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OF A PROFESSION

The Civil Service Tradition

By

SIR EDWARD BRIDGES



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SIR EDWARD BRIDGES

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PORTRAIT OF A PROFESSION

I SHALL be expected to speak to-day on a subject about which I may be presumed to know something, by reason of my experience. But I find myself under a strong impulse to speak, not of forms of organization or of administrative techniques, but of things less tangible but more compelling. I would like to describe the inhabitants of Whitehall in terms of the training and tradition, the outlook of mind, and aspirations which play so big a part in determining men's actions.

What I seek to do is to give a picture of the higher staffs of Whitehall, the headquarters staffs of Government, who handle the broader questions of administration and policy. I have no time to include in my picture the large and important professional and technical staffs who pursue their own specialized duties: nor the far larger numbers engaged in the executive work of Government up and down the country; although much of what I shall have to say applies to them also. I shall start by saying something of each of the main movements or events which have made the Civil Service what it is to-day, and have built up what could be called the Civil Service Tradition.

I hope this choice of subject will not be thought to be immodest or parochial. I shall not be vainglorious.

But I believe that there is something distinctive about the Civil Service Tradition; and, difficult though it may be to describe something so elusive, I shall make the attempt.

I

The real starting-point of any account of the British Civil Service as it exists to-day must be the reforms instituted by Stafford Northcote and Charles Trevelyan in the middle of the nineteenth century.

But one very important quality of the Civil Service, namely its non-political character, received its main imprint in the eighteenth century and must be mentioned first. The action taken by Parliament in that century to prevent the corruption of Parliament itself by patronage resulted in the series of Acts which limited, and clearly defined, the number of Ministerial offices which could be held by Members of Parliament. These Acts brought into being a sharp distinction between political and non-political offices;¹ and prevented the development of anything in the nature of a spoils system in this country.

But it would be wrong to regard the fact that the Civil Service is non-political, and free from party bias or allegiances, as due solely to the clear statutory distinction between political and non-political offices. It has deeper roots.

¹ Lowell, *The Government of England* (1908), ch. vii, gives, perhaps, the clearest statement on this point.

Patronage, in regard to first appointments to the Civil Service, continued until towards the end of the nineteenth century. But a characteristic convention was established that, while Ministers could use their patronage to appoint to official posts persons who had some claim upon them, such appointments, once made, were regarded as permanent and were not disturbed by subsequent administrations. More important still, by a process of instinctive good sense, it came to be accepted that permanence carried as a corollary a certain standard of conduct and discretion—namely conduct compatible with loyal service to whatever Government is in power.

II

I have used the term 'Civil Service' as though such a body existed in the eighteenth century. This is an anachronism. Even to-day there is no statutory definition of the Civil Service or of a Civil Servant save a wholly negative one of certain qualifications for drawing pension.¹ As short a time ago as 1910 the draftsman of an Order in Council could not trust

¹ The last Royal Commission on the Civil Service, under the chairmanship of Lord Tomlin, gave as a practical working definition of the Civil Service: 'Those servants of the Crown, other than holders of political or judicial offices, who are employed in a civil capacity, and whose remuneration is paid wholly and directly out of monies voted by Parliament'—paragraph 9 of Cmd. 3909 of 1931.

himself to go beyond the collective phrase 'persons serving in His Majesty's civil establishments'. Indeed, though the State has had Civil Servants throughout its history, it is only in the past half century, or century at most, that it has had anything which could be described as a 'Civil Service'.

I distinguish three main causes which brought about something which can be described as a 'service' in the place of a series of departmental staffs, separated off from each other, distant and jealous.

The first in time was the introduction of a common system of recruitment for all Departments. When Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan were appointed by Gladstone to clean up Whitehall in the middle of the nineteenth century, they saw that little progress could be made until they had abolished a system of appointment which was wholly dependent on patronage and conducted separately by each Department: a system which resulted in recruiting the unambitious and the indolent, whose course was 'one of quiet and generally secluded performance of routine duties'. They sought to substitute for this a system of competitive examinations conducted by a central Board. The examinations were to be of literary character, to test the intelligence as well as the mere attainments of a candidate; the examinations were to be for vacancies at two levels: those of nineteen to twenty-five were to compete for the superior

posts, those of seventeen to twenty-one for the junior posts.¹

The scheme was put forward as a means of recruiting an efficient Service; but it was closely linked with educational ideas and reforms. Royal Commissions on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1852 and 1853 had stressed the advantage of competition. Thus, the Commission on Cambridge said that the great majority of College Fellowships had long been open to free competition, which had given the University a 'high moral elevation'.² The Indian Civil Service was thrown open to competition by the Government of India Act of 1853, and the famous Report of Macaulay (Trevelyan's brother-in-law), recommending the nature of the Indian Civil Service examination, was written in 1854. The Northcote-Trevelyan report owed much to the influence of both Macaulay and Jowett; and its authors, in commending it, said that the inducement of making a Civil Service career open to competition 'would probably do more to quicken the progress of our Universities, for instance, than any legislative measures that could be adopted'.

¹ Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service, dated 23 November 1853. Included in *Reports of Committees of Inquiry into Public Offices and Papers connected therewith*. Published by Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts (1860).

² Quoted by Sir A. P. Waterfield, 'Competition for the British Civil Service and its relation to the Universities', printed in a special number of *Oxford*, 1949.

The Northcote-Trevelyan scheme, although strongly backed in educational circles and in contemporary thought,¹ came up against strong departmental opposition, mainly on the ground that a central system of recruitment would impair departmental efficiency, since Ministers could only accept responsibility for the action of their officers if they themselves had the choosing of them. Their proposals were not, therefore, at once accepted in their entirety. Then followed a period of some years during which the Civil Service Commission, first appointed in 1855, had to be content with a sort of twilight existence of limited competitions, or qualifying examinations, which fell far short of the Northcote-Trevelyan scheme. Indeed, a pretty successful guerilla resistance was waged for some years by many public Departments and it was not until the 1870's that the system of open competitive examination became securely established as the regular method of entry for most of the large Departments. This system of recruitment provided a great bond of unity between the staffs in the different Departments; the bond of having entered by the same gate and of being of the same vintage, or perhaps a year more or less in bottle than Smith of the Department across the road.

¹ John Stuart Mill thought that the proposal to select Civil Servants by a competitive examination appeared to be one of those great public improvements the adoption of which would form an era in history.

III

This bond of unity is closely connected with the second unifying cause, namely transfer between Departments. This was more easy to bring about when those concerned had a common origin in entry by the same examination, and when irritating and minor differences in conditions of service had been done away with. Such transfers began to have real significance when they came about, not very occasionally, and not simply by fluke or favour, but as part of a concerted plan decided upon in the public interest.

How early these moves became common I do not know. The first measure of concerted transfer on a large scale of which I am aware was connected with the setting up in 1912 of the National Health Insurance Commission. This, in any case a heavy task, was made heavier by strong opposition. The work was entrusted to a picked team of young men gathered from nearly all Departments. This 'loan collection'—for this was how it came to be known familiarly—comprised many brilliant men who rose later to the highest positions.

The second such occasion came with the First World War. New organizations had to be set up, and heavily pressed Departments strengthened. This could only be done by drafting trained men from work which was not essential to the war.

After the First World War transferability of staff was strongly fostered by the then Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, who did much in the 1920's to break down barriers between Departments.

In 1920 it was formally laid down that the assent of the Prime Minister was required to appointments to the top posts in all Departments. It was thus made clear that in filling such posts the Prime Minister and his advisers would take as their field of selection the whole Civil Service.

In these ways then, the isolation of Departments was broken down and something in the nature of a real Service came into being. In the last ten or fifteen years the process has been carried much further. In part this is due to the effect of total war on the Government machine, and to the very large scale on which transfers took place in the Second World War. But it is also due to the growing interdependence of Departments as a result of economic factors which affect the whole range of Government. This—the third unifying cause—I shall deal with later.

IV

What characteristics did this Civil Service show as it developed?

One effect of the Northcote-Trevelyan reform was a change—subtle and not easily described—in the relationship of higher Civil Servants to their Ministers. Before these reforms had taken effect many of the higher Civil Servants owed their appointments to the patronage—often in the best sense of that much abused term—the patronage of a particular Minister. Many of the holders of the higher appointments had first been brought into the Service to serve as the private secretary of some Minister and had graduated thence to better posts.

The impression one derives from the autobiographies of such men as Henry Taylor¹ or Algernon West² is that many of the higher Civil Servants, in the early or middle nineteenth century, had a far closer allegiance or affinity to the views of particular Ministers, and less attachment or loyalty to a Service, than their successors to-day: and many of those mentioned in these autobiographies sought or found advancement not in the Civil Service, but in a political career.

But I think that the better organization of the Civil

¹ *Autobiography of Henry Taylor*. Longman, Green etc. (1885).

² *Recollections, 1832-1866*, by Rt Hon. Sir Algernon West. Smith, Elder & Co. (1899).

Service which started a hundred years ago showed itself most markedly in the greater capacity of the staffs of Departments to marshal previous experience and bring it to bear on current problems. The clerk who at first had done nothing except copy letters, despatch them and file them, makes himself useful in collecting precedents and previous papers. The next stage is that he becomes a clerk who can describe accurately what has happened in the past, who can collect together the information required by the officer who is going to reach a decision on the matter in hand; and before long you have an adviser who presents his senior colleagues or his Minister with a carefully documented appraisal of the position, who tests all the statements made and sets out what seem to him the possible courses of action and the likely consequences of each. There remains a final step. To sum it all up and say which course has behind it the backing of all the knowledge and experience that the Department can give to its Minister.

But why should I seek to describe in my own words what was so aptly stated by Stafford Northcote and Trevelyan? As they said in 1853: 'The great and increasing burden of public business... could not be carried on without an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of Ministers... yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability and experience to be able to advise, assist, and to some

extent to influence those who are from time to time set above them.'

This transition from the clerk to the administrator was all the more rapid because the competitive examinations were successful in recruiting first-class material from the Universities: men who were determined to escape as quickly as possible from routine jobs by showing that they were fitted for better things; men who brought to their work the happy blend of scholarship and ebullience that one finds in a University.

V

By degrees, then, as Civil Service organization got into its stride, there has been built up in every Department a store of knowledge and experience in the subjects handled, something which eventually takes shape as a practical philosophy, or may merit the title of a departmental point of view.

This is not something which has been imposed on a Department by any one individual, though it may well bear the mark of the mind of some outstanding man who has impressed his personality on the Department. Sometimes the departmental philosophy may be the result of a conflict between two apparently divergent needs or policies: each policy may contain something which cannot be sacrificed, and so a way has been found of making the two go in double-harness.

But in most cases the departmental philosophy is the result of nothing more startling than the slow accretion and accumulation of experience over the years. An original scheme has been altered to meet acknowledged difficulties. Some features of the plan have been found too difficult to administer and have been quietly dropped. Some other point aroused serious public criticism; but means have been discovered of obtaining much the same result in other ways which were more generally acceptable. And so by trial and error something has come about which differs greatly from the original plan; it is something which has been fashioned by many hands. It is quite different from anything which any single man or woman could have produced; it is less logical but wiser and more comprehensive: above all, it is something which works, and which works better than anything else so far devised. And in making and reshaping it, things have been learnt which could only be fully grasped by practical experience; as, for example, that certain problems can only be treated by certain administrative methods; and that if certain limits or marks are overstepped, a public outcry can be confidently expected.

These departmental philosophies are of the essence of a Civil Servant's work. They are the expression of the long continuity of experience which can be one of the strongest qualities of an institution, if well organized. Again they are broadly based, and are the

resultant of protests and suggestions, and counter suggestions, from many interests, of discussion and of debates in which many types of mind have taken part. They represent an acceptable, middle point of view after the extreme divergencies have been rooted out.

Every Civil Servant going to a different job, unless it be an entirely new one, finds himself entrusted with this kind of inheritance. He knows that it is his business to contribute something of his own to this store of experience; and that he should play his part in moulding it and improving it to meet changing conditions. Equally he knows that it is something that he will ignore at his peril.

VI

These storehouses of departmental experience have a bearing on one aspect of public affairs which is most frequently misunderstood, namely the relationship between day-to-day administration and policy. The two are often spoken of as though they were wholly distinct; as though decisions in the one field could be taken independently of the other, and as though day-to-day administration had no contribution to make to the framing of policy. It is often added that, while decisions of policy are necessarily taken by Ministers, questions of administration are for the most part best left to their staffs.

This is worth a moment's thought. Let us start by looking at military practice. In the last war the Germans, greatly to their detriment, built up a central organization for military planning, distinct from the Army, Naval and Air Staffs, and superimposed on them. In this country on the other hand the higher professional advisers of Government on the strategic direction of the war were the three Chiefs of Staffs, whose duties have been defined as follows:

'In addition to the functions of Chiefs of Staffs as advisers on questions of sea, land or air policy respectively to their own Board or Council, each of the three Chiefs of Staffs will have an individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting as it were a super-chief of a War Staff in Commission.'¹

Under our system, the Chiefs of Staffs thus carried a dual responsibility therefore, collectively for central planning, and individually for executive action in their own Departments. There was thus no room for the fierce clashes of judgement which occurred in Germany between the Central Planning Staff which dictated a certain strategy and the Services, who believed that the plans drawn up by the Planning Staff were wrongly devised, or even incapable of fulfilment.

We have applied the same principle in the field of battle. It is clearly acknowledged that no Com-

¹ Salisbury Report, 1933 (Cmd. 1938).

mander-in-Chief would ever be asked to fight a campaign, the plans for which had not been made either by him or under his own direction and therefore carried his full consent.

This principle is of equal validity in civil matters: and it is a cardinal feature of British administration that no attempt should be made to formulate a new policy in any matter without the fullest consultation with those who have practical experience in that field, and with those who will be called upon to carry it out.

Consider now the functions of Ministers and Civil Servants in questions of policy. The constitutional responsibility of Ministers to Parliament and the public covers every action of the Department, whether done with their specific authority or by delegation, expressed or implied. Ministers cannot therefore escape responsibility for administrative matters. They are of course more interested, and rightly so, in issues of policy than in detailed administration. But this does not mean that their advisers have no part to play in framing policy. It is indeed precisely on these broad issues that it is the duty of a Civil Servant to give his Minister the fullest benefit of the storehouse of departmental experience; and to let the waves of the practical philosophy wash against ideas put forward by his Ministerial master. The Minister knows the broad lines upon which his Party or the Cabinet have decided to proceed. The advisers contribute practical

knowledge such as no Minister could be expected to possess unless he happened to have exceptionally long experience in that field. The relationship between Minister and adviser thus comprises the essential feature of good partnership, namely that the contribution brought by each partner is different in kind.

‘The hand which executes a measure should belong to the head which propounds it. . . ; and there will certainly be something infirm and halting about any measure which is devised by one man and executed by another; or (for it amounts to nearly the same thing) any measure of which the execution is continually revised and corrected by another than the author.’¹

So wrote Henry Taylor in 1836. But while the principle is sound enough, there is a good deal more to be said about its application to modern large-scale organizations. The hundreds of hands which execute such measures cannot in any literal sense belong to the head which propounds them. It is with the middle ranks of these large organizations that responsibility lies for ensuring that that which the head propounds is thoroughly understood by the hands, and that the hands which execute can communicate back to the head. It is for them to see that the decisions of policy laid down by Ministers and senior officials are thoroughly understood throughout the whole organization. It is for them to appraise everyday happenings and to see that those which are

¹ Henry Taylor, *The Statesman* (1836), pp. 88–9.

significant from the point of view of policy are brought to the attention of their seniors. Indeed, at the middle levels of the organization at which this work is done it can fairly be said that policy and administration merge and are only distinguished with difficulty. And it is by this kind of process that the administration can be kept in tune with public opinion and the needs of the country.

VII

These working departmental philosophies, of which I have spoken so much—it will be asked, is there not a danger that, being the result of experience gathered within the bounds of a single Department, they may tend to harden into a rigid point of view and to conflict with the needs of Government policy in some other matter of perhaps even greater importance? Are such differences of view serious in practice, and how are they resolved?

Did not Stafford Northcote and Trevelyan speak of the 'fragmentary character' of the Civil Service—of a state of affairs in which each man's experience and hopes and interests were limited to a special branch of the Service; and to the encouragement which this gave to narrow views and departmental prejudice?

That was said in 1853; but I can remember occasions in the 1920's when two Departments—each firmly entrenched in strongly held views, and amply pro-

vided with arguments—did long battle over some issue of no great importance; with little or no prospect of coming to a conclusion save by the arbitrament of the Cabinet or some senior Minister. I remember, indeed, one occasion on which the two Ministers who were engaged in heated controversy changed places while the battle was at its height. But each, when well established in his new Department, averred that, since his translation, he had had exceptional opportunities of considering the matter anew and had reached an entirely opposite conclusion to that which he had previously held: and so the battle went gaily on, the champions only being transposed.

But all that is changed. Let me explain why.

There is the healthy practice that, particularly in their younger years, men and women should change their jobs within the Department every three years or so. There are also the transfers between Departments of which I have spoken.

These frequent changes of duties, whether within the same Department or between Departments, induce a wider outlook. The first time a man is told to change from work which he has mastered to a new job, he may feel that the special knowledge he has acquired is being wasted. He may grudge the labour of mastering a new subject and may even wonder whether he will be equally successful at it. But when a man has done five jobs in fifteen years and has done them all with a measure of success, he is afraid of

nothing and welcomes change. He has learned the art of spotting what points are crucial for forming a judgement on a disputed question even when he has the most cursory knowledge of the subject as a whole.

This widening of experience and transfer from one job to another is a great solvent of the differences between Departments. A man with this experience behind him is likely to look with a critical eye at the departmental philosophy which he has inherited, and to be alert to correct any defects and weaknesses in it which his experience in other fields may suggest.

But it is economic factors more than anything else which have compelled Departments to work more closely together. No Government can to-day discharge its responsibilities unless it has a coherent economic policy, and such a policy must needs be framed after bringing together the views of several Departments, while its execution demands constant consultation between them. This has increased the interdependence of Departments and it has made necessary much fuller arrangements for discussions and co-operation between them.

These arrangements, I need hardly tell you, take the form of what to an outsider would, I suspect, appear to be an extremely elaborate system of inter-departmental committees, many of them with interlocking membership. To some this description alone

will be a sufficient condemnation of it. But this system does succeed in enabling a vast amount of business of an economic nature which concerns several Departments to be carried through quickly, and with little or no interdepartmental correspondence. Moreover, it has this great advantage: that colleagues from several Departments meet and talk things out before views have had time to harden in each Department into different moulds.

This habit of early and frank consultation on difficult questions—a habit which extends outside the economic field—has brought about a greatly changed outlook: and I would claim that those who work in Whitehall to-day look over and beyond the boundaries of their departmental loyalties and see themselves as part of a much larger and more complicated organization—an organization engaged in an enormous variety of tasks, and one in which they recognize that their own job can only be properly done if it takes its place in the fulfilment of the whole.

VIII

From this somewhat discursive account of the main developments which have affected the Civil Service in the last two or three generations, let me turn to a summary of what a Civil Servant's job amounts to.

One is tempted to fall back on paradoxes, as for example that the Civil Service is a professional

occupation yet differs in many ways from any other profession. If it is a professional occupation, what is the professional skill that is exercised? This is no easy question to answer; for in effect most Civil Servants exercise a combination of two or perhaps three skills or qualities.

There is, first, the long experience in a particular field; the man or woman who has specialized in labour relations or taxation, and who can tell you more in a short discussion than you could learn in many years.

Secondly, there is the special technique of the skilled administrator—perhaps it should be called an art—the man or woman who may indeed possess special knowledge in several fields, but who will be a good adviser in any field because he or she knows how and where to go to find reliable knowledge, can assess the expertise of others at its true worth, can spot the strong and weak points in any situation at short notice, and can advise how to handle a complex situation.

A possible third element—or perhaps it is only another way of looking at the other two—is the need for much the same qualities as are called for in the academic world, namely the capacity and determination to study difficult subjects intensively and objectively, with the same disinterested desire to find the truth at all costs, the same willingness to face the truth when it turns up in unexpected places, and in what

may be for practical reasons an inconvenient form, the same readiness to scrap much hard work which has already been done when one finds that one has started out on the wrong track.

But if a Civil Servant is called upon to exercise professional skills, his task differs in two important respects from that of any other professional man. A doctor, when he visits a patient, has to diagnose his complaint and restore him to health. A chartered accountant has to analyse the financial affairs of a company and express a view upon them. A schoolmaster seeks to train and teach his pupils. For each, no doubt, the part which his professional skill can and should play, in the general life of the community, means something pretty important in his general scheme of things. But, viewed in relation to his daily tasks, the end in each case is clear, and his own personal responsibility is clear: it is his job to cure his patients, to teach his pupils, to see that the finances of the company are clearly and truly presented.

But this is not so with Civil Servants. Few of them are ever completely responsible for the work they are doing. On all important questions it is necessary to make sure that the Minister approves what is being done; and, apart from ministerial responsibility, the complications of much Government work call for a far greater degree of consultation with colleagues and consideration for other and wider interests than is commonly found in other

occupations. Through the nature of his work, therefore, he has much less consciousness than other professional men that the work he does is his own individual achievement, and is inevitably far more conscious than others that the work he does is part of something greater than himself.

In the second place, though it is possible to regard each job which a Civil Servant does as one of a succession of professional tasks, no one with a single spark of imagination could so regard the range of duties of a Civil Service post. It is impossible not to see the day's tasks in perspective: first, as a contribution—however small—to a particular branch of work which has probably gone on for a long time already and will continue for years after he has gone; secondly, as part of a much broader context, namely the continued well-being of the State.

Then again, another paradox: a Civil Servant is bound to be well aware of the political content of his work. He will not indeed be a trustworthy adviser unless he has studied the general national outlook, as illustrated particularly in Parliament, to any problem he is handling, and accepts this as the general background against which he works. At the same time, he is perhaps the least political of all animals, since the departmental experience of which he is the exponent—although it is an essential element in the Government of the country—is part of the stock of things which are common to all political parties. It is some-

thing which stands apart from the creed of any political party and thus makes a Civil Servant avert himself, almost instinctively, from party politics.

Finally, a Civil Servant has to combine the capacity for taking a somewhat coldly judicial attitude with the warmer qualities essential to managing large numbers of staff. Detached, at times almost aloof, he must be if he is to maintain a proper impartiality between the many claims and interests that will be urged upon him.

But at the same time, many of his colleagues are the effective heads and organizers of large staffs whose varying qualities and attainments can only be successfully blended into an effective organization by his understanding and leadership.

IX

It is these paradoxes, these contradictions in the make-up of his job, which give the characteristic flavour to the occupation of a Civil Servant, and make his life so difficult to describe. They also condition his outlook: he must be a practical person, yet have some of the qualities of the academic theorist; his work encourages the longest views and yet his day-to-day responsibilities are limited; he is a student of public opinion, but no party politician.

What manner of creature results from these contradictions? I will list some of his qualities, and, in

order that I may finish on a sufficiently elevated note, I will start with the bad ones—real and supposed.

I need not, I suppose, deny the fable of idleness (that belongs to a magic past). Nor need I assert that we are not—to borrow a phrase of the Master of Trinity—used in another and quite different context—a ‘strange third sex... (created)... by training men up from boyhood in a world that is not a world of men’.¹

Our most obvious defects spring from the constitutional position of Civil Servants. They are at all times answerable to some Minister who will get the praise and blame for what they do, and this determines many of their actions and reactions. It was, I believe, this fear of involving Ministers in unnecessary troubles which led to the pernicious tradition of writing letters in language deliberately framed so as to mean as little as possible, in the hope that since so little meaning could be attached to them, they would not lead to embarrassment. Nobody now believes in this ridiculous doctrine, and war was declared upon it several years ago. But, even with the help of Sir Ernest Gowers and *Plain Words*, it will take some years before the disease is wholly rooted out.

It is the same absence of direct responsibility which makes the average Civil Servant uncomfortable and

¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic* (1908), p. 62.

infelicitous in his relations with the Press. The direct quick reply may be the only thing which will satisfy the Press inquirer, but it may result in headlines the next morning which will be far from pleasing to his ministerial master. The tendency of many Civil Servants is, therefore, to hedge or confine themselves to what has already been said. This disease is so endemic that we have had to call in gentlemen from Fleet Street to help us out of our difficulties. I see no remedy for it, unless it be accustoming the younger generation of Civil Servants to face the rigours of the Press from their earliest years.

The same absence of direct responsibility is perhaps also responsible for the Civil Servant's highly developed sense of caution. But it is both natural and right to take more care when you are advising a Minister who will carry the responsibility himself than you would take if any blame would fall on your own shoulders.

There is also perhaps on occasion a tendency to seek a greater degree of logical completeness or of regularity than the matter in hand requires; a tendency which I have heard described as perfectionism or pedantry in action. This habit is but an exaggerated form of the civil servant's vigilance in defence of his Minister. For this reason he is at times too unwilling to admit anything which looks like a defect; and he wishes to be certain that the decision made in a particular case will not be used as a lever

for other concessions which might embarrass his Minister.

All these are real defects—but they are rather of the nature of occupational maladies which we have to fight against; the housemaid's knee, so to speak, of the profession. They do not touch the essential qualities.

A Civil Servant's life makes him, above all, a realist. He is less easily elated, less readily discouraged than most men by every-day happenings. Outwardly he may appear cynical or disillusioned, and perhaps to be disinclined to put up a fight for things which excite others. But that is because he has learnt by experience that the Walls of Jericho do not nowadays fall flat even after seven circumambulations to the sound of the trumpet, and that many of the results which he wants to see come about in the most unexpected of ways. Once the crust of apparent disillusion is pierced, you will find a man who feels with the fiercest intensity for those things which he has learnt to cherish—those things, that is to say, which a lifetime of experience has impressed upon him as matters which are of vital concern for the continued well-being of the community.

As a Civil Servant's working experience grows and the years go by, his life becomes bound up with some of those wider issues. And it is for this reason that, notwithstanding the disappointments and frustrations inevitable in a life with so many masters, the

work provides, and provides to a considerable degree, an intense satisfaction and delight in the accomplishment of difficult tasks, a delight which has much in common with that felt by scholars or even on occasion by artists on the completion of some outstandingly difficult work.

Lest this be thought presumptuous, may I say that this satisfaction and delight are usually accompanied by a sense of humility which is the exact opposite of the avariciousness for power with which we are sometimes credited?

These satisfactions, these disappointments are, moreover, part of a strong corporate life, a corporate life which knows no barriers based on social upbringing or educational background, and which accepts without question as a passport for the higher appointments anyone whose work and approach to problems show that he has learnt how these things should be done. Indeed, the Service recognizes gratefully that it is strengthened and toughened by the greater diversity of experience thus brought within its ranks.

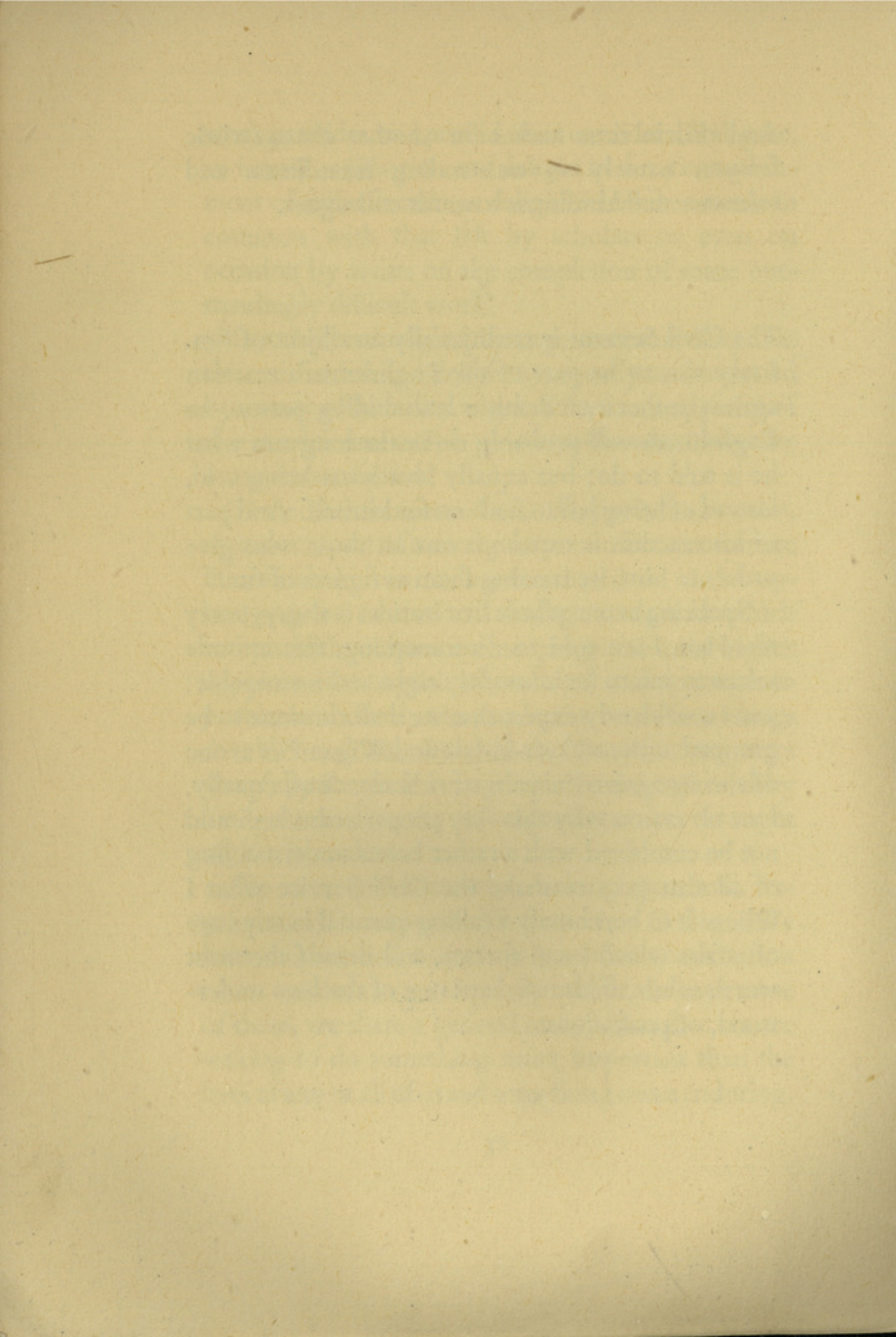
We are, unfortunately, lacking in those expressions of a corporate life found in a College. We have neither hall nor chapel, neither combination room nor common room. But while we have none of these, we share a general recognition that we are seeking to do something more important than the lives of any or all of us and something more enduring.

And this in time makes for another characteristic feature, namely an outstanding friendliness and tolerance and kindness towards colleagues.

X

The Civil Servant is traditionally an object of fun. I take this to be part of the Englishman's reaction against authority. Being a law-abiding person, an Englishman will probably do in the long run what he is told to do; but equally he resents being told, instead of being left to find out for himself. And part of his reaction is to take it out on those who give orders to him, by treating them as figures of fun.

Speaking as one whose first instinct is always to say no when I am told to do something, this attitude seems to me to be inherently right and inescapable; and I confidently expect that we shall continue to be grouped with mothers-in-law and Wigan Pier as one of the recognized objects of ridicule. But, equally, I see no reason why this very proper attitude should not be combined with a rather better understanding of all that goes to make the Civil Service what I believe it to be, namely a calling essential in any state of affairs which I can foresee, and one of the most worth-while, if also perhaps one of the least understood, of professions.



~~1 NOV 1958 2~~

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