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The Burden of Detail.

Sir George Murray, who has acquired a high reputation as a Civil Service administrator in Great Britain, who was asked to come to Canada and make a report on the public service of this Dominion, did make such a report, and it says in part:

With the increase of population, the extension of trade, and the development of the various activities of the State, the business of Government necessarily grows both in amount and in complexity.

The only means by which this growth can be met is by division of labor and devolution of power. In the absence of some continuous process of this kind the machinery of government must gradually become less efficient and must ultimately break down under the stress imposed upon it.

Nothing has impressed me so much in the course of my inquiry as the almost intolerable burden which the present system of transacting business imposes on Ministers themselves. They both have too much to do and do too much.

Instead of the Cabinet being relieved of petty details and free to give the necessary time and consideration to matters of highest importance to the state, the time of the Governor in Council—identical with the Cabinet—is mainly taken up with the disposal of patronage; such as “the acceptance of a tender for the erection of a pump, the promotion of a clerk from one grade to another, and the appointment of a lighthouse keeper or an exciseman.”

The business of a Minister is not to administer, but to direct policy. When a Minister has laid down a line of policy to be adopted in his Department, the carrying out of his policy, or in other words the administration of the Department, should be left to his subordinates.

If I venture to make this statement in rather dogmatic form it is because I am convinced that it is the foundation of any sound system of departmental organization.

To go further and quote an instance of how the attention to petty details works out let us take for example the history of a case under the following regulation.

Commencing on the 1st January, 1914, no employee who has less than ten years service will be allowed full pay for more than two weeks absence, in addition to his annual leave, for any cause whatever, except in cases of severe illness such as typhoid fever, pneumonia, or

some ailment or accident that requires a surgical operation, making it a physical impossibility to attend the office or perform office duties. A medical certificate is to be furnished in all cases of absence over three consecutive days on account of illness, before payment can be considered. Employees who have over ten years service may be granted such leave as circumstances on investigation would seem to warrant. The Department reserves the

M. A.