

with kind regards &c

THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE AS A PROFESSION.

A Lecture

DELIVERED AT TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN,

ON

JUNE 10th, 1903.

BY

VINCENT A. SMITH, M.A.,

INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE (RETIRED);

READER IN INDIAN HISTORY AND HINDUSTANI IN THE
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THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE AS A PROFESSION

THE HOME CIVIL SERVICE is an indefinite and unorganised multitude of men and women, consisting of all servants of the Crown, other than the naval and military forces, and may be said with accuracy to include the Premier and the postman, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the office caretaker.

Between the extreme limits thus indicated comes the vast army of clerks. The Home Civil Service is mainly clerkdom; and to describe a man as a Civil Servant is a polite way of saying that he is a clerk in a Government office.

The Indian Civil Service is very different. It is a compact, organised body consisting of about nine hundred specially selected and

highly-trained officers, with duties and privileges defined by statute.¹ The highest official in India, the Viceroy, is not ordinarily a member of the Service, nor, on the other hand, is a single clerk included in its ranks. The Indian 'civilian,' the man lawfully entitled to write the letters C. S. or I. C. S. after his name, may in the course of his service be many things successively, or all at once, but, whatever he may be or become, he can never, even in his most junior and 'griffin' days, be a clerk.

The young man, therefore, who thinks of entering the narrow gate which leads to the Indian Civil Service, and feels a distaste for the kind of employment ordinarily associated with the idea of the Home Civil Service, need not fear that, if he goes to India, he will ever be called upon to do the work of a clerk. The call of duty may summon him to hunt

¹ Especially the 'Indian Civil Service Act' of 1861. Subsequent enactments permit the occasional appointment of natives, under certain restrictions, to offices ordinarily reserved by the Act for the Civil Service.

down a gang of brigands, defend a fort, lay out a cholera camp, frame the Imperial Budget, or do many other things not specially provided for in his early education ; but, whatever may befall, he will never be asked to perform the routine duties of an office clerk.

The moment he arrives in India, the young 'civilian,' to use the current Anglo-Indian term, will find himself figuring in the Gazette as an Assistant Magistrate and Collector, lawfully empowered to inflict a month's hard labour and fifty rupees fine upon his erring fellow-creatures. For the first year or two he will not be of much account officially ; and it is just possible that his seniors may occasionally find him more inconvenient than useful. But, in due course, he emerges from the chrysalis or 'griffin' stage, and becomes a 'full-powered' or 'first-class' magistrate. During his apprenticeship he will be required to pass examinations according to both the Lower and Higher Standards in the vernacular language of his province, the codes

of law, and a miscellaneous collection of revenue, police, and treasury regulations of very unattractive character.

Having got over the Higher Standard fence, and having been gazetted to the exercise of full powers as a magistrate and revenue official, the young officer, at the age of five or six-and-twenty, becomes a personage with extensive powers and grave responsibilities. In his magisterial capacity, he is empowered and required to try, sitting by himself, all offences except those of the most heinous kinds, and may sentence an offender to two years' hard labour and a fine of a thousand rupees. He investigates the more heinous cases which he is not empowered to try, and, if necessary, commits the accused persons to a higher Court. As a revenue officer, he deals with many intricate matters concerning the land, such as boundary disputes, the determination of fair rents, and so forth, as may be required by the law prevailing in the province where he serves. As an executive officer, he soon discovers that *nihil humani a*

se est alienum. Everything connected with the general administration concerns his immediate chief, the District Magistrate; and the young assistant may be called upon to aid his chief in any of the branches of the multifarious duties imposed upon the head of the District.

After some years of this sort of work—more or less according to luck—he will probably be asked to elect between the judicial and executive lines of employment. The man who likes a quiet life probably will prefer the dignified, if monotonous, duties of the Bench, and, as a matter of course, will become a District and Sessions Judge, with unlimited civil and criminal jurisdiction, subject to the control of the High Court of his province. If he is exceptionally able or lucky, or, still better, is both, he will himself obtain a seat in a High Court, have a good time, and ultimately retire with an extra pension.

But the young officer who is active, energetic, and ambitious will generally incline to choose the more exacting tasks of the execu-

tive line. He will then by virtue of seniority, sooner or later, become the chief magistrate of a District, and the local representative of His Majesty and the Government of India for all purposes. The 'District,' I must explain, is the unit of administration in India, and means a big tract of country, fifty or a hundred miles across, inhabited by a vast population, numbering generally from a million to three millions. The post of District Magistrate, although one attainable in the ordinary course by the rank and file of the Service, is, perhaps, the most interesting appointment which an officer holds in the course of his career; but it usually implies hard work and much wear and tear. A successful District Officer may expect to be selected for the high post of Commissioner of Division. The Commissioner stands between the District Officer and the provincial government, and exercises a general supervision over the affairs of several districts constituting a 'Division.'¹ In the province

¹ In the Madras Presidency there are no Commissioners, and 'Districts' are very large.

where I served, the average population of a division is about seven millions. The most fortunate of the officers in the executive branch of the Service may look forward to attaining one or more of the high dignities of Chief Commissioner or Lieutenant-Governor of a province, Resident at the Court of a great feudatory, or member of the Viceroy's Cabinet.

Among miscellaneous appointments open to members of the Indian Civil Service, and in some cases reserved to them by law, may be mentioned the office of Inspector-General of Police, Director of Public Instruction, Accountant-General, and Secretary to either the Government of India or a provincial government.

The brief outline which has been given will, I hope, suffice to indicate in a general way the nature of the various and multifarious duties entrusted to the Indian Civil Service, and to show how widely they differ from those ordinarily performed by members of the Home Civil Service. The special

function of the Indian Civil Service is to provide a corps of trained officers to undertake the higher tasks of the judicial and general administration ; and every junior member of the Service may reasonably hope that he will, in time, share the honour and responsibility of such tasks.

The officers enrolled in special technical departments, such as Police, Public Works, Forests, and Telegraphs, however important and honourable their employment may be, are not members of the Indian Civil Service.

Although, nowadays, no member of the Indian Civil Service is or can become a clerk, in the olden days all its members began their career as clerks or 'writers.' As everybody knows, the Empire of India is the unexpected result of the trading operations of the East India Company, which received its first charter from Queen Elizabeth on the last day of the year 1600. For more than a century and a half from that date, the transactions of the Company were almost wholly commercial ; and its agents, who were

traders—not administrators—were known, according to their seniority, as ‘writers,’ ‘factors,’ ‘junior merchants,’ or ‘senior merchants.’ Robert Clive, one of the young ‘writers,’ having quitted his desk and turned soldier, won the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and so founded the Indian Empire. But all the writers and merchants were not Clives; and the failure of many to carry rightly the burden of the greatness thrust upon them brought shame and disgrace upon the English name. Clive did something, and Warren Hastings—the greatest of Indian civilians—did much, to convert greedywriters and merchants into honourable officials. Lords Cornwallis and Wellesley continued the good work; and the Indian Civil Service, as an organised instrument of government, may be said to date from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The establishment of the East India College at Haileybury, a few years later, provided facilities for the general education and professional training of the young officers

selected for the Service by the Directors, and for half a century much good work was done there. But the mutiny brought about, along with other changes, the abolition of Haileybury, which closed its doors in December, 1857.¹ Personally, I feel convinced that the abolition of the East India College was a mistake, and that selected candidates for the Indian Civil Service would receive a far better training in a reformed and properly equipped Oriental College than they can obtain at the Universities. The question of the proper training for the Indian Civil Service is, however, much too complex to be treated parenthetically, and I cannot discuss it now.

¹ The College of Fort William at Calcutta was founded by Lord Wellesley in 1800. The East India College, which was at first located in Hertford Castle when opened in February, 1806, was transferred to Haileybury in 1809. The College was closed on the 7th December, 1857, and formally abolished on the 31st January, 1858. The College at Fort William was abolished in 1854. (*Memorials of Old Haileybury*: Constable, 1894.)

My purpose in this lecture is merely to give our students and their parents a notion of what the Service actually is and does, and to urge my young countrymen to claim their rightful share in the good things of a career which still probably offers higher interests and greater attractions than those offered by any other branch of the Service of the Crown.

The only official career which, to my thinking, can compare with the Indian Civil Service in the attractions presented to an able youth with spirit and ambition is that of the Royal Engineers. The 'Sapper' has the world for his oyster. His opportunities are not confined by the limits of India; and, as recent examples testify, he may aspire, not only to the ordinary prizes of his profession, but to the rank of a Colonial Governor in Africa or Australia, or of Commander-in-Chief in India. A clever lad with a strong bent for mathematics will probably be well advised to try for the Royal Engineers at seventeen or eighteen years of age rather

than for the Indian Civil Service four years later. But a young man, capable of taking a good degree in honours, whose tastes lie in the direction of the 'humanities'—the studies usually associated with the name of Oxford—should consider well before he rejects a good chance of entering the Indian Civil Service in favour of either the Home Civil Service or one of the learned professions in the United Kingdom.

I am often puzzled to understand why so many of the best men who succeed at the open competition elect for the Home Service rather than for the Indian. A clerkship on £150 a year, with the probability that the successful candidate will be a clerk of sorts for all his life, does not seem to me so attractive as it evidently is to many people. In the Home Service we find routine work, little dignity, small pay, and few good things. In the Indian Service, we find responsible work of the most varied character, the highest judicial and administrative dignities, and numerous well-paid appointments. Such

good things as the Home Service has to offer are not only few in number, but tardy in coming; whereas the Indian ‘plums,’ although far inferior in richness to the produce of the extinct pagoda tree, are still a fairly abundant crop, and may be gathered when a man is forty or fifty years of age. What other Service in the world can offer posts equal in dignity and emolument to those reserved by Act of Parliament for the nine hundred members of the Indian Civil Service?

The Lieutenant-Governors of four great provinces or kingdoms—Bengal, Burmah, the Upper or United Provinces, and the Punjaub—must all be members of the Service, which is also entitled to the Chief Commissionerships of Assam and the Central Provinces, to one or two seats in the Viceroy’s Cabinet, and to a multitude of high administrative and judicial posts carrying with them extensive powers, commensurate responsibilities, and adequate allowances.

The Judicial branch of the Service offers to

its members many desirable Judgeships in the High Courts and Chief Courts of the different provinces. For instance, in the province where I served, three out of the six judges of the High Court are selected from the Civil Service—the Chief Justice, and two puisne judges being barristers, of whom one is usually a native.¹ Nor are the District Judgeships to be despised. The rates of pay vary; but a few of the District Judges receive 3000 rupees a month, or £2400 a year at the present rate of exchange.

The highest salary which a member of the Service can draw is that enjoyed by each of the four Lieutenant-Governors—8333 rupees a month, or £6666 a year. The Chief Commissioners, who govern the minor provinces, draw salaries less in amount, but still considerable.

In the early days of his career, the pay of a Civil Servant is ordinarily very moderate,

¹ Sir John Stanley, the present Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, is a graduate of the University of Dublin.

while the work is hard. He begins on 400 rupees a month (£320 a year), which is raised to 450 rupees (£360 a year) when he passes the Lower Standard Departmental examination, and to 500 rupees a month, or £400 a year, when he passes the Higher Standard and becomes a first-class magistrate. This second step should be attained in two years.¹

From this point onwards the emoluments of different officers equal in standing may diverge widely. Each provincial government has its own staff; and, as a rule, an officer remains for all his service in the province to which he was originally attached. Owing to fluctuations in the policy of the Home Government, and many other causes which I cannot stop to examine, the rate of promotion varies greatly in different provinces and at different periods.

A few years ago the Service in all provinces was permitted to suffer such diminution in numbers that there were not men

¹ 'Exchange compensation allowance' adds about 6 per cent. to these figures.

enough to go round, and youngsters of three and four years' service were acting as chief magistrates of districts. Latterly, the rate of recruitment has been increased; and promotion is now comparatively slow in every province. From Madras, and the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, where prospects seem to be particularly unpromising, complaints are beginning to be heard; but I have not yet heard of similar growls from other provinces. Much inequality in advancement is to be ascribed to individual fitness, luck, or opportunity. It is therefore unsafe to venture on any general statement affirming that after so many years' service a civilian may expect so much pay or such and such rank.

I am perhaps justified in saying that for the first five years of his service, especially if married, he will be a poor man, that when of ten years' standing he will be fairly well off, and that after twenty years' service he should be drawing in the ordinary line not less than £1800 a year. Of course, if an

officer is a favourite of fortune, he may do very much better. Sir Raymond West became a Judge of the Bombay High Court when he had only twelve years' service ; and, from time to time, officers exceptionally lucky rise to high posts under the Government of India at an early age.

A man who becomes a Secretary to the Government of India has his fortune made, and, in the course of natural evolution, ordinarily develops into a Chief Commissioner or Lieutenant-Governor, and a K. C. S. I.

All pensions may be regarded as a form of deferred pay. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case of the Indian Civil Service, each member of which pays to a very large extent for his pension.

With the exception of a very few High Court Judges of long service as such, every civilian, irrespective of his rank or pay at the date of retirement, draws the same pension, £1000 a year.

He may claim this allowance when he has completed twenty-five years' service, includ-

ing twenty-one years' Indian service, but not a day sooner. No intermediate pensions are allowed, except to certified invalids; and an invalid pension cannot exceed £450 a year. He may hold on for ten years longer, but not a day more; and the extra service earns no extra pension.¹

From the day he joins the Service until he retires, the civilian has to contribute four per cent. of his salary, be it great or small, towards the cost of his pension. A result of this arrangement is that the lucky officer who has enjoyed high pay for many years defrays probably the greater part of the charge for his pension, while the retiring allowance of the man who has had bad luck and comparatively small pay must be mostly provided by the State. This is a very peculiar and anomalous system, differing totally from that in force in the Home

¹ An officer actually in possession of one of the great offices, such as that of Lieutenant-Governor, tenable by custom for five years, retains it, even though his period of thirty-five years may have expired.

Service ; but I do not think that a change is either desired or desirable.

A hundred years ago, when the organisation of the Service was inchoate and incomplete, no provision was made for family pensions. When an officer died prematurely—a common accident in those days—it was the practice to circulate an appeal to his brother officers for charitable subscriptions for the benefit of his widow and children. In order to obviate the scandal and distress inseparable from this procedure, the East India Company sanctioned the establishment of special funds—one for each Presidency, Bengal, Bombay, and Madras—charged with the provision of annuities sufficient to keep the widows and children of deceased officers above the pressure of want. These funds, derived primarily from the subscriptions of the Civil Servants, and supplemented by liberal contributions from the Company in the shape of high interest on the accumulations, were administered by Service committees, under the supervision of the Comptroller-

General. Every member of the Service, married or unmarried, was bound to subscribe, but the married men paid nearly double the unmarried rate, and the contributions for children's pensions were levied only from the parents concerned.

This system lasted until 1880, when the Secretary of State, with due reservation of vested interests, abolished the Presidency funds, and undertook the provision of family pensions as a charge on Indian revenues. Although no separate fund now exists, and everything depends upon the pleasure of the Secretary of State, the pensions continue to be provided on the same principles as formerly, but on a less liberal scale. Every member of the Service, married or unmarried, is still bound by covenant to subscribe. A considerable donation is exacted at the time of marriage, varying from £64 to £600, according to the age of the husband, and the disparity between his age and that of his bride. The subscriptions for widows' pensions range from £20 to £116 a year for married, and from £15 to

£58 for unmarried men. Parents pay £6 15s. annually for each boy, and £12 15s. for each girl. Annuitants continue to pay the subscriptions for children, and also £50 a year, if married, and half that sum, if unmarried, for widows.

In return for these subscriptions the widow of an officer of less than twelve years' service is entitled to £250, and the widow of a senior officer to £300, a year. The allowances of children range from £25 to £100, according to age, and cease, in the case of a boy, at the age of 21, and in the case of a girl, on marriage. The daughter of a subscriber also receives £250 as a marriage portion.

The details of the pecuniary emoluments and liabilities of the Service which have been given do not afford much support to the notion, which is, I believe, commonly held, that the young civilian, with nothing beyond his pay, can well afford to marry at the outset of his career, even before he sails for India. An income varying between the limits of £320 and £400 a year for the first three or

four years of service may be enough for one person, but it is not always adequate for two or more; and the figures may well suggest caution to young officers who contemplate early matrimony. The newly joined assistant will usually find it advantageous to gain some experience of working in a strange country in single harness before experimenting in double harness.

The pecuniary attractions of the Service lie, not in the rates of salary during an officer's early years, which are extremely moderate, but in the certainty of a good income after fifteen or twenty years' service, the assurance of a decent pension after twenty-five years, and the practical certainty of high and lucrative appointments for all officers who are able to hold on and avoid premature retirement.

Although, as a matter of business, it has been necessary to spend some time in explaining the exact nature of the pecuniary inducements offered by the career of an Indian civilian, I should be sorry if I could not

recommend the Indian Civil Service to spirited young Irishmen on higher grounds. I venture to recommend it, not merely because, on the whole, it pays much better than most professions, but because it offers to an able and ambitious young man an honourable and manly career, giving full scope for the exercise of the strongest character and the highest intellectual power, and holding out promise of eminent distinction. The most valuable prizes and the most honourable distinctions of the Service are freely open to all qualified competitors; and a man needs no family or social influence to carry him to the highest pinnacle of official rank—the Lieutenant-Governorship of a great province.¹ The history of Indian administration is filled with proofs of this proposition; and the recent experience of two Irishmen, who have won their present high positions solely by

¹ It is not likely that a member of the Civil Service will ever again be appointed Viceroy. Lord Lawrence is the last example of a 'civilian' Viceroy and Governor-General (1864-68).

merit, may well serve to encourage the legitimate aspirations of their young countrymen now about to join, or thinking of entering, the Indian Civil Service. All Trinity men feel a justifiable pride in claiming as a son of their Alma Mater Sir James Digges La Touche, K.C.S.I., who now worthily holds the honoured position of Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Galway can regard with equal satisfaction the career of the Right Honourable Sir Antony MacDonnell, G.C.S.I., the predecessor of Sir James La Touche in that high office, who, after thirty-six years of arduous Eastern service, has sufficient energy left to tackle the thorny problems which beset the path of the rulers of Ireland.

It is true that we cannot all become Lieutenant-Governors, but every young man who enters the Service should work the better for knowing that he has as good a chance as anyone else of attaining the highest rank, and that, even if he should miss that prize, there are many valuable and honourable appoint-

ments which await officers who possess the double qualification of seniority and merit. Even after retirement, the official career of the Indian Civil Servant is not necessarily closed. He may, if sufficiently favoured by fortune, become a member of the Council which assists the Secretary of State for India, or one of the Secretaries at the Indian Office. In either of these cases he has the satisfaction of drawing both pension and active pay at the same time. Retired members of the Indian Civil Service are also to a limited extent in demand for administrative appointments unconnected with India. At the present moment two of the principal officials of the London police are Indian Civil Service annuitants.

When all these certainties, probabilities, and possibilities are considered, I think that the assertion is justified that no other official Service in the world, with perhaps the exception of the Royal Engineers, offers to an energetic young man of good abilities so many openings for the attainment of

rank, dignity, power, and modest competence.

Besides the official attractions of pay and power, an Indian career has many charms, and few men who have once experienced those charms can lose them for ever without a pang. The feeling of brotherhood and good-fellowship which arises so naturally in the hearts of a small society of Europeans set in the midst of a vast multitude of Orientals, cannot be matched at home, and is a very precious possession. Most of us have something of the sportsman in our natures ; and in spite of all the havoc wrought in the old hunting-grounds by the spread of cultivation and the increase of population, the man of moderate means can still find use for gun and rifle in India. Life in camp gives many delightful opportunities for combining business with pleasure ; and the best sportsman is very often the best official. There are diversities of gifts ; and the duties of the Indian Civil Service are so diverse that there is room for men of all

tastes—for the scholar as well as for the sportsman. The Indian Empire is a vast ethnological and linguistic museum, stored with an infinite treasure of materials for the study of the science of man in all its branches.¹ The history and antiquities of the country offer an illimitable field for investigation; and I can testify from personal experience that these subjects can furnish welcome relaxation from official toil and ample occupation for the long leisure of retirement. I would earnestly desire to impress on all young officers going to India the necessity—I am tempted to say the duty—of acquiring and keeping at least one hobby. In the long hours of a day in the hot weather, when the offices happen to be closed, and nothing disturbs the deadly silence of the darkened house, when tobacco

¹ In the person of Dr. G. A. Grierson, C.I.E., Director of the Linguistic Survey of India, the University of Dublin can claim one of the most distinguished scholars who have graced the ranks of the Service.

ceases to charm, and the delights of long drinks must be chastened with discretion—the man with a hobby may still be content and rejoice in the quiet which bores to death his idle comrade. Let the hobby be what it may—beetles, coins, postage-stamps, or anything—a man should see that he has one, and not be happy until he gets it.

People tell me that nowadays our best Irish students seldom turn their thoughts to India, and that they prefer very small things at home to all that the East can offer. I venture to think that they are mistaken, and am persuaded that a young man who has brains enough to succeed in the ‘open competition’ will usually do better for himself, and live a fuller and more interesting life, by going to India, than he could expect to have if he remained at home. India needs, and is worthy of, the best that we can give her. This year our University sends three only of her sons. They, though few, are fit, and will, no doubt, worthily uphold in the East the honour of their University and

country ; but, instead of three, I should like to see ten going forth filled with the desire and determination to emulate the fame and equal the achievements of the many great men—English, Scotch, and Irish—whose names illustrate the roll of the Indian Civil Service.