

wilderness, lifeless and desolate as the grave; of Loch Linnhe, with the savage crags of Appin and the blue hills of Morven for its background; of the sacred island of Lismore, long the seat of the Bishops of Argyre; of wooded Loch Eitive, and the ruins of Dunstaffnage Castle, where once the Scone Coronation Stone, now in Westminster Abbey, was kept; of the noble sweep of Oban Bay, with the ivy-clad keep of Dunolly, the lonely stronghold of the old Lords of Lom, guarding its bluff northern cliffs. Merely to catalogue the names of these places is to suggest a moving panorama of enchanting beauty. Nor is the rest of the journey less interesting or picturesque. Our steamer leaving Oban has had to wind its way through a rugged archipelago, ere it glided into the Crinan Canal, which cuts the peninsula of Cantyre; down the sparkling waters of Loch Fyne, which the phosphorescent herring-shoals at night

turn into molten silver; past the sombre peaks of Arran; through the wooded strait called the Kyles of Bute to Rothesay Bay, from whence looking over the glassy waters on the further shore, a mountain barrier, pierced by great fiords or sea-lochs, is seen rearing itself in stately grandeur. The route is one that haunts the memory with visions of beauty that only fade with life itself. But for us the vision, at the time at least, vanished like a day-dream. A few hours steaming brought us to Glasgow—to the busy, pushing, work-a-day world of reality and fact—to scenes and sounds before which the romance of a Highland tour melted away like a cloud, into whose fleecy heart the Sun-god has shot one of his gleaming arrows. We bade good-bye to Dreamland, saying, "We *have* been there, and would go again." So, we venture to predict, will everybody say who this year follows our northward track.

CORRESPONDING WITH GOVERNMENT.

BY A GOVERNMENT CLERK.



GOVERNMENT" is something very impersonal, as all of us know; some of us, perhaps—inventors, more notably—think they know it to their cost. But few, however, are aware of the machinery by which the thread of continuity is maintained unbroken between "Government" and those who correspond with it by letter.

Of course, it is well understood that if the Vicar of Wakefield thinks proper to address the Prime Minister upon the claims of John the Ploughman to money due in respect of his great-grandfather killed on board the *Victory* at the battle of Trafalgar, the letter is sent on to the Admiralty; if the reverend gentleman feels that John's mother stands in need of out-door relief, instead of the "house," to whomsoever he may address himself, his letter will find its way to the Local Government Board. So far, then, from a general point of view, once a letter to "Government" is in the post-box it is sure to go right—with more or less delay.

But take the case of the man who, having over and over again vainly urged the Government any time during the last twenty years to construct torpedoes, declares that it is his very idea which the country is gladly adopting now. How is all the applicant's correspondence on the subject brought together and thus shown as a whole, no matter over how long a period it has extended?

To illustrate the plan actually followed it will be convenient to take some one particular large Department of Government—for every Department at present secures the same end by a different system. We will take the War Office, for that is certainly a large Department, and probably on that account well ad-

ministered as regards correspondence with the outside public.

It is Monday morning, and what with some foreign mails (all the heavier from the disturbed condition of the States in the Malay Peninsula, or the disembarkation of the Native Indian troops at Cyprus) some 3,000 letters have come in. At nine o'clock arrives at the War Office to meet them a staid, experienced, old-fashioned Government clerk. He may notice that the mail is unusually heavy to-day, but he is not to be flustered and hurried. His functions are very humble, he knows, but if his duties are not performed carefully delay and difficulties follow. First of all, protecting his hands by some leather finger-stalls, he proceeds to open the envelope and look at—rather than read—each of these 3,000 letters. More tents wanted at the Cape—and straight this goes into a tray labelled "Mr. Jones;" proposals for purchase of War Department land—"Jones" again; the Colonial Office thinks a battery of artillery necessary at Graham's Town—still "Jones's" tray; wrong rate of forage allowance issued to Colonel Busby—"Brown's" tray; anonymous letter, accusing a contractor of bribing officials—"Robinson's" tray. And so it goes on all through the 3,000 letters; each finds its way into one of these three trays, which from time to time are carried off to the desks of the three gentlemen named.

Now Brown, Jones, and Robinson are first-rate men, capable of seeing everything from a broad point of view, as well as maintaining the details of a complicated system. Each of these men really reads—more or less attentively—every one of the letters thus coming before him, and marks them with a number, according to the subject. The tents for the Cape may be 57-Cape; the purchase of land, 10.190; the artillery question, 20 a; the wrong forage allowance, 83-3; the bribery by the contractor, 0072; and so on. These letters are distributed from time to time,

as they are thus marked, to the twenty or thirty clerks who sit under Jones, Brown, and Robinson. These are men charged with inferior, and comparatively mechanical, duties, and do not rank with the general establishment of officials. Each of them keeps a dozen or so of books in which to enregister letters; and perhaps many of these books contain fifty sections, differently numbered, for fifty different subjects, all more or less cognate.

Let us follow up the letter of the gentleman who thinks the country indebted to him for its torpedoes. It has already been marked by Jones—say 99-Stores—in pencil in one corner, and is now with the clerk who keeps the book containing this number. He enters the letter as of such a date, coming from such a person, and notes briefly the exact general object of the writer. He puts the letter inside a sheet of foolscap and labels it 99-Stores-1079, for already 1078 letters have been previously registered—not by any means all referring to torpedoes, but all more or less of the same sort; and he endorses it to the Director of Artillery. All papers of this “number” go to that officer in the first instance; if the letter should specially have gone to the Engineer Department, or elsewhere out of its usual course, the superior clerk, Jones, would have so pencilled it accordingly. The clerk then runs back over this particular section of his book in search of “former papers” on the subject—“f.p.” is the slang in Government offices. He finds that our torpedo friend wrote last in 1872, and that his letter was then registered 99-Stores-767; against 767 is marked 673-571-509-490-387, from which it is clear that all these papers are on the same subject. But on referring to the entry 387 is marked, “See also 1/4004/10, 0084-Torpedoes-312, 39894 all.”

The sheet of foolscap covering our friend’s letter is therefore marked with orders to the press-keepers to annex all these former papers, and a note is made against the registry of the present letter referring back to 387. The press-keepers are lads at a guinea a week or so, but very apt and very methodical. Thousands, literally, of sliding trays or drawers exist in the War Office, in which are kept these “former papers;”—into which, in other words, all letters find their way when done with for the time being. Every seven years or so those that seem no longer wanted go to similar drawers in the cellars of the office; a few years more, and, if still not wanted, they are “bundled up” and stowed anywhere about the cellar passages (there is an acre or so of cellars at the War Office); and by-and-by, to make room for more recent papers, they are carted off to the Record Office in Chancery Lane. And thence, now and again, old and apparently unimportant papers are destroyed by experienced officials, and sent to be pulped for paper. Through every stage, be it remembered, the exact whereabouts of every single paper is noted.

30/14/101 is wanted, about the cost of forage at Gloucester, and the press-keeper does not find it in the 30/14 tray; the registry clerk looks to his book, and finds it is annexed to Colonel Pipeclay’s appli-

cation for increased forage at Bristol. However, on searching for the colonel’s letter, it turns out it has not yet been put away; what then is to be done to get the papers at the back of it? The registry clerk gives the date of registry of the colonel’s letter, and off we go to the “General Transit Room.” Every paper moving from one branch to another has to pass through this room for notation of its present whereabouts. Colonel Pipeclay’s letter went to the Accountant-General on the 9th; a boy goes to that officer’s room, where a “transit-book” is kept for his branch; and of the twenty or thirty rooms under him, this book enables him to say which room has it—to whom he has marked it.

Well, meanwhile, our torpedo friend’s letter has travelled, with all its former papers, all over the office—from the Director of Artillery—who has perhaps written to the Admiralty about it—up to the Secretary of State. A decision has been come to that he has not the ghost of a claim to the invention, and that a civil letter should be sent saying so; probably the Secretary of State adds, “And let me see the proposed draft.”

But in our office rambles we have met with another letter from our typical Vicar of Wakefield, who thinks that if the actual advantages of a soldier’s life could be expressed in figures and shown within the four corners of one sheet of paper, recruiting would not flag; and, perhaps, he winds up by saying that the position of men in the Reserve Forces is so little understood, that he is pestered with inquiries that he is unable to answer. Suppose we see what is being done with the vicar’s letter.

The head of the room directs the vicar’s letter to be registered under the recruiting number. Say that is 27: then we have 27-1st Foot, 100th Foot, Artillery, &c., and 27-General. He also directs that it shall be registered in a nominal index, as coming from the Reverend Mr. So-and-so, and in a “place” index, as coming from Wakefield. This done, he next directs that the paragraph about the position of the Reserve men should be copied on to a second sheet; and then, say the Reserve Force business number is 101, the extract is registered to 101-General. The head clerk takes care not only that the Chaplain-General and the Inspector-General of Reserve Forces shall see what is said, and that the Accountant-General shall see the suggestion made for a statistical return, but he secures that the letter in its entirety shall come under the eye of the Secretary of State or of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary; whilst, by cross references on each of the separate papers, he secures that there shall be no want of harmony in the action taken. More than this: the registry clerk looks back to his personal index, and finds that the reverend gentleman some years ago intervened on behalf of a lunatic soldier, and he attaches this paper to the present letter for what it is worth—it may show the weight that should attach to any suggestion of the writer’s; he looks under the different “General numbers,” and finds that two or three other people have made similar suggestions, or finds that such a statis-

tical return was some time ago actually presented to Parliament, and he attaches these papers; he looks under Wakefield, and finds suggestions on the subject from authorities there, and attaches them. Thus the officials concerned in each one of the vicar's suggestions have presented to them, it is to be assumed, every scrap of information, or a reference to it, which the Department has on the particular point. The system does not, however, end there. Every room—and there are many under one head of a Department—has a noting book of precedents. The Inspector-General of Reserve Forces can consequently say that a placard showing the position of a Reserve man was printed last year—why, then, did not the Pension Officer at Wakefield have it posted about the town, &c. &c.?

It is evident that a great deal depends upon Brown, Jones, and Robinson, the heads of the enregistering rooms, invariably selecting the same number for the same subject. This selection is seldom simple. Parliament must be asked to vote a Supplementary Estimate, to cover the cost of extra supplies of food for men and horses consequent upon the present outbreak at the Cape. An inexperienced man might hesitate whether to register this paper under one of the numerous Cape numbers, under a "provisions" or "forage" number, under some general Colonial number, &c.; the experienced clerk at once puts it under the ordinary number used for points in connection with Parliamentary Estimates, because here and nowhere else would he think of looking for it in time to come.

No system can be much, if any, better. Every system must have its disadvantages. One of the greatest is the possibility of delay in obtaining the papers required to be attached; they may be twenty years old, lying at the Record Office, or they may be of yesterday, even now being acted upon. As a rule, however, ninety-nine out of one hundred letters are before those persons who have to deal with them on the day of receipt. Anything exceptionally pressing is, of course, exceptionally treated. The system is one which is designed to be independent of the individuality of the official. Sir Garnet Wolseley and Bishop Claughton are here to-day; but they, and Jones, and Brown, and the Hon. Fitz-Buggins, and all the other registry clerks may leave to-morrow, and their successors will have every opportunity of getting at all that has gone before them.

No systematic machinery, however, exists for securing harmony of action between one Government Department and another. For instance: suppose you call at the War Office and the swing-door jams and injures your right hand, and you walk on to the Admiralty, where the swing-door jams and injures equally your left hand, and you apply to each Department separately for compensation; neither would know of the demand you had made upon the other, and you might get nothing in respect of one hand and £100 compensation in respect of the other. But this much is clear, that write again whenever you would, and on almost any subject, the jammed hand correspondence turns up!

THE MORTGAGE-MONEY.



AM sorry you should think me hard, James, but you are unreasonable. It is now two years since I gave you notice that I must call in the money, and you know you have only paid me half a year's interest since."

Thespeaker, George Brymer, was a

pleasant cheery looking man of about forty-two years of age, with curly hair and a short crisp beard. He was seated at a table covered with papers, in a little three-cornered office, scarcely large enough to hold more than two or three persons besides himself and his table. Here he announced himself to the public as land-agent, auctioneer, and valuer, transacted all

the business of a lawyer that could be done by one not actually a member of the profession, and generally undertook every kind of agency required by the mixed population of the little village or town of Alverstoke.

The man whom he addressed appeared to be about thirty years old, and his short, rather thick-set figure was dressed with something of the knowing smartness of a well-to-do young farmer. His hair and complexion were light, and he had altogether in his rather handsome face an air of feebleness and vacillation. His features just now were overshadowed by the anxiety that had brought him to Mr. Brymer's office. He was well known as James Harte, of Beechleigh.

In explanation of Mr. Brymer's words, it must be stated that some five years previously he had advanced to Harte the sum of £250, secured with interest by a mortgage on Harte's farm and lands. It was about a demand for the immediate repayment of this loan that Harte had come to Brymer's office this morning. He was seated in front of the table, looking very despondent, as he replied to Brymer's address—

"Well, anyway, you can't get blood out of a stone."

"That's true," said Brymer, "but you *can* get money out of a good security."

Harte's face darkened. "Do you really mean to sell me up then, a man that you call your friend?"