

Training for the Civil Service.

Louis Windmüller in the June Forum.

Facts such as these have been pointed out time and again by civil-service reformers, but it seems that more radical measures are called for. All grades of the administrative public service, except the highest positions, ought to be brought within the range of appointment by competitive examinations. Of course the President must select his own Cabinet, and a few officials of the highest rank, to help him carry out his policy. Aside from these, he should not have, and it is indeed questionable whether he have, the right to deprive any honest man of the position which he fills well and to the satisfaction of the public.

I suggest that our schools and colleges should provide a regular course of training for persons of good moral character who desire to devote themselves to the public service. A Postmaster should know the geography of our country, all the regulations of the service, and enough arithmetic and bookkeeping for the requirements of his position. His general education should be good enough to entitle him to social standing in his community. All Custom House officers should have the same accomplishments. Appraisers should be conversant with the value of goods, the materials they are made of, and the currencies and customs of trade of the various countries we deal with. Those who desire to embrace the Consular or diplomatic career should have not only all this knowledge, they should also be proficient in foreign languages, political economy, and international law. The Governments of France and of Germany require professional Consuls who are college-bred.

When the studies of candidates are completed they ought to submit to public examination by competent examiners and in the presence of United States Commissioners. Only those persons should be considered candidates fit for the office they seek who pass with honors. There should be appointed in their turn as vacancies occur. After a sufficiently long and meritorious service promotion should follow upon another competitive examination. Retiring allowance should be provided for those who have faithfully performed their duties, when they become incapacitated by age or sickness. The holding of public office would then be an honor carefully guarded as a sacred trust instead of being considered, as it is, the temporary reward of political wire pulling. A similar system prevails not only in Europe, but in our own army and navy. The bureaucratic example of the former and the severity of the latter should be avoided. But we can adopt from both the rules best suitable to our own civil service.