**The Civil Service as a Profession\***

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WE all know what difficulty there is in making choice of a profession. That choice has to be made very generally, not by him whom the choice most concerns, but by others—by others who are probably as anxious on his behalf as he ever will be himself, but who cannot think with his thoughts or feel with his feelings. And then, too, that choice is actuated by other circumstances than abstract eligibility. Mamma would, perhaps, like to see her son a clergyman, or papa would fain have him be a barrister. But it is necessary that the boy shall, in early life, do something to lessen rather than to increase the family expenses. The noviciates of the bar and of the church are costly and cannot be endured by slender purses. Therefore the eligibility of the Civil Service is discussed at the domestic fire. “Think what a thing a certainty is,” papa says. Mamma yields, and in this way the destiny of the boy is decided.

It was thus the fathers and mothers of most of the civil servants of the present day spoke of them, and it was thus men were chosen. My object will be to prove that the Civil Service may be made as noble, as independent, and as free a profession as the bar or the church; as arms, or art, or medicine. But in seeing whether it be so or no, let us look the truth in the face. Men do not go into the Civil Service with ambitious views of their own. The profession is generally chosen for them, and has been so chosen because an early income is desirable.

It has been said—and the saying was very prominently put forth by certain Government pundits who were selected to remodel our profession, and who thereupon proceeded to chop it up mince-meat fashion, and boil it in a Medea’s cauldron, so that the ugly old body might come out young and lovely—it was said by these pundits and by others, that appointments in the Civil Service Were looked for by the indolent and incapable, by those afflicted with physical infirmity, and by young men unfit for active exertions. For this statement I think that there was no shadow of a pretext. But I do think that the res angusta domi—the want of a full exchequer at home—has had much to do with it.

I insist upon this in order that those who are personally interested as Civil servants may look the matter full in the face, and tell themselves the truth respecting their own positions. Much they have a right to expect from the Civil Service—such at least of them as are faithful servants—but there are advantages which men derive from other professions for which they ecannot justly look. They are entitled to an early income and a fairly liberal rate of pay; but they may not expect to make their fortunes. They will not be briefless barristers without business, hoping through hopeless years till hope is over; but neither will they be chancellors, lords justices, or judges. They will not be left without livings, but neither will they become the inhabitants of bishops’ palaces. They have their sweets—not yet, I think, so many of them as they may fairly expect;—but there are sweets which they may not expect, and certainly will not get. In considering their profession it is as well that they should bear this in mind.

Whether or no there be more of good or more of evil in this moderate uncertainty, it is beyond my purpose now to inquire. Whether the risk of a profession which may possibly bring nothing, and may possibly bring great wealth, is or is not better than that moderate safety which is enjoyed in the Civil Service; is a question which may be argued at great length, but which we will not argue now. The moderate and safe lot has been chosen for them. But of this I am sure—and of this it is my object to make them sure, and others also, if it may be within my power to do so—that there is no profession by which a man. can earn his bread in these realms, admitting of a brighter honesty, of a nobler purpose, or of an action more manly and independent. Yes; of an action more manly and independent. And if this manliness and independence be not achieved, the object is missed through their own faults. Despots do not make slaves, but slaves make despots. And when you see a man crouch beneath a rod, you should generally blame him who endures the rod more than him who uses it.

I say that no profession admits of a brighter honesty, a nobler purpose or of more manly action. And I say this now with much urgency; because a certain slur has been thrown upon it of late years. This slur has come from various quarters; from those government pundits to whom I have alluded, and to whom I must allude yet again; from certain portions of the press, and from political reformers who have thought that pubic money has been wasted in salaries. I will not say that there has been no cause for complaint. The political reformers and the press had no doubt so much of truth with them as justified them in speaking. From them absolute accuracy of statement is not expected, and would indeed be impossible. But, on the other hand, I do very strongly feel that the profession should not have been spoken of in the terms of general reproach. which have been used towards it, and that it is for us to vindicate it. Let us vindicate it at any rate to ourselves. If we can. do that thoroughly, we shall soon justify it in the eyes of others.

I say that there is no honester calling than the Civil Service. I had almost said none so honest, but I will not go so far as that, lest I may encounter specific contradiction.

Does it not often occur to many men,—I should say to most men—that there are callings in which a man can hardly earn his bread, and still stick to truth and an honest purpose? I say that a man does not do so if he spreads a lie or defends a lie. Those in the Civil Service are never called upon to do either. I say that a man should not live with an easy conscience if, in his calling, he pretends to anything, either to knowledge, or to sanctity, or to property which he does not possess. So little temptation to do so comes in the way of government clerks, that they do not bring themselves to think that such a state of things can exist in others.

Let us remember how many callings in these days depend in a greater or a less degree upon advertisements. And is it not the fact that we silently, without the trouble of thought, regard almost every advertisement as a falsehood? One man sticks upon a wall that his newspaper is the biggest in the world. Does anybody believe him? Another who has a house to get rid of, describes to you a rural Paradise. Do you not know as a matter of course that such description is false?—false and fraudulent, but with a modified fraud, because no one was expected to believe it. Is it not a fact that dishonesty such as that runs very far and very wide, till men do not know dishonesty when they see it? But as a rule, dishonesty does not come in the Civil Service. Many in it may be dishonest; but if so, they go to seek it. And then as to the noble purpose. My idea of a profession is this, that there are two main things to be regarded. First, is the income to be gained, for let any preacher preach as he may, self-interest will be first. First is the quid pro quo; the reward to be earned; the amount of wages which a man is to get in return for his skill, his labour, and his patience. Till we come up to men who have no need for wages, this must be the first consideration. But there is another consideration which should press very close upon its heels, without thought as to which no man should allow himself to be happy; and that is the good to the world which his work may do.

Could any man be happy if he were to work ever so diligently at writing documents which were instantly to be burnt, or at sorting letters which were never to go? It is necessary to the happiness of men that there should be some other result to their work, besides that of giving them an income. Men are undoubtedly anxious that their work should do good in the world. Now in the Civil Service, if men do their work, they may be sure of that.

It is bad to be invidious, and very bad to speak as a Pharisee; but to explain my meaning I must name another calling or two. Can all lawyers be quite sure that they are doing good in the world? Can soldiers always be sure of it? Let it not be supposed that I say that they never do good. Our soldiers in China have been doing a deal of good, and I hope we shall have our tea cheaper before long in consequence. Can members of Parliament always feel safe that they are doing good? Is any tradesman doing good who sells an article as A 1 which is not entitled to be called A at all? And yet, in most of these instances, the individual himself may be hardly responsible that he does not do good. The lawyer—who once he is a lawyer—must act after his kind. And so must the grocer, who cannot sell coffee without chicory at eightpence per pound, and who must sell eightpenny coffee or else shut up his shop. Now, in the Civil Service, men are not constrained to mix any chicory with their coffee. If they do so, it is from a personal aptitude for dishonesty.

Therefore I say that this profession admits of a noble purpose, and that the daily work attached to it—that work which no doubt seems often to be dull enough—is always compatible with honesty. The youngest of my readers may not hitherto have thought much of this; but it is a matter very worthy of thought. It is a sad reflection for a man, as he goes down in years, that he has passed his life in digging holes—in digging holes and re-filling them—or perhaps in work less innocent even than that.

Then, as to the independence, or what I may call the manliness of this profession! Those who know aught of social life in England, and of the changes which have come upon it during the last two centuries, will be aware that all professions have gained greatly in this respect. Parsons used to be considered little better than head servants; and though they were admitted to table, were expected to leave it when the puddings and pies came in. Now-a-days they take their full share of the puddings and pies, and of all the good things that come after them. Naval and military officers were forced to cringe and hang about like lacqueys at the doors of their noble captains and colonels; and authors sued humbly, cap in hand, to the great lords, praying for some fee in return for a dedication. All that is nearly over now.

And so was it with the Civil Service. In the days of which I am speaking, a clerk in an office could hardly say that his soul was his own. Indeed his spirit was not his own, and could not be so. A man’s daily bread—his own and that of his wife and children,—must be his first consideration; and in those days a man could not feel his daily bread to be secure unless he would bend his neck to the yoke. Now, I take leave to think, no man in the Civil Service need bend his neck to any yoke. If he chosen to bend it—if he prefers a yoke—then, indeed, he may do so.

Doubtless there are difficulties in the way of the full fruition of this independent spirit—difficulties for which no individuals can be blamed; and I am inclined to think that it behoves a man who intends to earn his bread as a servant of the Crown, to look more to this point than perhaps to any other. Manliness, a spirit of independence, grows quickly with a man, as does also a deficiency of that spirit. He who at five-and-twenty can feel within his bosom that sort of dread for another man which a schoolboy has for his master, will too probably feel it also at five-and-thirty; and will then carry it with him to the grave. Such a one will never have been a man.

The difficulties in the way of this independence are, I think, as follows:—In the first place, men enter the Civil Service by favour; but do not so enter most of the other professions. An appointment is given. So also, indeed, is a living, and so are many commissions in the army, and so were all appointments, military and civil, in India. But by this gift, an idea of an obligation is engendered; and a man is, or may be, taught to suppose that he has incurred a favour in being allowed to earn his bread after tins fashion, and that he should pay for that favour.

I can best perhaps explain what I mean by pointing to the Civil Services of foreign nations. Take Prussia for instance. In Prussia there is a very large staff of “placemen.” Is there any designation of men more objectionable than “placemen?” That word alone nearly explains what I mean. There is, in Prussia, an army of placemen who are bound to give, and who do give, in return for salaries, not only their allotted quotas of work, but also a moral—or an immoral—support. The giving of such support is incompatible with independence on the part of the ordinary Civil servant. It is that sort of support which a Minister in this country openly and fairly demands from his Ministerial party. The holder of Ministerial office incurs no obloquy in rendering it. But to be bound by party obligation without party privileges or party feelings—in that, I think, there is great obloquy.

I believe I am correct in saying that such obligation is exacted from. the Civil servants of many Continental Governments, and that much of it was exacted in ours, as the natural return to be made by men who had received the gift of a situation.

Most of my readers will be conversant with the memoirs of Samuel Pepys, who was a very remarkable Civil servant in the days of Charles II. and of James II. He was at heart a grand Englishman, with a spirit strong against servility, peculation, and idleness—a man not to be mentioned by any means with reprobation. But I cite his name now because his memoirs show us very plainly how hard it was for a Civil servant in his time to be free from servility, peculation, and idleness—even with such a spirit as that of old Samuel Pepys. He could not endure to eat his bread without earning it; but, nevertheless, he did not keep his hands clean. Clean hands were not in fashion in his days.

And in this way sinecures came to pass. When a man conceived that he had placed himself under an obligation in being allowed to draw a certain income quarterly, he was apt to think that that feeling of obligation was in a great measure the return which he was bound to make for that income. That was the return in lieu of so much work. Where was the favour if he was to work hard? Where, indeed? I should say. And then the favour grew in. amount, and the work lessened, till the Civil servant was a sinecurist. That is one phase of the Civil Service. I shall not wound the feelings of many who now hold places under Government by saying that a sinecurist is a contemptible fellow. If a man hold a sinecure in payment for past service, he is a pensioner and not a sinecurist. But a sinecurist proper—a man who takes pay and does not give or has not given anything for it—is a contemptible fellow. He, of course, is under a heavy load of obligation. Then comes the man who gives half work and takes out the rest in obligation. He is a shade better off,—but only a shade.

But he who for every half-crown gives service to the full value of half-a-crown,—surely with him need be no servility, no feeling of favour. In such a case the workman confers the favour, and may fairly feel within his own bosom that he does so.

It is, however, in the power of men to reverse the matter altogether, and to place the balance clearly on the right side. For every half-crown that they receive, let them be careful to give work to the value of three and sixpence, and then let them not care a straw for any man. He who so arranges his weights and measures, never does care a straw for any man. There is no difficulty in so arranging them, in so fixing his pennyworths of work. That he may attain his object—that manly independence without which no profession can be pleasant—it is not necessary that all the that one man know the amount of return he makes. It is only necessary that one man should know it;—and that one man will always know it. It need not be said who that one should be.

And here, in speaking on this subject of favours, let it be acknowledged that the Civil Service Commission has done some good. I am not one of those who believe in the Medea’s cauldron. I do not think that the chopping up and boiling will change the bones and flesh of the body. The amelioration which has taken place, and which is taking place in the Civil Service, is a part of the progressive movement of the nation, and would have come to pass, and was coming to pass, without any commission whatever. But it is well to have something to say in praise, and that something may as well be said here as elsewhere.

A preliminary examination of candidates for the Service by an independent Board has no doubt been beneficial. And while it is simply a test of the fitness of the person nominated, it must, I think, continue to be so. Among other things, it assists men to achieve that independence of which we are speaking. A lad who knows that he has been adjudged fit for the work which he has to do, and who bears with him into the Service this mark of approbation, is taught to conceive that from the first he makes a fair bargain with the public which is his paymaster. Such a fair bargain he does make. Let him, therefore, eschew all idea of an obligation imposed—of any favour, I should say.

Then, again, the position in which one Civil servant stands with reference to another, does create a difficulty in carrying out that feeling of independence. One man is subject to the censure and displeasure of another; and one man may be put out of the Service by the will or at the judgment of another. And thus that manliness, which should be the moving spirit of all trades, professions, and callings whatever, is rendered difficult. But I venture to think that this difficulty also may be overcome,—nay, that it is being overcome. It is still a difficulty, but it is not an insuperable obstacle as it Was some fifty years ago.

Fifty years ago an independent spirit in the Civil Service was, I believe, an impossibility. Twenty-five years ago it was nearly so. Now it may be enjoyed, but with difficulty. It is for those who now form the Civil Service to see that it may be enjoyed by those who come after them without difficulty.

I have alluded to the subjection to censure under which Civil servants must hold their places. It has no doubt occurred to us all that men in the open professions, as they are called, are in this respect better off than Government clerks. Clergymen cannot be censured, nor can barristers. Of course I allude to censure supposed to be inflicted and borne without liberty of reply. From censure with liberty of reply who is, or should, or can be free? Doctors and attorneys; poets, painters, engineers, and architects, cannot be reprimanded at the will of any one person; and, therefore, we are disposed to think that they are more independent in the exercise of their calling than Civil servants. But before we altogether acquiesce in the truth of this, let us see very shortly how other professions are circumstanced, and how this profession is placed.

No one likes to be blown up. And when such an evil comes upon any one, that one always imputes the chief fault to him who is the scolder, and not to himself who is the scoldee. Such little exercises of patience generally fall to the lot of the younger,—the more amusing pastime of the tongue being the privilege of the elders. I imagine that very much of the same thing is the case in all trades going. May it not be surmised that the younger partner, or the expectant partner, in an attorney’s firm hears of it if he be remiss with his indentures and his latitats? And the young curate, too, who for a while has thought more of the pretty girls in his parish than of the old women, does he not experience the rough side of the rector’s tongue? You would not think so, observing how unassailable he looks, seen with his wavy hair on a Sunday morning; but I have but little doubt that such is the case. And younger counsel, too,—men wrapped in all the glories of bombazine—barristers with wigs on their heads! Even such a one must submit, if on occasion it be thought that he has failed in annihilating, as he should have done, the presence of mind of some witness.

There is on record a case of a bishop who was censured, and who endured it! And I doubt whether fault may not occasionally be found even with a Cabinet Minister! It is the lot of man,—and I fear the very ordinary lot of young men.

But, it may be urged that in the professions above named a man feeling himself to be in the right may so place himself without danger of being ousted from his profession. If one rector be too hard on a curate, that curate may succeed better with another, and so on. But that in the Civil Service an obedience is required almost menial in its submissiveness.

In answer to this I say, that such submission was the order of the day fifty years since; that it need not be the order of the day now; and that, by God’s help, it most certainly will in nowise be so in the days which I and we shall all live to see. It is very far from my present purpose to teach any young man a lesson of disobedience; but I am prepared to tell every young man—as, indeed, every old man also, if it were necessary—that is the first and chief obedience required is that of a workman to his work; an obedience which is in no respect menial, which is the very reverse of menial; an obedience which is Godlike in its nature, and which is the very source and fountain spring of manly independence! Yes! The obedience of a workman to his work. That obedience which should induce a shoe-maker to make his shoe well, even though the wearing of that shoe should bring him no personal credit. The obedience of a workman to his work! If this Civil Service cannot be made an independent profession, it will be from want of such obedience as that. Let that obedience be paid, and the workman will find that no other need annoy him. Let that obedience be paid, and no other obedience need ever be servile. A man who cannot take off his hat to his work and pay it reverence, is not a workman in a happy frame of mind.

A workman owes obedience to his work, and if he pay that he need pay no other that is not compatible with it, and is not a part of it. I will go further, and say that any man holding authority, and demanding more than this, will find himself, now in these days, utterly foiled. There is not now the old aptitude for censure. And why? Because men are less prone to domineer? No. Such improvements do not descend from the few to the many. They ascend from the many to the few. It is because the spirit and inner manhood of the workman is of a higher calibre. Men now will not be browbeat; and, therefore, as a rule, the work of brow-beating is at an end. No civil servant now need fear censure—no civil servant who does his duty with fair energy. A truant dog must, we know, be whipped; but, now-a-days, woe be to him who attempts the whipping of a dog that is not truant.

I have spoken as to the bearing of censure, and, while I am on the subject, I will venture to say one word as to the giving of it. Most civil servants have some in authority under them. I would say to all such, Remember the golden rule,—“Do unto others,” &c. Men know how unbearable to themselves is a harsh word, an undeserved rebuke. I trust that they abstain from speaking harsh words, and from giving undeserved rebukes. They declare to themselves that they will allow no superior to trust them as a machine, to be wound up and set a-going at his will. I trust that they remember that other men are not to be wound up at their will.

To you, my friend, I would say, that if you allow yourself to regard any one under you as less than a man, you are as mean in that thought as though you imagined him who is over you to be more than a man. Nay, one meanness will accompany the other. When I see that Smith wants to make a machine, of Jones, I know that Smith is a machine ready made to the hands of Brown.

And then as to the risk of dismissal, a man cannot be dismissed from being a lawyer or a clergyman, unless his conduct have been very vile indeed; and therefore a lawyer and a clergyman call hold their profession with independence. Is it not pretty much the same thing now in the Civil Service? Is it not felt to be practically sure that no man can be put out of his place as long as he does his work, and that no inquiries will be made as to what he thinks, or what he is, or in what way it may suit him to live. I fancy that a Civil servant now-a-days holds his office by as firm a tenure as a parson does his living. If the parson disgrace himself, he may lose his gown; and so may the Civil servant, in such a case as that, lose his gown.

But the greatest difficulty in the way of independent action remains to be told. And there is something yet to be done before that can be overcome. The object in this profession, as I take it, is not merely to hold a certain position, which will give bread, but to rise in it to bread and butter; ay, and to cakes and ale, if that be possible. Men all want promotion. Now, the question is how they may put themselves forward as candidates for that promotion, and secure their fair chance of cakes and ale without leaning on the favour or soliciting the good-will of those whose words carry promotion with them. Such leaning and such soliciting is opposed to manly independence. There is much of it in all professions; but it is our purpose now to inquire how men may best act in this profession, so as to be as free from; it as men may be.

And here again, that which has been done proves to us what may be done. I think I tell no State secrets, but utter certainly a State truth, when I say that twenty-five years ago no man could rise in a public office who was personally disagreeable to his superiors. More than that; it was almost necessary that he or some one belonging to him should be personally agreeable. I think it will be admitted that such is not the case now. It may be imagined that there is partiality of selection, but it is not imagined that men are selected without reference to their competence. The selector may judge badly, and possibly may have allowed himself to be influenced by his likings; but he no longer dares to throw all judgment to the winds. The clamour would be too great. The English of it is this: he could not do it.

And here I must say that in. this respect Medea has done us no good with her cauldron. If any possible plan could enable a job-loving, favouritizing senior to withstand the spirit of the age, and put unfairly forward his special friends, it is the system of promotion by merit as at present sanctioned. That I give as my opinion. Valeat tantum. As I must recur to the matter before I have done, I will not further insist upon it now.

But, though I do here protest that this system of promotion as at present arranged has this evil tendency—and I trust we shall all live to see it overthrown, or rather to overthrow it, for in these matters a man should not so much desire to see good results as to produce them—but though I do protest that this system of promotion has a terribly strong tendency towards dependency of spirit and time-serving, Still,—still I do we think that that tendency is so strong as the counter-tendency of the age. Though Medea with her cauldron has done so much to bring us back to servility, I think that the manhood of the times is too strong for her.

But let it be remembered that that manhood depends oh the exertions of individuals of the profession. It is for each man to feel individually that he will do nothing to obtain promotion—nothing but the one thing—nothing but deserving it. In spite of Medea, that I think will still be his safest course for obtaining it. .

It has always appeared to me in what I have heard and read about the Civil Service as a profession that Government clerks are supposed to think less of themselves than any other class of men in the world. I do not myself believe that they have any special merit of this sort, but it seems to me that some such special merit is attributed to them; I hear them incited to deeds of ambition and spurred on by educational tests and competitive examinations to learning, philosophy, and mental cultivation; but I hear very little of the usual rewards which the World is accustomed to hold birth as inducements for high acquirements and devoted labour. Of high acquirements and devoted labour I think very much; but I conceive that, if a profession requires them, a profession should pay for them. I am far from saying that the Civil Service does not need high acquirements and devoted labour; but the Civil Service should be prepared to give the quid pro quo.

There are three headings under which I would propose to look at the rewards or wages which a Civil servant has a right to expect. The first is that of his simple salary; the rate of annual pay for which he commences working and goes on to work. On this matter I can say nothing here that would be of any advantage, unless it be this: that very generally in the world men are valued at the rate at which they value themselves. The higher men of the Civil Service can learn to think of themselves, the higher others will think of them.

The second heading is that of ordinary promotion; and on this subject I do feel that a few words should be said. This is no general question of political economy affecting the world at large, and which can only be discussed on large abstract principles. It is a question affecting every civil servant individually; which affects that profession and none other, which is absolutely a question of their own; and it is one which, I take leave to think, should not have been decided for them without an expression of the opinion of the profession in general. Such an expression of opinion might easily have been elicited. But this has not been done; and an enormous change has been made, affecting all their worldly interests with an importance that I cannot exaggerate; and that change has been made, as it appears to me, without any attention to the wishes of the profession, and so made in accordance with the Utopian theories of a very few men.

Could it have been possible that the interests of clergymen or of lawyers could have been thus played with? It would have been impossible. But then it will be said that the law and the Church are open professions; and that, as Civil servants are paid by the Crown, the Crown may do as it pleases with them.

I altogether deny that the Crown possesses any such right. No one has a right to injure those he employs, and the Crown less of such right than any other employer. But in order to see what the crown has done in this matter, we will make the comparison between the Civil Service and other Crown servants. We will take a regiment, or the body of officers in a regiment, and compare it to a public office. Of course we all know that ordinary promotion is now to be given in the Civil Service,—not to the man who stands next in order to receive it, if he be fit,—but to the man below who may be most fit, whether he stand next, or next but one, or last in the order of expectants. Now let us go to the regiment: we will say a regiment of artillery, because there is no purchase there.

In this regiment we will say that a major retires. There are ten captains, all of course desirous of the majority. Captain Brown, the senior, is an excellent officer. Everybody, including the Colonel, says that he is an excellent officer. But there is a certain Captain Green at the bottom of the list who knows more than Captain Brown, and more than all the other captains. He was probably brought up but the other day from the bottom of the lieutenants on account of his terrible proficiency. He talks French like a Frenchman, understands trigonometry, draws fortifications, and can answer questions out of his head about everything under the sun. Brown is now forty, and when he was young, there was none of all this learning going. All he knows is, that since he buckled on a sword at seventeen up to this day, he has served his sovereign with loyalty, and fought his country’s battles,—that he has never shirked parade, and has lived among officers and gentlemen as officers and gentlemen should live.

It is all nothing. Green is the most worthy captain of the lot, and he becomes the major. And then after that, Captain Pink comes up. A lad, who has the advantage of being a lad in these days, can educate himself up to any mark. And so on the next vacancy, Captain Pink goes up.

I need not say, that all this would be simply impossible. The regiment could not be held together under such circumstances. But why should it be possible within a public office, if not possible in a regiment? The hardship is the same.

But if this could be done among that corps of officers, what would be the result? Would Captain Brown be a good soldier after he had been so treated? Would it be possible that he should be a good soldier? Quite impossible, I think, that he, or any of the nine, should be so! A worthy man can bear a deal of disappointment, but he cannot bear to be treated, as though he .were unworthy.

All the men so passed over are destroyed as public servants. But not only are they destroyed. Green, who has been selected as so much wiser than his seniors, he is destroyed also. He has been taught to think himself such a prodigy, that he cannot be got to do the ordinary work of his life.

But that which I have described as impossible in a regiment is now the law of ordinary promotion in the Civil Service. I do not know that I have in any point exaggerated the matter. Not only may young Green and young Pink from the bottom of a class be put over the heads of all their seniors, but the officer who makes the selection is bound so to pro—and then, if he thinks that they are the most worthy. The fact that all these other men are fit for the higher position—those men who are thus unpersuaded, and ruined in life by being superseded; the fact of their all being fit—affords no argument against the selection of Green. It is nothing that they have all done all that they ever undertook to do, that they are able and willing to do all that that higher class will require of them. The rule is, that without any reference to their welfare, their rights, or their wrongs, the best man shall go up—the best man, or the man whom somebody thinks to be the best man. This is the theory of promotion by merit—so called.

There is a cruelty in this theory which to a certain degree mitigates the evil. Such is the rule. But men have hearts, and they cannot be get to carry out such a rule. But what shall we say of a law that can be palliated only by such an excuse as that?

It may have been and probably was the fact that the vis inertias of mere length of service did in former days secure promotion without reference to fitness. It was a fault of the service that an idle man was thus put on a par with a man of industry; and if so, it was well that such a fault should, be remedied. But the remedy was at hand, without going to Utopia for a dream of perfection—for a theory of promotion satisfactory only as an abstract idea. Let it become the rule that no man shall be promoted who is not fit for the duties of the higher position. The question is this. Shall the promotion be given to the most worthy man, or to the first man who is worthy? “Detur digno,” or “detur digniori?” The law now says, “detur digniori.” My belief is, that that law, if carried out, would ruin the Civil Service, but that it cannot be carried out. Tremendous injustice is done from day to day by attempts to carry it out—even by most conscientious attempts to do so; of that I am full sure.

For this rule or law which is so unjust to the candidates is quite as unjust to those who have to select the chosen candidate. No position can be worse than that of a conscientious man intrusted with such a duty. As far as I can see, a man so placed must give up his conscience. He must give up his conscience and disobey the rule—which I hope is usually done; or he must give up his conscience and make selections, without any adequate knowledge of what he is doing.

This system has been tried, and I think that the Civil Service generally will agree with me in saying that it has failed. The matter, as I have said, is one of vital interest; and I think that it behoves the Civil Service as a body to see that the rule be abrogated. No one should press for promotion of men by simple seniority; but I do maintain, that if a be fit to perform the duties of a class to which he has risen, by length of service, he is entitled to the promotion by all equity. And I maintain beyond this, that the advantage of the Civil Service generally, and of the public at large, will be best consulted by giving such a man the position he has earned.

Then there remains the third heading, under which we must consider the quid pro quo—the payment, that is, with which the country remunerates its Civil Service. This heading concerns promotion which is not ordinary; which does not, and never did, and never can, go with length of service. It concerns what we may call staff appointments, as to which the whole Civil Service is, I believe, agreed that they should be given as the rewards of special merit. But then the whole Civil Service is agreed also that they should be so given to members of the Civil Service, and to members Of the Civil Service only; to them and no others.

I said that Civil servants could act become chancellors, or judges, or bishops; meaning by that that they cannot aspire to prizes so high fit. those to which lawyers and clergymen may rise. This is so. But it is also true that there are prizes to which they may aspire; and these should be as much their own by right, as the bishoprics belong to the Church and the judgeships to the law. We all know that no power in the British Government could give a man the emoluments of a bishop unless he were first a clergyman of the Church of England; nor could it make a man a judge, unless he had been a barrister. This is understood by every child; and tile other should be equally well understood.

Of all the printed words I have ever read, none have ever made me so angry as certain words in that report about the Civil Service. “Few public servants,” the report says, “would feel the appointment of a barrister of known eminence and ability to some important position, as a slight or discouragement to themselves.” Now, to my thinking, there is an arrogance and an impudence about that which is astounding. The writers of that report had just been pointing out how necessary it was that the ambitious youths of the country should be attracted to the Civil Service, and had then gone on to say, that unfortunately these ambitious youths had not been forthcoming. Youths very much the reverse bad been forthcoming, and a description is given of the Civil Service which is not at all flattering. After that, in order to encourage the clerks the better, they give them their opinion as to the barristers of well-known eminence. I have not a word to say against barristers of well-known eminence, and do not at all desire to oust them from their peculiar seats, but I do most earnestly desire to keep them—and all others, except Civil servants—from seats which should afford the appropriate rewards of the Civil Service.

In the report, allusion is made to the higher qualities of these eminent barristers, meaning, of course, that such men would be more fit for important places than mere Civil servants. But that is arguing in a circle. If you deny men their right to certain rewards, they will not enable themselves to earn those rewards. You do not promote men in the Civil Service to be under-secretaries because they are not fit; but in the same breath you acknowledge that you have no men fit because you have no rewards to encourage such fitness, if men were confident that they could rise in the Civil Service to be secretaries, under-secretaries, and commissioners; that they or their brethren in the Civil Service must, so rise; that, by the law of the service, no one else could so rise—I think we may say that a sufficient amount of competency would be found;

But how shall an officer make himself fit td be a colonel, when, by the practice of the service, it is almost impossible that he should ever become one.

And now I would wish to call attention to a matter which affects, not the whole Civil Service, but a very large portion of it. My chief object in these remarks—indeed, I may say my only object—has been to assist in raising that profession to the level of other professions. In order that this may be done effectually, an earnest endeavour should be made to remove from it any stigma that may attach to it specially. Now, there is a law barring many of its members from certain rights of citizenship which. I think I may safely call absurd and vexatious, and the repeal of which they have, as I think, a right to demand. All members of the Civil Service who are concerned directly or indirectly in the collection of the revenue, are forbidden, under various terrible penalties, from the exercise of their franchise—from voting for a member of Parliament. I consider such a barrier to citizenship as that to be a stigma on the profession.

I would fain hope that every man in the Service is a politician. I do not much mind what a man’s politics are, so that he has got politics. So that he will concern himself with the public welfare of his country and of his race, and give his mind to the matter, I do not much care whether I be called upon to agree with him, or to differ from him. But I don’t love a man with whom I can neither agree nor disagree; who will say that politics are nothing to him. Such a one seems to me to shirk the first of a man’s duties.

But how is a man to exercise his energy as a politician in such a country as this, who is ostentatiously debarred from the ordinary political rights of an Englishman? A document is issued very freely at periods of a general election among this portion of the Civil Service, in which their unfortunate position in this respect is explained to them. They are not simply told that they can’t vote, but they are assured that if they do, they will be dismissed, be fined in some tremendous sum of money that not half of them can pay, and after that imprisoned. The doom of the sinner sounds like some of those terrible mediaeval punishments in which it was thought by no means enough to kill the guilty one, but he must be disembowelled also, and drawn and quartered and left unburied afterwards. In case that they sin in this particular, they are to be visited with utter ruin and the worst species of disgrace, for doing that which it is the duty of every Englishman to do—of every Englishman who stands sufficiently high in the scale of life.

I will not now go at length into the original reason of this rule. Years ago, when the law was passed, the Civil Service was a very different calling from that which now exists. It was very much smaller, and it may be that the men who held positions in revenue offices would, if they had voted at all, have been coerced to vote as the head of the Treasury would have them. There may then have been a reason for the embargo. But there can be no such reason now.

I have found no one who would tell me that there was such reason now. Artizans in the dockyards vote; and will it be said that clerks in metropolitan public offices are more subject to the influence of Government than they are? We hear that they are subject to such influence, but no one dreams of taking from them their votes. It would be monstrous to tell a body of men who, combined, form the largest portion of a large profession in the metropolis, that they should be so influenced.

The fact, no doubt, is this: that they—they now in 1861—are so debarred, not because anybody thinks it right, but because the law exists. And the law will exist till they make themselves heard, and make it understood that they wish to have this stigma removed from them. The fact, no doubt, is this: that they—they now in 1861—are so debarred, not because anybody thinks it right, but because the law exists. And the law will exist till they make themselves heard, and make it understood that they wish to have this stigma removed from them. When they have united in expressing such a wish, this stigma will be removed.

By Anthony Trollope. Taken from *The Cornhill Magazine* **3** (1861 February), 214–228.