

Lord Morley on the Early History of Civil Service Reform.

The principle of open competition for entrance to the civil service was first enforced by Mr. Gladstone, and in this connection the following quotations from Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* are interesting:

It was the conditions common to all the public establishments that called for revision, and the foundations for reform were laid in a report by Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan (November, 1853), prepared for Mr. Gladstone at his request, recommending two propositions, so familiarized to us to-day as to seem like primordial elements of the British constitution. One was, that access to the public service should be through the door of a competitive examination; the other, that for conducting these examinations a central board should be constituted. The effect of such a change has been enormous not only on the efficiency of the service, but on the education of the country, and by a thousand indirect influences, raising and strengthennig the social feeling for the immortal maxim that the career should be open to the talents. The lazy doctrine that men are much of a muchness gave way to a higher respect for merit and to more effectual standards of competency.*

One result of this report was the appointment of the Civil Service Commission in 1855, and finally by an order in Council of June 4, 1870, the principle of open competition was definitely established.

Regarding this Lord Morley says:—

Resistance came from Lord Clarendon, and strange to say, from Mr. Bright. An ingenious suggestion of Mr. Gladstone's solved the difficulty. All branches of the civil service were to be thrown open where the minister at the head of the department approved. Lowe was ready to answer for all departments over which he had any control — the treasury, the board of works, audit office, national debt office, paymaster-general's office inland revenue, customs, and post-office. Mr. Cardwell, Mr. Childers, Mr. Goschen, and Lord de Grey were willing to do the same, and finally only Clarendon and the Foreign Office were left obdurate. It was true to say of this change that it placed the whole educated intellect of the country at the service and disposal of the State, that it stimulated the acquisition of knowledge, and that it rescued some of the most important duties in the life of the nation from the narrow class to whom they had hitherto been confided.

Gladstone himself foreshadowed the principle of entrance to the civil service by competitive examination in the following words:

"I speak with diffidence; but remembering that at the revolution we passed over from prerogative to patronage, and since the revolution we have also passed from bribery to influence, I cannot think the process is to end here; and after all we have seen of the good sense and good feeling of the community, though it may be too sanguine, I cherish the hope that the day is now near at hand, or actually come, when in pursuit not of visionary notions, but of a great practical and economical improvement, we may safely give yet one more new and striking sign of rational confidence in the intelligence and character of the people."

*Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. Book IV., chap. IV., vol. I.