; that of clearing letters through his register: giving a mark of notation or deposit under the number, showing that all necessary proceedings had been taken upon the letters—in short, that the letter had performed its work, was done with, and was now only of use as a record. As this proceeding advanced, a formidable pile of "Letters for deposit" was soon collected, and we were now more than ever curious to see "what he would do with his letters."

It was obvious at a glance that he kept his letters opened out, and quite evident that it would be a great convenience to him if all his letters were written on paper of the same size. We now saw the cause of his dislike to little letters; for all his note, quarto letter-paper, and Bath post communications, he either wafers or pinned to half sheets of foolscap, remarking that Treasurers of County Courts, to say nothing of the clerks of the same little halls out of Westminster Hall, were among his most troublesome small-paper correspondents.

Seeing the trouble inflicted on—may we say it?—a hard-working Government clerk, by the system of writing official communication on paper only fitted for invitations to dinner or a little dance, we inquired of our friend if any attempt had been made to try and persuade correspondents that a letter to a public office ought not to be received, unless it were written on foolscap paper. "My dear fellow, yes," was our friend's reply. "Look at the printed directions on almost every envelope; directions almost like commands, with a dash of entreaty in every second request. As you are curious in this matter (our clerkly friend continued), you should see what envelopes ask." He then extended his hand to his waste paper basket, and took out, at random, envelopes with printed "entreaties," as he insisted on calling them, some of which we were allowed to take away as examples for future use. Here are a few, and first the Board of Health.

"All communications on Public Service should be pre-paid, and directed to "The General Board of Health, Gwyder House, Whitehall."

"And in case of further correspondence on the subject of this communication, it is requested that the number as well as the date of the enclosed letter may be quoted. It is also desirable that all letters whatever should be written on paper the size of foolscap."

Listen to the vocal Woods:—

"All letters on Public Service, for any department of the Office of Woods, must be addressed to "The Commissioners of Her Majesty's Woods, Office of Woods, Whitehall."

"If any further correspondence on the subject of the enclosed communication should be necessary, it is requested that the number as well as the date may be quoted; and, if it be accompanied by papers, they should be tied together, or otherwise properly secured against the accidents to which heavy packets are unavoidably liable in the course of transmission by post."

The Audit Office is not less precise:—

"All public letters to the Audit Office should be addressed to "The Commissioners for Auditing the Public Accounts, Somerset House, London."

"If further correspondence on the subject of the enclosed communication be necessary, it is requested that the number as well as the date may be quoted. All letters transmitting accounts or answer to queries should relate to such matters only. All letters and papers should be properly secured."

The Inland Revenue has but two requests:—

OBSERVE:—In case of further correspondence on the subject of the enclosed letter, you are requested to quote its number and date.

The Poor Law Commissioners are particular:—

"All communications to this office on public business should be addressed to the Poor Law Commissioners; the postage on all such communications must be paid by the writers. In case of further correspondence on the subject of the enclosed letter, you are requested to quote its number and date."

No less so (though in a different way) are the Educational Commissioners in Ireland:—

"You are requested to write, at the head of the letter, the name of the school to which your correspondence relates, and also of the county in which it is situated; and all letters to be addressed to "Maurice Cross, James Kelly, Secretaries."

Education Office, Marlboro' Street, Dublin."

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners for Ireland make an excellent request:—

"It is requested that correspondents will not write on more than one subject in each letter."

The Inclosure Commissioners are not particular in their grammar, though they are in what they ask:—

"It is desirable that all letters should be written on foolscap paper,