

I was crushing out the flames that threatened to devour her, a change had come upon me.

Either of two things had happened. Through the lurid terror a new feeling had been born; or in its vivid light, one before existent, but latent, unrecognised, and unconfessed, had thrust itself to the front, had appeared at last in its own true colours.

However this may have been, the fact remains. I knew that night that I loved Cecilia Beaufort. I knew that it was madness. I believed that, so far as I was concerned, nothing but misery could follow—my own scorn, and, were it ever known, the scorn of the world. I determined then it should never be known.

END OF CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

## THE LOWER DIVISION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE.

BY A LATE CLERK.



F the many hundreds of young men who annually compete at "Open Competitive Examinations" for appointments in the Civil Service, very few have any notion at all of the kind of life upon which they are so anxious to enter; and still fewer have had an opportunity of learning, with any degree of accuracy, what will be the duties imposed upon them, and what their chances of success. The object of this paper is, therefore, to give to such a few fragments of information gathered from personal experience as a clerk in Her Majesty's Civil Service, and to disabuse their minds of some of the notions which are now-a-days rife with reference to the life of a Civil Servant.

There are a good many popular delusions current about the Service, which appear to be regarded by many inexperienced persons as undoubted and indisputable facts. It is still generally supposed that a Government Department is a sort of Eldorado, and that having once obtained an appointment, the young clerk has nothing to do but "live happy ever after." He is supposed to be at liberty to go to his office very much when he likes, and leave when he feels disposed, to do as little work as he pleases, and to receive a very respectable salary for doing it. Such would probably form a very good description of the life of a clerk in the Civil Service thirty years ago. There are still many material traces of this state of things, besides the fact that men now in the Service well remember those "good old times." It is not an unknown thing for a young clerk appointed to an office which is not of the mushroom growth of a few Departments, such as the Education Office and the Local Government Board, to find that the desk which has been allotted to him contains, in addition to the ordinary implements of clerkship, a drawer mysteriously fitted with cellular divisions designed for the accommodation of four or six wine-bottles; such things were thought nothing of thirty years ago. Indeed, a story of those days is told of "one of the public," who went one day on official business of some importance to a certain large office. On essaying to make inquiries in one room, he found

the sole occupant engaged in cleaning his gun; in the next, two clerks were having a bout at single-stick exercise; in a third, no one was at home, and he finally had to give it up as a bad job and return another day. But a vastly different state of things obtains now. A stranger would find as much industry, and as earnest a devotion to the business of the hour, in most Government Offices as in the busiest of City houses.

Clerks in the Civil Service are divided into two main bodies—namely, clerks "on the establishment" and "writers." The difference between the two classes consists in the difference between the scales on which they are paid, the different entrance examinations which they are obliged to pass, and the different kind of work required from each. A "Civil Service Writer" or "Copyist" is only required to show a sufficient knowledge of the "three R's" to enable him to perform simple calculations correctly, and to copy documents accurately, and his rate of pay is small in proportion to his attainments. Men-clerks of the Lower Division rank next above the "writers," and receive a commencing salary of £80 a year, rising by triennial increments of £15 to £200 a year, with the possibility of obtaining "duty pay" (*i.e.*, extra pay awarded to men whose work is of a specially onerous or responsible kind) to the extent of another £100 a year. To obtain a man-clerkship, a difficult examination has to be passed. Although it embraces none but English subjects, the competition is so keen that the proficiency of successful candidates must be very considerable. There are frequently five or six times as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. The examination passed, the official life of the man-clerk begins.

People whose experience of office buildings extends only to City offices have very little idea of what the interior of a Government Office is like. As a rule, the latter contains no spacious and airy apartments, fitted with rows of mahogany desks, fronted by a variety of cells and rails, for the accommodation of ledgers, or enclosed with screens of opaque glass. Indeed, with very few exceptions, the business of all the large public Departments is carried on, not by a number of men working in one large room, but by numerous small detachments, comfortably located in rooms which are in nearly all cases well furnished, and which are sometimes even luxurious in their appointments. An average complement for a good-sized room would be, perhaps, two or three writers, one or two men-clerks,

and one clerk of the Higher Division who has the general superintendence of the whole. Such an arrangement is, however, by no means universal, and it is not unusual for a man-clerk to have a small room to himself. In the furniture of the rooms, the frugal hand of modern economy is making itself felt. In place of Turkey carpets, convenient study tables, and alluring arm-chairs, such as were in use a few years since, more common and less expensive furniture is now generally supplied. Indeed, it may safely be said that at the present time the principle of economy is the "spirit of the age" in all matters of departmental organisation and government. Not unnaturally this principle, when too closely applied, sometimes reacts on those who enforce it. An instance of this happened not long ago. One of the "chiefs" of a large Department, who had fitted his room with elegance, and at some expense to himself, gave instructions for the erection of a small set of book-shelves. The order was referred to the Office of Works (the Department which conducts business connected with the furnishing of public offices), who coolly informed the applicant that they did not consider the furniture he wished for necessary. A few days afterwards that gentleman caused the whole of his own property to be removed from the room, and in the end the Office of Works were obliged to completely refit the apartment.

Let me now describe some of the duties which fall to the lot of men-clerks of the Lower Division. These young men are, for the most part, tolerably well educated and respectably connected. Coming fresh from school, or from the anxious care of a "coach," they bring to their official work a freshness and vigour which is sometimes unfortunately not remarkable in men of an older generation, who with the lapse of time appear in some cases to have become almost fossilised in the dull routine of official every-day life. The work entrusted to men-clerks is usually not of an arduous description, but it varies widely in different Departments. It generally consists of book-keeping, assisting in the preparation of official "papers" and "blue-books" for presentation to Parliament, or other work of the same kind. If the young official has intelligence and tact, he may hope to be relieved, at no very distant period, of those merely mechanical and elementary routine duties which will naturally be allotted to him at first. To some men favourable opportunities of bringing themselves into notice occur sooner than to others, but in the Civil Service, as in other callings in life, men who are really worth any-

thing are pretty sure to come to the surface sooner or later. Some clerks, finding that for a few months after their entrance into the office no notice is apparently taken of their efforts to excel, gradually become careless, arrive late at the office, take frequent holidays, and perform their work in an unsatisfactory and negligent manner. Unless this kind of thing is carried to an impudent excess, it is probable that nothing will be said to the man himself; but when a vacancy occurs in a higher grade, or a post becomes vacant which involves some degree of responsibility, he may expect to find his name passed over on the list, and himself left to vegetate in his half-hearted official existence, while some enterprising and persevering junior is promoted over his head.

It is quite true that under the new regulations by which the Lower Division has been lately reorganised, promotions into the higher grades of the Service will be less frequent than in former times. Still, in every large Department there will always be many appointments to which a man of industry and energy may hope to attain. For instance, there is always a number, large or small as the case may be, of what are known as "staff appointments," such as draughtsmen, actuaries, interpreters, and shorthand-writers, appointments which are very well paid, and which have up to the present time been frequently held by men who have risen from subordinate ranks in the Service. Formerly, it was no uncommon thing for a man who began his career as a temporary clerk (a position lower than that of man-clerk) to mount to the top of the official ladder; indeed, I have personally known more than one gentleman who, having risen in this way, holds to-day a highly responsible and remunerative position. These are, of course, exceptional instances, and I should be sorry to hold out hopes that such success will be an every-day attainment in the future; but for all that, the Civil Service is at the present time in such an unsettled and transitory condition, that a man who is resolutely bent on reaching a good position, and who has the *nous* to make the most of any opportunity that may present itself, starts with a fair chance of success. Although a Lower Division clerkship does not offer to a young man, who is possessed of strong individuality of character and keen business acuteness, that scope which may be found in a mercantile establishment, it presents in the first place the absolute certainty of a fair competence, and in the second a tolerable chance of ultimate distinction and influence.

