

same space of time with which I could heartily agree, except as to their application to the measure now before the House. He has rightly said that the choice which is presented by the motion of the hon. member for Northumberland (Mr. Mitchell) is whether this Bill should pass or the old law should remain in force, so that we are asked to say whether, on the whole, the Civil Service Act will be improved by the passage of the product of the labors and ingenuity of the Secretary of State for the last few weeks. As to that point, I may say that I think there are several provisions in the hon. gentleman's Bill which are not amendments but which are worse than the provisions in the existing law. That is my opinion of it. I do not state them all, but amongst others is that which places the Board of Civil Service examiners under the supervision of the hon. gentleman and whoever may be his successor in office. But there are several provisions of the Bill which I consider to be positive deteriorations instead of amendments in the law, and therefore, when the choice is offered whether the existing law shall remain or this deterioration of the existing law shall pass, I have no hesitation in voting for the former proposition, and thus for the three months' hoist. As I have said, I have seldom heard more resentments in the same space of time expressed by the hon. gentleman in which I could agree. I agree with him in the importance of a properly framed Civil Service Act, and I believe it to be of the utmost importance to the public that there should be a properly framed Civil Service Act; I agree with him in the importance of a Civil Service Act framed on proper principles; I agree with him in the laudations which he has expressed of the English Civil Service Act; I agree with him in the statement of the general results which have been obtained under the operations of that Act; I agree with him in the views which he has expressed as to the evils of political patronage, and I am sure that he has given to us a very great and a very valuable testimony to-day of the evils and of the difficulties which surround a Minister or Ministers in dealing with this question of civil service. But what is the hon. gentleman's Act? The hon. gentleman's system is one which does not protect the Government where he says it is weak and ought to be protected, the hon. gentleman's system is one which does not relieve him from political patronage, the hon. gentleman's system is one which does not secure to the best man a place in the Civil Service. The hon. gentleman speaks of his examination; let him look at his examination. Let him look at these wretched little papers, a certain percentage of which these young men are to answer as the test which he speaks of efficiency. Let him look at them and compare them with other examinations which take place in the country, and let him tell us after that investigation that these are any true testimonies of efficiency and standards of the acquisition of learning of which a young man ought to be proud. I do not think they are anything of the kind. I think that a qualifying examination such as we now have is no proof of qualification in the true sense of the term. It is true that it may exclude some, but it is also true that it admits far, far too many amongst the list of those amongst whom the Minister may choose. What is that system which the hon. gentleman has referred to, and which anyone who was not acquainted with the facts would have supposed was the model upon which the system he is lauding here was based? What is the English Civil Service system? It is one in which there is a competitive examination, it is one in which the comparative efficiency in answering the questions gives the right to be tried, not the right to permanent employment, but the right to be tried by the actual test of temporary employment. That is the English system. That is the system which you would have supposed, if you did not know to the contrary, the hon. gentleman was lauding as the system here. But it is not the system here.

That is the system under which the English Civil Service has become such as he has depicted it. It is under the influence of a system of this kind, gradually extended, applied first to one great branch of the service and afterwards to others, that the English Civil Service has become that which it now is and which is boasted of. It is by that means and under that system that Mr. Gladstone was able to make the statement which he did make as to the appointment of subordinate officers. But is that to be said here? The hon. Minister knows that—how many were they? Were they 1,200?—1,200 young men passed the qualifying examination to fill—how many offices? Possibly a hundred, possibly fifty, I know not how many; and, so far from not having the power to choose, there was the power to choose out of 1,200 to fill fifty or one hundred places. There was ample opportunity for the exercise of Ministerial favor, there was ample opportunity for Ministerial weakness, there was ample opportunity to yield and to take the worse and leave out the better man in the choice from these 1,200 who had managed to scrape through the so-called qualifying examination to which the hon. gentleman refers. No, while I believe that a good Civil Service Act is a good thing, while I believe that a high standard, to which the hon. gentleman has referred, is an important thing, although, as I have said before in this House and repeat, the passing of a good examination cannot be accepted as the sole test of qualification, although the practical efficiency in the office is to be the ruling condition after a man has had his chance, while I am willing to accept the proposition that a good standard of examination and passing in the comparative order of merit as the test of right to be tried is a good thing, I believe of this system that it is a system which is delusive, that it is a system which is a screen, that it is a system which, under the guise to the public of giving those advantages which the hon. gentleman has so glowingly depicted, of giving those advantages of getting rid of political favoritism and of securing to the most efficient an entrance into the public service, it is none of these things, but it is a system which gives the right to exercise political patronage under a cloud, which gives the right to employ the least deserving instead of the most deserving without the public knowing it, which gives a screen to those transactions which, but for the Act, would take place under the direct responsibility of the Minister, and in respect to which there would be a more accurate appreciation of the neglect of public duty that can exist when the Minister points to his long list and says: I took them out of the qualified lot, they passed the examination, they passed the test, and I am entitled to choose. No, Sir, we have contended on this side of the House for the adoption of the English system, we have pressed for the adoption of it, a majority, I believe of the Commission which the hon. gentleman appointed on this subject, proposed the adoption of that system. Hon. gentlemen opposite deliberately rejected that system; they adhered to the other system, just because they declared that they required that discretion, that power, that choice, that right, that Ministerial right, which the hon. gentleman has told us it is so dangerous to give, and which is so often abused. They want it to remain in the rut, in the slough, of which he has spoken. They refused to be relieved of this clause; they insisted on this which gives them power to do the things at which the hon. gentleman has hinted, and gives them, also, the means to protect themselves against the public in respect of the things they do. That is the provision of the Civil Service Act, and it is to such a provision I object; and it is because I believe that, bad as the present law is, the proposed law is worse, I propose to vote for the motion of the hon. member for Northumberland (Mr. Mitchell).

House divided on amendment of Mr. Mitchell, p. 1282.