

THE
REFORMED CIVIL SERVICE.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORKING OF THE SCHEME
OF THE PLAYFAIR INQUIRY COMMISSION,

BY THE
COMMITTEE OF THE LOWER DIVISION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE.

"A Profit and Loss Philosophy, speculative and practical."—CARLYLE.

(For private circulation.)

1882.

Houses of the Oireachtas

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It is now more than eight years since a long series of movements and agitations in the Civil Service culminated in the appointment of the celebrated Playfair Inquiry Commission. It will be necessary to sketch the condition of the Service at the time of the institution of this Inquiry, as well as the state of feeling then existing in the ranks of the Clerical Staff, and in the minds of the authorities, in order to fully understand the difficult questions which now, as in the past, continue to beset the welfare of the Civil Service. Immediately previous to 1874 the great and growing discontent existing in all Departments of the Service was such as to seriously impair their efficiency, and cause grave concern to those responsible for their administration. The Service split up, from its nature, into three great Sections, of which it might be said that each had its own grievance, or set of grievances, in addition to those common to all. The three Sections were—

State of Civil
Service
before
Playfair
Inquiry.

- (1) The Clerks under Regulation I.
- (2) The Clerks under Regulation II.
- (3) The Writers.

THE CLERKS UNDER REGULATION I.—The Examination Scheme for this Section was meant to recruit the higher ranks of the Service. Owing, however, to difficulties which we need not here discuss, the entries under this

Scheme had been very few. Many large and important Departments, indeed, were recruited wholly under the lower examination, and the total number who had gained admittance under Regulation I. was so very small that we may dispense with any notice of it for the present.

THE CLERKS UNDER REGULATION II.—These constituted the great body of the Service. They numbered about four-fifths of the entire Clerical Staff. The seniors amongst them had come in under the old patronage system, the greater proportion had entered under limited competition by nomination, and the remainder, who had joined since 1870, had gained their certificates by open competition.

The prospects of these men differed according to the Department in which they were employed.

The Clerks of each Department were divided into classes, and the following scales of salary were typical :

Inland Revenue	£90	by	£10	annually	to	£150
„	160	„	10	„	„	260
„	300	„	15	„	„	380
„	400	„	20	„	„	500

With prospect of further promotion.

Post Office	£100	by	£10	annually	to	£200
„	210	„	10	„	„	300
„	310	„	15	„	„	400
„	400	„	20	„	„	500

With prospect of further promotion.

Promotion was said to be rapid when a man passed into a higher class before he had reached the maximum of the class immediately below it; but when he was detained long at the maximum of his class before a vacancy occurred in that immediately above, promotion was said to be slow.

This division of the Service was loud in its expression of discontent. Those who had come in by competition, although distributed among different offices, had originally all passed the same examination, and having entered under the same conditions naturally looked forward to

equal prospects in after official life. Here, however, a great disappointment was experienced. Scarcely any two Departments could offer similar rates of advance, and in many cases wide and marked inequality of prospect existed. It often happened that two men who entered the Service at the same time found in middle life that the one enjoyed a handsome salary with expectations of further promotion, while the other, having been appointed to an office where promotion was slow, or the low maximum quickly reached, was, through no fault of his own, the victim of circumstances under which it was his peculiar hardship to feel that the greatest official merit could count as nothing towards further advancement.

In some cases even the same Department was split up into several Sub-Departments, each of which had its own scale of pay and its own prospects. Periodical re-organisations were looked forward to as a means of hastening advancement where promotion was in stagnation, and, as it was impracticable to transfer clerks from one Department to another, the public purse was burthened with the weight of superannuation and compensation allowances to men, many of whom were in the prime of life and activity.

These were some of the evils which added to and aggravated the great grievance common to all clerks of the Establishment, viz., that the scale of salaries of the men had been fixed many years previously, and did not bear the original relation to outside rates, which had been continually increasing.

THE WRITERS.—These did not form part of the Establishment, but they constituted a clamorous and disaffected body, numbering some 1,200.

Most of them had entered under a qualifying examination held by the Civil Service Commissioners. They had no security of tenure, and no claim to pension. They were employed from week to week, and were generally paid for their services at the rate of 10d. per hour, with no hope of further advance. They were supposed to be engaged solely upon copying work, but the evidence went to show that only 5 per cent. of their number were in actual practice so engaged. The dis-

content engendered by a total absence of all prospect of advancement was heightened by the knowledge that a large portion of them were employed at a small pittance to perform the same duties as men who enjoyed a comparatively large salary, with all the privileges and prospects attaching to a place on the Establishment.

Such was the state of the Service upon the appointment of Mr. Playfair's Commission. To it was entrusted the task of evolving order and harmony out of the prevailing confusion and discontent.

The Commissioners were officially informed by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Stafford Northcote) that their inquiry was to have reference to the following points.

- " 1. The method of selecting Civil Servants in the
" first instance.
- " 2. The principles upon which men should be
" transferred from office to office.
- " 3. The possibility of grading the Civil Service,
" as a whole, so as to obviate the inconveni-
" ences which result from the difference of
" pay in different Departments.
- " 4. The system under which it is desirable to
" employ Writers or other persons for the dis-
" charge of duties of less importance than
" those usually assigned to Established
" Clerks, or duties of a purely temporary
" character."

In order to be able to view more clearly the present condition of the Service and its connection with this Inquiry, it will be necessary to recapitulate briefly the leading features in the reconstructive scheme of the Commissioners, as well as some of the reasons which guided them in their recommendations.

At the outset, the Commission found that the situation presented itself under two distinct and clearly defined aspects. They found, on the one hand, that the Clerical Staff was thoroughly discontented. The men were dissatisfied with the system under which they worked, with the pay which they received, and the

The task
entrusted to
the Playfair
Commission.

The Situation

prospects to which they looked forward. It was evident, moreover, that they had made up their minds, in no uncertain manner, to do all in their power to have their condition improved.

The Commissioners were constrained to admit that there were some grounds for such complaints, and that it was not unreasonable to ask for some improvement. After speaking of the inequalities and anomalies existing between different Departments, and the previous changes in the Service, which had aggravated rather than removed the difficulties, they go on to say:—

“ The discontent which undoubtedly exists in certain
“ branches of the Service cannot, however, be wholly
“ attributed to these changes. The prices of various
“ commodities have increased within the last few years,
“ and rates of wages are, as a rule, higher than they
“ were. Many employers of labour have had to increase
“ the salaries paid to their clerks, and it is not unnatural
“ that clerks in the Civil Service should expect a similar
“ increase.”

Circumstances made it not unnatural to expect increase of salaries.

This was one side of the situation. The other was, that although the Commissioners found themselves entrusted with the power to recommend the best means of bringing about the much desired improvement, they doubtless knew that if their recommendations involved any material increase in the cost of the establishment, it was very probable they would never see them adopted. To satisfy the demands of existing claimants, and without any increased charge to the State, was the very difficult problem which called for solution.

The Commission might not increase cost of Establishment.

Consequent difficult problem to solve.

Mr. Playfair's Commission tried to find a way out of the difficulty, but the restrictions under which they were placed must be borne in mind, in order to explain the unfortunate results which have attended the adoption of their proposals.

The position and prospects of those who had been so loud in their complaints, were to be improved, but without increasing in a corresponding degree the cost of the establishment. The unfortunate part of the scheme, however, and that in which its weakness consists, is, that the cost of the improvement has to be made up in some way or another.

Leading
feature of the
Playfair
Scheme.

The great principle of the scheme of the Playfair Commission is the division of the Service into two grades—Upper and Lower; the Members of each entering by different examinations, and those of the Lower not being eligible for promotion to the Upper Division, except under very special circumstances.

Upper
Division.

The scheme of the Higher Division resembles that under the old Regulation I., which had already found little favour with the principal Departments. These men are supposed to be the superiors of those forming the Lower grade, at first to the extent of passing a higher examination, and afterwards officially, being placed in superior positions, by virtue of having passed such examination. This part of the scheme has as yet come into only very partial operation, and we will postpone our remarks on the measure of success which has attended it until we have considered the other great feature of the scheme.

Lower
Division

The Lower Division was to constitute the rank and file of the Service, to be officered by the favoured individuals of the Upper Class. This part of the scheme has been eagerly taken up by the Authorities, and it is not difficult to understand how it came to be regarded with such peculiar favour in their eyes.

The new body was to consist of men entering by the same examination as that under which nearly all the principal Departments had been hitherto recruited, viz., the old Class II. Examination, but with prospects and conditions vastly altered. The salary of the men was to begin at £80 annually, and rise by *triennial* increments of £15 to £200* with no prospect of further increase. The new Civil Servant was told in the Order in Council which called him into existence, that he could not reach the higher grade without a Special Certificate from the Civil Service Commissioners, to be granted exceptionally only after ten years' service, and the Order goes on to speak of extra pay not exceeding £100 per annum, to be bestowed strictly by merit and not by seniority, and attached to certain situations

* In the Order in Council of 12th February, 1876, the commencing salary for men in 7 hour offices was made £90 and the maximum £250.

open to Clerks of the Lower Division as a reward for the most meritorious amongst them.

It was intended that the Lower Division should eventually constitute the greater part of the clerical staff, and it was pointed out that throughout the Service almost absolute uniformity in pay, prospect, and conditions would be attained.

Such was the outline of this part of the scheme.

We shall now proceed to examine the application and working of the Playfair scheme in relation to this new Lower Division of the Service.

Working of
Scheme.

The first step towards the introduction of the scheme into those Departments in which it has been fully adopted has been the reorganization of the office. Liberal and exceptional retiring allowances, in many cases supplemented by large bonuses, have at intervals since 1876 been offered in these Departments to such Clerks as were willing to retire. In the Admiralty, Customs, War Office, and Inland Revenue large numbers of the disaffected were satisfied in this way.

Re-organisa-
tion.
Exceptional
retiring
allowances.

Then came the application of the scheme in the interest of those established Clerks who remained. Although 99 per cent. of them had entered the Service under an examination no higher than that now prescribed for the Lower Division, yet at one stroke they were all constituted, either actually or prospectively, the Higher Division of the Service—actually, inasmuch as the Higher Division places created under the new scheme, as well as all the emoluments attaching thereto, were given to the members of this class; prospectively, because, as the number of such places was limited, only the seniors amongst them could come into immediate possession, while for the juniors was reserved the right to succeed to such places as vacancies occurred before any appointment could be made from the outside under the new Higher Division Examination.

Wholesale
appointment
of Higher
Division
Clerks
without
Examination.

Then came the Lower Division. It must be remembered that in the principal Departments vacancies had not been filled up pending a reorganization, and from 1872 to 1876-7 appointments were made only where urgently required. They were now rapidly filled up by men of the new Lower Division.

Appointment
of Lower
Division
Clerks.

Writers
receive the
first Lower
Division
Appoint-
ments.

The nucleus of this class was formed from the Writers. Those of them who had served three years, and were not over 30 years of age, were, upon passing a non-competitive examination, promoted upon the recommendation of the Department in which they served.

The Playfair Commissioners had thus expressed themselves with regard to the Writers:—

“Any attempt to recruit this Division (the Lower Division) from such men as form the main body of Civil Service Writers would result in the collapse of the whole scheme we have recommended.”

Yet, although the Lower Division numbers at present some 1,500, a total of nearly 500 of the first appointments were given to men as “nominees in respect of previous temporary employment.” Some of these were not ordinary Civil Service Writers; a few of them, indeed, belonged to the class which now constitutes the Upper Division, and had entered the service through the same door as many of the members of that body. Appointments to the Lower Division have in this manner been made from Admiralty Writers, extra and temporary Clerks, Civil Service Writers proper, Soldier Clerks, &c.

The remaining vacancies in the Lower Division were afterwards thrown open to men entering by open competition under the new regulations.

Result of
reorganiza-
tion to those
already in the
Service.

It will be seen that those who had brought about the reorganization had fared well by the result. Those of the established clerks who were in a position to avail themselves of the opportunity secured exceptionally liberal terms of retirement. The remainder, besides enjoying the chances of promotion occasioned by the retiring members, were to constitute the Higher Division of the Service, and enjoy all the newly created emoluments attaching thereto, while in many cases the scale of their increments was revised and improved. The most deserving of the Writers, on the other hand, had their claims recognised. They gained a place on the establishment, a fixed increment, and seniority over the incoming members of the new class.

Although most of those who had been fortunate

enough to have been already in the Service had been fairly, not to say liberally treated, there was one thing more, however, which the authorities saw no reason for refusing to grant them. It will be remembered that the scheme required that in each Department a certain number of fixed annual sums, not exceeding £100 per annum, should be set apart as a reward for exceptional merit or responsibility on the part of the Lower Division Clerks. By some curious process, not provided for in any of the Regulations, the greater proportion of this extra pay has now been distributed among those clerks of the old establishment already described, who succeed by seniority to the Higher Division as vacancies occur, and who either still continue to bear their old designations, or are known as "Redundants." The greater part of the remainder has been bestowed upon those of the Writer class who have been placed upon the Establishment as already described. The Authorities have thus given to a few of the members of the Writer class what was in strict justice due to many of them. But in so doing they have vitiated the scheme at the very outset, and perpetuated a lasting injustice against the incoming members of the new Lower Division, while the great grievance of the Writer body remains to this day still untouched.

Lower
Division Duty
Pay largely
absorbed by
'Redundants'
of Higher
Division.

It will be for us now to consider the position of those unfortunate men who have entered the service as Lower Division clerks since the above arrangements have been carried into effect, that is to say, since the summer of 1876.

There are at present in the Service some 1,500 Lower Division Clerks, of whom over 1,000 have entered since 1876 by open competition, and the remaining 500 consist of writers and others who have been placed on the Establishment as before mentioned. Of this number we have had before us authoritative statistics relating to 1,345, and we have no reason to believe that a consideration of the remaining small proportion unaccounted for would materially influence the general results arrived at.

We will first dispose of the subject of extra pay, commonly known as "duty pay," which candidates for Lower Division Clerkships were told on joining

was to be in each office attached to certain situations open to clerks of the Lower Division. The great importance of a just disposal of these places will be seen at once. Promotion is virtually abolished as far as men of the Lower Division Class are concerned. Of this we shall have more to say anon. For the 1,345 Lower Division Clerks, which we are now considering, there are ostensibly provided 201 duty pay places with a total annual remuneration of £8,915. This gives on the average one seat worth £45 a year to every six or seven men, which proportion will perhaps sink to one place to every nine or ten men when the Lower Division has reached its full strength. When it is remembered that this represents practically all chance of reward for exceptional merit or ability, it will be seen that the prospect is none too brilliant at best. It would then scarcely be expected that an examination of the working of the duty pay clause would exhibit the following strange results.

Statistics as
to Duty Pay.

Seven
important
Departments
without Duty
Pay.

To begin with, we find that out of the above total of 1,345 clerks there is the large proportion of 310, representing seven important Departments, for whom no provision whatever in the shape of Duty Pay has been made, although all these men came into the Service in full expectation of a reasonable prospect of such as a reward for exceptional zeal or merit.

103 out of 201
Duty Pay
places held
by "Redund-
ants."

But the prospects of the remainder of their colleagues are only nominally better. Out of the 201 Duty Pay places provided for this number of clerks, 103 places, representing a total annual remuneration of nearly £5,000, are in the hands of Redundant Clerks of the Higher Division: that is to say, over half the total Lower Division Duty Pay places, and considerably more than half the total remuneration attaching thereto, are in the hands of men for whom such allowances were never intended, and who have no claim whatever to them. They have already, as we have shown, been provided for under the scheme, and they receive, irrespective of Duty Pay allowances, salaries two or three times as great as those which Lower Division men will receive when they will occupy the same seats, and will have attained the same length of service.

Of the remaining 98 places 79 are in the possession of Promoted Writers and others, who were placed upon the establishment when the new scheme came into operation.

79 out of remaining 98 Duty Pay places held by Promoted Writers.

There remain out of the 201 Duty Pay places only 19—representing £655—in possession of the men of the Lower Division who have entered by open competition, and who already number over 1,000.

Nineteen places only for the Open Competitive Men.

In one of the largest of the seven Departments before mentioned, in which no Lower Division Duty Pay is provided, the men, feeling that their prospects in this respect were so obviously different from what they had been promised on entering, petitioned the Head of the Department to have carried out the provisions of the Clause in the Regulations which stipulates that Duty Pay shall be provided for the most deserving Lower Division Clerks in each Department. The men were not prepared for the naïveté of the reply of the Head of the Department, who stated his regret that the constitution of the office precluded him from giving effect to the prayer of the petition.

Yet, in spite of all this, Duty Pay is put forward prominently in the Regulations, and made to appear as a substantial addition to the prospects of men who are invited to compete for appointments.

We are quite prepared to be met with an answer which is losing force every day, namely, that the Junior Lower Division Clerks cannot, as yet, reasonably expect to be in possession of Duty Pay, as their short service would scarcely fit them to hold responsible positions. Our reply is, that for such a view to have any weight, it must be shown that there is a probability of some of these men receiving Duty Pay when they will be fit to hold responsible positions. We are painfully convinced, however, that it would be impossible to show anything approaching to a reasonable prospect of holding a Duty Pay allowance for more than an infinitesimal proportion of the open competition Lower Division Clerks at present in the Service. It is, moreover, no satisfaction to the present Members of the Lower Division to be told that a clerk entering the Service 30 years

Hopeless condition of Junior Lower Division Clerks.

hence will have a reasonable prospect of attaining to a Duty Pay allowance.

We have said that 79 of such places out of a total of 201 are held by promoted Writers and others. A Duty Pay allowance in such cases is practically bestowed upon the holder for the remainder of his official career. Taking 27 years as the average age of the Writers promoted, then, as 60 years is the minimum age before which they cannot ordinarily retire on superannuation, it will be seen that 33 years would in this case elapse, during which a man of this class might continue to enjoy a Duty Pay allowance to the exclusion of a man who, from the beginning, had been his junior by only a few days or a few months, as the case may be. Nothing can possibly be said against granting to those men what was in most cases a well merited reward; but we cannot too strongly condemn a system which made even this very small concession to the claims of the class which those men represented possible, only at the expense of widespread injustice to a body of men who could not at the time speak a word for themselves.

Time will
aggravate the
difficulty as to
Duty Pay.

It will also be seen that this difficulty must eventually crop up on a larger scale. There are some 1500 Lower Division Clerks who have entered the Establishment within a period of six years. The total of all the other clerical staff in the offices in which they are employed is 2,300 odd, giving a combined total of 3,800, of which the Lower Division Clerks form nearly 40 per cent., none of whom have been more than six years on the Establishment. Excluding the promoted Writers all these men are of nearly the same age, and remembering that there is to be practically no promotion to the Upper Division, it follows that the small proportion of them who will be fortunate enough to secure Duty Pay at the beginning will continue to enjoy such allowances to the end of their official career to the exclusion of perhaps equal claims on the part of their less fortunate colleagues.

In the case of the 103 Lower Division Duty Pay Allowances held by Redundant Clerks, although it is presumed such allowances must eventually be dropped by such of these as may be promoted to the Upper

Division, the places will still not be available for men of the Lower Division.

We find that in those Departments in which Redundant Clerks hold such Lower Division Duty Pay seats, those in actual possession are, on an average, only in the proportion of one to three of the total number of Redundant Clerks in those Departments, so that as vacancies occur those next in seniority will, as hitherto, continue to appropriate these allowances, and thus prevent them coming into the possession of the men for whom they were ostensibly provided. Nor is this the worst. In some Departments, such as the War Office, the Redundant Clerks are not to be promoted, as a matter of course, to the Upper Division as vacancies occur. Some are to be retained on the Establishment as a distinct class, and these will indefinitely continue, as at present, to absorb nearly all the Lower Division Duty Pay to the exclusion of the Lower Division Clerks to whom it was to be held out as an inducement to zeal and energy in the Service.

We must offer a few remarks on the distribution of these Duty Pay Prizes. It will be remembered that one of the principal objects to be attained in the institution of the Lower Division body was to obviate the evils arising from difference of prospect in different Departments. Even if the scheme were carried out in its integrity, the only prospect left for a Lower Division Clerk would be the hope of gaining a Duty Pay allowance. We find, however, a wide inequality in the provision made in this respect in different Departments. In five Departments representing a total of 232 Lower Division Clerks, provision in the shape of Duty Pay is made for 30 per cent. of the men. In four Departments representing a total of 294 Lower Division men, Duty Pay is provided for 12 per cent. only, while, as already mentioned, in seven Departments representing 310 Lower Division Clerks, no provision whatever has been made. We have confined ourselves to averages, but in some of those Departments Duty Pay is provided for as great a proportion as 50 per cent., while in others the proportion is as low as 3 per cent.

It must be borne in mind also, that under the old

Striking inequality in the provision of Duty Pay in different Departments.

system a forcible answer was at hand to the complaints of those who expressed dissatisfaction at the inequality in different Departments, for candidates were allowed to choose in order of merit on the list the Department in which they elected to serve. But even this satisfaction is taken away from Clerks of the Lower Division, and they have been distributed regardless of their place on the Examination List to seven hour offices and six hour offices, as well as indiscriminately to Departments in which some provision for their future has been made, and to those Departments in which there is a complete absence of all prospect.

We do not think that the state of things sketched above, and which applies to the question of Duty Pay only, can be regarded as satisfactory by even the warmest advocate of the Playfair scheme. As regards the recommendation that Duty Pay places were to be bestowed according to merit only, the results are equally unsatisfactory.

However well this system might work in the upper ranks of the service, where Heads of Departments come into close contact with candidates for promotion, it has up to the present shown few symptoms of soundness when applied to the Lower Division.

We could confidently appeal to the opinion of any Head of a Department who has already had experience of the subject. One might, indeed, well be excused from envying the feelings of any conscientious Head of a Department who was anxious to bestow a Lower Division Duty Pay place according to merit amongst a crowd of eager applicants, the generality of whom could not but appear to him, from his slight acquaintance with them, to be all equally meritorious.

Already, after a short experience under these circumstances, Lower Division Duty Pay has come to be regarded as little better than a personal allowance to be bestowed upon Redundant Clerks by seniority in absence of any better claim, for any departure from this rule has already on more than one occasion led to such scenes in Public Departments as must cause any Head of a Department with a proper sense of his position and dignity to be little anxious to have occasion to promote by merit.

Bestowal of
Duty Pay by
merit—in
theory and
practice.

Indeed, there is every reason to hope—or to fear—we scarcely know which word to use, that if ever it comes to the turn of the Clerks of the Lower Division proper to enjoy these allowances they will be bestowed upon the same principle.

It will thus be seen, then, that the only prospect of the vast majority of the Clerks of the Lower Division who have come in by competitive examination consists of a triennial increment of £15, with a maximum of £200 in six hours offices, and £250 where seven hours' daily attendance is required, thus taking 24 years to reach the maximum in the former, and 34 years in the latter instance.

Triennial
increment
of £15
practically
the only
prospect.

Even *this* residuum of the officially-sketched prospect, if we may so term it, differs when worked out into practice from what one might naturally suppose it to mean.

So far from being equivalent to an annual increment of £5, a triennial increment of £15 is only equivalent to an annual increment of £3 for the first six years, and something like £4 for the first 12 years, while it entails an average difference of £5 per annum to each Lower Division Clerk over the whole period during which he continues to receive an increment.

Illusory
nature of
triennial
increments.

It is very doubtful whether the results of the questionable economy which, for the first time, here introduced this system of triennial increments into the Service are not outweighed by the evil effects of the soreness and suspicion engendered in the mind of the young Civil Servant.

It is significant that throughout the Service the Playfair Commissioners are conceded the credit of being not at all unwilling to take advantage of the probable effect on a youth of 17 of a high initial salary coupled with what appears, on a first glance, to be the equivalent of a certain annual increment, with the prospect of advancement to Duty Pay and other delusive attractions in the background. His services having been secured at the beginning he would not afterwards be in an advantageous position to transfer them elsewhere, although he finds himself advancing into middle life with no incentive to zeal or industry, and sees merit and mediocrity alike

No incentive
to zeal or
industry.

reduced to one dull level from which even exceptional ability on his part can scarcely be expected to raise him, while it is not his fault if he enters into the spirit of the scheme and is content to perform his duties with only just as little carelessness and just as much interest as will be sufficient to secure him against dismissal.

Even in less important details the recommendations of the Playfair Commission have been disregarded to the dissatisfaction of the men. The Commissioners expressed themselves :

“ The assimilation of the rates of pay in the Service would almost of necessity lead to uniformity in hours of attendance, in holidays, and in sick leave. We think it would be well that uniformity in such matters should exist.”

Yet the ordinary leave of Lower Division Clerks varies from a fortnight in some departments to six weeks in others, and the sick leave allowed, from a few weeks to 12 months. The Lower Division is divided into two classes, one class employed for six hours, and the other for seven hours daily. For each class, as has been shown, there is a different rate of pay and different prospects, yet the men are distributed to six or to seven hours offices without the exercise of any choice on their part, and apparently without any reference to their place on the examination list. In some offices overtime is paid for at the rate of 1s. 6d. per hour, while in others the men are compelled to work, during a great part of the year, three and four hours daily longer than their more fortunate colleagues without receiving any extra remuneration whatever.

It will not be difficult under the circumstances to understand the step taken by the Clerks of the Lower Division in 1880. The scheme had then been only four years in operation. But already the men had begun to realise the hopelessness of their position under the new order of things. Even the juniors among them could not help feeling, when they came to understand their position, that their prospects had been deliberately sacrificed in order to satisfy those in the Service who had had sufficient influence to bring about a reorganisation in their own interests. They had won a small salary

by their own endeavours only to find that they had been condemned all their lives as inferiors to men in no degree more competent than themselves as judged by a similar scheme of examination. The fair commencing salary, and the disproportionate prospect, the triennial increment of £15, the circumstances under which it was adopted, and the fallacy which it concealed, were bad enough for a beginner. But promotion to the upper grade of the Service was practically forbidden, thus taking away the hitherto universally recognised incentive to efficient work. The Government, as we shall show further on, were saving at least £100,000 annually by the employment of Lower Division Clerks, which saving went to make up bonuses and compensation allowances for Clerks retired before their time, and large salaries for those who remained. But the strange motives which inspired the whole scheme prevented the new Lower Division Clerks from enjoying even the scant provision made for them, and had largely bestowed Lower Division Duty Pay on Redundant Clerks of the Upper Division.

The Lower Division Clerks decided in 1880 to take the most natural course open to them under the circumstances. In a respectful manner they pointed out to the Treasury in a Memorial the strange hardships of their position, and asked that their Lordships would be pleased to allow—as the most reasonable improvement that could be made—that the triennial increment of £15 might be raised to £25, with a corresponding increase to those men employed in seven hour offices.

The request
of the
Memorialists.

It must certainly have been evident to the authorities that already something was radically wrong. Here was a body of men, scarcely any one of whom had been more than four years in the Service—for it was the new Lower Division Clerks who were most active—coming to lay before the authorities what they considered to be grounds of very grave complaint regarding their present position and their future prospects. It was an instance almost without precedent in the Service, and its great significance cannot be ignored. It will be necessary to give a few figures to show the very reasonable nature of the request. The strength of the Lower Division in 1880, may, for purpose of comparison, be taken as

Significantly
early
discontent.

Facts prove
that the
Lower
Division
Clerks have
superseded
highly paid
Clerks—not
Writers.

1500. The actual total was 1464, but allowing for proportion in seven hour offices, 1500 would represent the total strength if all were in six hour offices.

Although the Playfair Commission contemplated that the Writers were to be superseded by Lower Division Clerks, yet so far have their anticipations been disregarded, that the number of Writers employed instead of being reduced from 1200 to 100 as recommended, has gone on increasing till it has now reached 1,945, including 315 Boy Writers.

The Lower Division men, speaking generally, hold the places and perform the work formerly done, not by Writers, but by men of the old Establishment, who were grouped in classes as before shown. Now, let us suppose that on the average these clerks of the old Establishment commenced at £80, received an annual increment of £10, and attained at this rate an average maximum of £280. There is no doubt that the prospects of the greater proportion of the men whose places are now occupied by Lower Division Clerks were much better than that represented by a commencing salary of £80, with an annual increment of £10 and a maximum of £280.

Cost of
increased
increment
asked for
in 1880
compared
with saving
effected.

We are willing, however, to allow this low average for the purpose of comparison.

A Clerk on this scale commencing at £80 would, during an average career of 34 years, receive £7,420, or a sum equal to £218 yearly.

A Lower Division Clerk commencing at £80, and rising by triennial increments of £15 to £200, would receive in 34 years £5,180, or a sum equal to £152 yearly, showing an average yearly gain of £66 on each Clerk of the Lower Division employed, or on a total of 1,500 Clerks, a yearly gain of close on £100,000.

Surely the Government might have spared a little of this sum to have ensured the success of the scheme and the contentment of the men.

On the scale asked for by the petitioners, a Lower Division Clerk commencing at £80, and rising by triennial increments of £25, would receive in 34 years £5,750, an average of £169 yearly.

This would be equivalent to an average yearly

increase on the present scale of £17 per man, or for 1,500 clerks a total increase of £25,500; a very small sum it will be said considering that the Government, in the mean time, save £100,000 per annum by the introduction of this class.

The Treasury declined to make any change in the increments received by Lower Division Clerks.

On the representations of the men employed in the seven hour offices, that they received no advance on the rate of payment of the seventh hour's services till after their 24th year, while the value of their services for the other six hours had gone on progressively increasing, the Treasury allowed them to commence at £95 instead of £90 as hitherto. This was the only concession, and it will at once be seen that it does not touch the really important grievances.

Treasury slightly modifies the Scheme.

"My Lords" decided that the financial considerations involved in the proposal were so serious as to place its adoption out of the question, and that "it would reopen a question settled little more than five years ago." This was the gist of the reply.

We must now explain how the thoroughly unsympathetic treatment which their request received from the Treasury embittered in the minds of the Lower Division the deep-seated and wide-spread feeling of distrust and discontent.

Reception of Treasury reply.

We have noticed how the Playfair Commission, which was practically composed of Heads of Departments, was intrusted with the consideration of the demand raised in the Service for increased pay. We have shown how this demand was admitted to be not without reason, and how the Commissioners proceeded to satisfy it by calling into existence a body of men who could be required to do the bulk of the work at a greatly reduced rate. We have shown how the saving thus effected, instead of being applied to the relief of the Public Purse, was spent in rewarding all classes of those who had cried out loudly enough to have made themselves heard; how they had been credited with introducing the questionable device of triennial increments, the disproportionately high commencing salary, and the delusive prospect of Duty Pay in the back-

Resumé of the history of the Playfair Scheme.

ground in order to find men to do the work on the new conditions. We have also shown how, when the scheme came to be put in practice, even the small provision made for the New Lower Division men was, contrary to the intent of the scheme, immediately seized upon by Redundants and others, who had already profited largely by the changes.

But with all this evident spirit of hostility towards the claims of the Clerks of the Lower Division, the men were not prepared for the extraordinary statements which came from "My Lords," in the reply to their Memorial.

Finance
versus
Justice.

It was significant that the opening statements in the reply of the Treasury consisted of elaborate statistics to show that the "financial considerations involved in the proposal were serious," as if the justice and propriety of the claim was not the first matter for consideration. Having, however, succeeded in proving that even to grant in full what the men asked for would require an annual increase of £25,000 to satisfy 1,500 men, the proposal was dismissed from further consideration, and "My Lords" then proceeded to stand on the defensive.

"We cannot admit that such increase of charge is demanded by justice to members of this class or is consistent with justice to the Public."

Apparent
confusion as
to what
constitutes
welfare of
Public Purse.

We hardly think that it was demanded by justice to the members of this class, that the only provision made for them under a scheme which at best had but little regard for their welfare, should be given to men many of whom had no shadow of claim to it; and we might also ask if it was consistent with justice to the Public that the large saving effected by the introduction of the Lower Division should, instead of being returned to the Public, be devoted to further increasing the salaries of men who do exactly the same work for a salary, two, three or four times as large, and whose principal qualification consisted in having been able to look after themselves.

After having quoted from the Report of the Playfair Inquiry Commission to the following effect:—

"The rate of remuneration to be fixed for the Lower Division of Clerks should only exceed the rate fixed for similar work in the open market by such an amount as

will attract to the Public Service the *élite* of the class employed in similar work outside of it," "My Lords" went on to say:—

"It is, perhaps, easier to prove from the result that it has been too attractive, rather than not attractive enough. The number of Lower Division clerkships disposed of by open competition up to the end of 1880 had been 995, for which 3,470 persons presented themselves. If each of these persons were counted as a new candidate as often as he had presented himself for examination, the number 3,470 would be raised to 4,189."

It is, indeed, very difficult to understand how these figures came to be employed by the Treasury *against* the claims of the Lower Division, even in default of any better argument.

They would appear to us to furnish most important evidence in support of the request of the Memorialists.

3,470 persons (without, in this case, counting candidates twice over) presented themselves for 995 vacancies, that is between three and four candidates for each vacancy.

Can any person with any experience in business or commercial life imagine a firm of solicitors, or an Insurance Company, advertising places in their clerical staff with prospects sufficient to attract the *élite* of the class—which "My Lords" would have the Lower Division to be—and that the forthcoming candidates would only be in the proportion of between three and four to every vacancy?

Business experience in the matter of application for vacancies.

In comparison with every other Civil Service Examination the result is strikingly in favour of the Memorialists. Counting each man as a new candidate as often as he presents himself, we have 4,189 candidates for 995 vacancies, or a proportion of a little over four to one. And it may be fairly presumed that even this proportion would be much smaller were it not that the Civil Service Commissioners have lately instituted Examinations at a large number of provincial towns, a proceeding which has greatly increased the number of candidates.

Number of candidates for Lower Division compared with other Civil Service appointments

We find that there was not another regular Examina-

tion by open competition held during the same period in which the proportion of candidates to the vacancies was anything like so low. During the same period the vacancies in the Customs Outdoor Department were 562 and the number of candidates 4,695, or a proportion considerably over eight to one. In the Excise Establishment the number of vacancies was 615, and the number of candidates 4,828, or a proportion of nearly eight to one also. Yet there is no hint that the prospects in these branches of the Service have been too attractive. We believe that the facts lie the other way, and there at present exists in the Excise and Customs Establishments a wide-spread and active agitation for a general improvement of prospects. The proportion of candidates to vacancies in open competitive examinations often far transcend these limits, but the above two cases may fairly be compared with that of the Lower Division. Even the records of the writer qualifying examinations held during the same period are a strange comment on the declarations of "My Lords."

It is notorious that the condition of the Writers has long been a standing disgrace to the Service. Their prospects are simply *nil*. Yet during the period above-mentioned 3,090 candidates presented themselves for examination, of whom 780 were registered for employment as Writers, a proportion of nearly 4 to 1, the proportion which "My Lords" characterize in the case of the Lower Division as showing prospects too attractive.

We have no hesitation in saying that the record of the examination for entrance to the Lower Division shows that this portion of the Service is far from being in a healthy condition. Indeed the proportion of candidates to vacancies under open competition scarcely, if at all, exceeds that under a system of limited competition by nomination.

The one and only concession made by "My Lords," viz., that the commencing salary of men in seven hour offices should be £95 instead of £90, was thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of the whole scheme. The already high initial salary is thus further increased, and we do not think that any reasonable person can but admit that it is now even as disproportionate to the

Treasury
concession
in wrong
direction.

value of the services of a youth of 17 or 18, as it is to the prospects which follow.

We will now give a brief sketch of the service as it exists at this moment, as it will be instructive to judge what measure of success has attended the working of the Playfair scheme in other directions.

THE WRITERS.—It will be remembered that the system of the employment of Writers was one of the heads under which the attention of the Playfair Commissioners was directed to the evils existing in the Service. On this point they were outspoken enough. They most emphatically condemned their existence as a body, on the conditions under which they were employed. They recommended that only those actually employed on copying should be retained. The body then numbered some 1,200, and Mr. Playfair's Commission contemplated its reduction to 100, yet on the last list issued their number has now reached 1,945, including 315 Boy Writers. Their grievances still remain the same, and the conditions under which they continue to be employed remain unchanged.

Application
of Scheme as
regards
Writers.

THE UPPER DIVISION.—We have already referred to the Upper Division of the Service, as sketched by Mr. Playfair's Scheme. The commencing salary for a Clerk of this Division is £100, rising to £400 by triennial increments of £37 10s., with prospect of Duty Pay not exceeding £200. The scheme of examination is the same as that for the old Class I. The intention is, when all the Redundant Clerks shall have passed into the Upper Division, to fill up all further vacancies from the outside, under this examination. We have referred to such a mode of filling up the higher appointments in each Department as contrary to all sound and just principles of administration, and we have shown that such a plan had already proved little better than a failure. As however, in most Departments the vacancies will, for an indefinite period, continue to be filled up from the Redundant Clerks, we have merely to refer to the operation of the scheme in one instance in which it has come into immediate operation.

Application
of Scheme as
regards the
Upper
Division.

The Board of Inland Revenue employ in their service a class of officials known as Surveyors of Taxes.

These appointments were formerly held by Clerks under the old Class II. scheme. The men had been required, before being appointed to the post, to serve a sort of apprenticeship in the duties under an experienced Surveyor, and were then known as Assistant Surveyors of Taxes.

At the application of the Playfair Scheme, these men, in common with their colleagues in other Departments, were constituted members of the Upper Division of the Service. There happened to be no redundants in this case, and when vacancies shortly afterwards occurred, they were filled up by men entering under the Examination for the New Higher Division. Lower Division Clerks were appointed to fill the places and perform the duties of the Assistant Surveyors.

Failure of
Upper
Division
scheme in the
Inland
Revenue.

Twenty-four appointments have been made under the Upper Division Examination, and of these no less than eight have since been resigned. So unsatisfactory was the working of the scheme, that a few months since the Commissioners of Inland Revenue decided not to receive any more men under such a system.

The fittest
men ineligible

Here, however, a difficulty immediately presented itself. They found they had got a class of men from which appointments to the post of Surveyor of Taxes had originally been made as a matter of course. The Lower Division Clerks employed under Surveyors of Taxes had all passed as high an entrance examination as the Surveyors themselves. They were actually performing the duties, and each of them held the place, if not the name, of Assistant Surveyor, and on occasions of absence virtually took the place and performed the duty of the Surveyor himself. By the Playfair scheme, however, such men were then ineligible, even under "special circumstances," for promotion to a post coming under the Higher Division Regulations. The Treasury had to sanction a subsidiary examination through which Second Class Assistants of Excise were to be appointed to the vacant posts, although such men were possessed of no special fitness for the situation, either by position or training, while they had originally passed a lower entrance examination than Clerks of the Lower Division.

The Lower Division Clerks employed in Surveyors Offices then asked the Board of Inland Revenue, that if they could not be appointed Surveyors of Taxes, or Assistant Surveyors of Taxes, by virtue of their position and training, they might, at least, be allowed to stand the examination as candidates for the situation in common with the Second Class Assistants of Excise. The Board of Inland Revenue, however, were compelled to tell the men that they had no power to allow them the privileges granted to Second Class Assistants of Excise. Not indeed, because the interests of the Public Service were consulted, for the interests of the Service were most undoubtedly therein disregarded, but because the so-called equality between them and their colleagues in other Departments would be disturbed.

The interests of the Public Service sacrificed to the Doctrine of Uniformity

In strange contrast to the decision of the authorities in this case, is their action in another instance, in which they would seem to have ignored the existence of such unchangeable principles, and to have acted directly contrary to the intent of the Playfair scheme. In consequence of a change in the system of work, a reorganisation of the Clerical Staff of the Customs Department has recently taken place. A large number of Lower Division Clerks have had to be provided for, whose services were no longer required in the same capacity in the departments under the new system. The Treasury, strange to say, have sanctioned a scheme by which a large proportion of such Lower Division Clerks have been transferred to the Outdoor Service of the Customs Department. The minimum initial salary of these men in their new position is £110. They will rise by annual increments of £7 10s., instead of triennial increments of £15, and attain a possible maximum of £550 instead of £200 or £250 open to other Clerks of the Lower Division. The authorities have here reconciled themselves to disturbing the equality between the Lower Division Clerks in the Customs Department and their colleagues in other Departments.

Provisions of the Scheme violated by force of events.

It is but reasonable to ask if it is seriously contemplated to carry out to the bitter end a scheme which is so evidently unsuited to the practical wants of the Service.

Does the
Playfair
Scheme meet
the wants of
the Public
Service?

We have no hesitation in expressing our conviction that the great discontent at present existing in the Lower Division, marks only the very beginning of what must eventually be, if the authorities do not act in time, a general and radical movement throughout all classes of the Service. The Regulations respecting the Lower Division are practically the only part of the Playfair scheme which has been yet applied. But can it reasonably be expected that the Regulations respecting the Upper Division will work satisfactorily—if they were ever meant to work at all? On the other hand, there is apparently no hope of a settlement of the Writer question, which grows a greater scandal every day.

In Departments such as the Customs and Inland Revenue, and in the latter case, perhaps more than in any other Department, the internal organisation already most nearly approaches the ideal of the Playfair Commission, the great body of the work is of such a nature that even for the highest posts trained and experienced ability must ever furnish a qualification immeasurably superior to that of any educational or other test. Could the Playfair Commissioners, who were undoubtedly experienced men, have thought that the Heads of such Departments, responsible for the efficient discharge of the duties of their offices, would sacrifice the interests of the Public Service in order to carry out a scheme which makes it the exception for vacant places to be filled by the most capable men, and could they have thought that they would secure the efficient and contented service of the men thus excluded?

Bearing in mind the recent experience of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue in their attempt to apply the Upper Division Scheme to their Department, we may ask whether the Playfair Commissioners could really have thought that a commencing salary of £100, rising by triennial increments of £37 10s. to £400, could tempt men of the qualifications which the Higher Examination requires, to enter the Service, or to remain if they did enter.

If they did not think so, the whole scheme must have been a make-shift to stave off the inevitable result of increased expenditure. The Commission was instituted to inquire

into the demand for increased pay. The Commissioners said they could effect a saving in the work of the lower ranks of the Service, which saving would be applied to the better remuneration of the work performed by the upper ranks. Undoubtedly they are effecting a large saving, as we have shown, at the expense of the lower ranks, and with it they have rewarded those who have raised the cry for increased pay. But where is the provision for the *future* better remuneration of the upper grade? Is it represented by a scale of salary commencing at £100 and rising by triennial increments of £37 10s. to £400, and does a short experience show that the men who are induced to enter, regard such prospects as representing increased remuneration?

Without suggesting in detail the alterations necessary, we would, in conclusion, point out the direction in which timely action may avoid the continuance of the discontent which already exists in the Civil Service, and which must become intolerable if the present system is carried out to the letter.

The direction
in which
action is
required.

1. While condemning the system of Duty Pay as entirely unsuited to the requirements of the Service, we think that, in justice to those who were induced to enter by the prospect of obtaining it, some definite prospect in lieu thereof is an imperative necessity of the moment.

2. If the men of the Lower Division are to remain efficient public servants, there must be some incentive to zealous work. It is opposed to all the traditions of the Civil Service that, as under the Playfair Scheme, there should practically be no career whatever open to men, the predecessors of whom, with the same qualifications, have proved themselves equal to filling satisfactorily all the higher posts of the Service. We would also call attention to the fact that this great evil is in no way met by the possibility, under special circumstances, of rising to the Upper Division. The Upper Division, it must be remembered, is not a large proportion of the total number of Clerks in each Department. It is only part of the hardship of the case that the promotion to the

Upper Division is indefinitely blocked by Redundant Clerks. As we have shown, a place in the Upper Division must be for ever beyond the reach of nearly all the men of the Lower Division, while the few who may reach it will do so at a small salary and in the decline of life.

3. A properly arranged scale of increments, proportionate to the growing value of the services and experience of the Clerk, would be acceptable to the mass of the Lower Division, and would remove some of the anomalies of the present system. It had been previously a universal and just rule in the Civil Service for a man to receive a larger periodical increment as the value of his experience increased with length of service. But the salary of a Lower Division Clerk rises by a fixed triennial increment of £15 till he reaches his maximum. In strange contrast to this provision were the words of the Playfair Commission :—

“ We are of opinion that the salary should be low in the earlier years of the service, and should rise more rapidly as the Clerk gets older, when his responsibilities in life increase, and the value of his experience becomes greater to the State. The example of the open professions, and the practice of private firms and establishments, strongly confirm the view that good service will be better secured by good prospects in later life, than by a high initial salary.”

The very opposite of an arrangement so universally recognised as necessary by all employers prevails in the case of the Lower Division. We think that the most ardent advocate of the Playfair Scheme cannot find fault with a demand on the part of the Lower Division that, instead of the present fixed triennial increment of £15, there should be substituted a scale of increments proportional to the growing experience of the Clerk.

