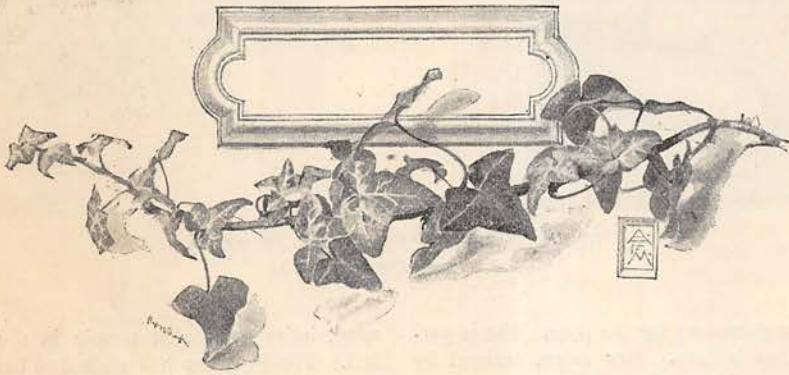


were going on, came to fetch some promised present. Bewildered and shy, she tried to make her way to the back door, but found herself suddenly on the lawn, where a fashionable crowd was assembled. In a moment Princess May came forward, with a sweet smile and kind words, and received the poor old dame as an honoured guest.

Prince George Frederick Ernest Albert, who is about two years older than his *fiancée*, is also much liked by all who know him, especially by the men and officers of the Royal Navy. Only the other day one of the latter, who had been shipmate with him on at least one commission, told the writer that our future king was a real sailor, who liked, and had worked hard at, his profession. "And a good sort, too," he added; "for I know that whenever another lieutenant wished

to go on shore Sailor George would very frequently offer to take his watch for him."

Some fourteen years ago, when I was stationed at the Bermudas, those summer but rather sleepy islands were enlivened by the arrival of two young royalties, naval cadets on board H.M.S. *Bacchante*. Prince George was then a very bright, fresh-looking boy. At a garden party at Admiralty House he seemed to enjoy himself much, talking and laughing as only sailor boys can with a pretty girl his own age, the daughter of a military officer. How quickly time passes! The small boy has grown up, and is going to be married. We all hope that he will be very happy. Indeed he ought to be, if it be true that the Prince always admired his future wife, and has been heard to say that if his brother did not marry her he would do so himself.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CABINET MINISTER.

BY RAYMOND BLATHWAYT.



HOUGH the sun blazed down upon the hot and crowded and dusty streets beyond, and though the roar and bustle of the great city lying around ceased not for a single moment, yet, within the cool secluded precincts of the India Office, and the stately

building which affords a shelter to the Local Government Board, a deep, unbroken silence reigned supreme. An official would now and again cross the wide-stretching quadrangle, or a harmoniously-cooing pigeon would flutter through the hot air, its white wings glancing and flashing in the golden sunshine, the strains of a distant band came thrilling across St. James's Park, but otherwise it was as still and secluded as one might imagine would be the courtyards of a mediæval monastery buried in the heart of the Black Forest. Here within this charming wilderness of silence I paced slowly up and down, waiting for the moment when I could keep my appointment with Mr. H. H. Fowler, the President of the Local Government Board, for in the case of so tremendously worked and busy a person as a Cabinet Minister, the compliment of exact punctuality is not only a desirable courtesy but a veritable necessity.

At last there came booming through the air the solemn, albeit rather cracked notes of the bell familiarly known to all the world as Big Ben.

Punctually, therefore, to the moment, I found myself ascending a deep, wide stone staircase, passing down long resounding corridors, through the misty, solemn gloom of which many a golden ray of sunshine pierced its way, until at last I was ushered into the presence of the hard-worked and energetic minister himself. For I do not suppose that even our indefatigable Premier is a harder worker than the President of the Local Government Board.

"No eight hours for me, Mr. Blathwayt, I can assure you," he remarked, as he rapidly opened and glanced through letter after letter from the tremendous pile which lay in front of him.

"No," re-echoed his son, who is also his private secretary; "I don't think my father ever ceases work; his recreation is merely change from one kind of work to another."

Mr. Fowler is a grey-haired, middle-sized man, with small grey whiskers, a firm, clean-shaven mouth and chin, a dry, business-like manner and expression, which is, however, illuminated now and again with a pleasantly-humorous smile. He is, I believe, the senior member of a firm of lawyers in Wolverhampton, which town, in conjunction with Mr. Villiers, the

Father of the House of Commons, he has the honour of representing in Parliament, and of which he was mayor in 1863.

The son of the Rev. Joseph Fowler, he was born at Sunderland in 1830. He was the first chairman of the Wolverhampton School Board in 1870, and he acted as Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department in 1884-1885, becoming Financial Secretary to the Treasury for a few months in 1886; his official experience, therefore, is by no means small.

He is a devourer of every kind of literature, so that even in my own brief conversation with him I was much struck by the evidences of that peculiar knowledge which are forthcoming from a person who reads not only here, there, and everywhere, but who also reads studiously and deeply. In fact, *thoroughness* is the chief characteristic of the man—thoroughness combined with a marvellous capacity for assimilating, digesting, and arranging facts and figures. It may be objected that the statistical mind is incapable of the imaginative faculty, nor is the objection without an underlying truth, but in the case of the President of the Local Government Board such a tendency is balanced by the equally strong tendency towards the general and widely-comprehensive literary turn of which I have already spoken.

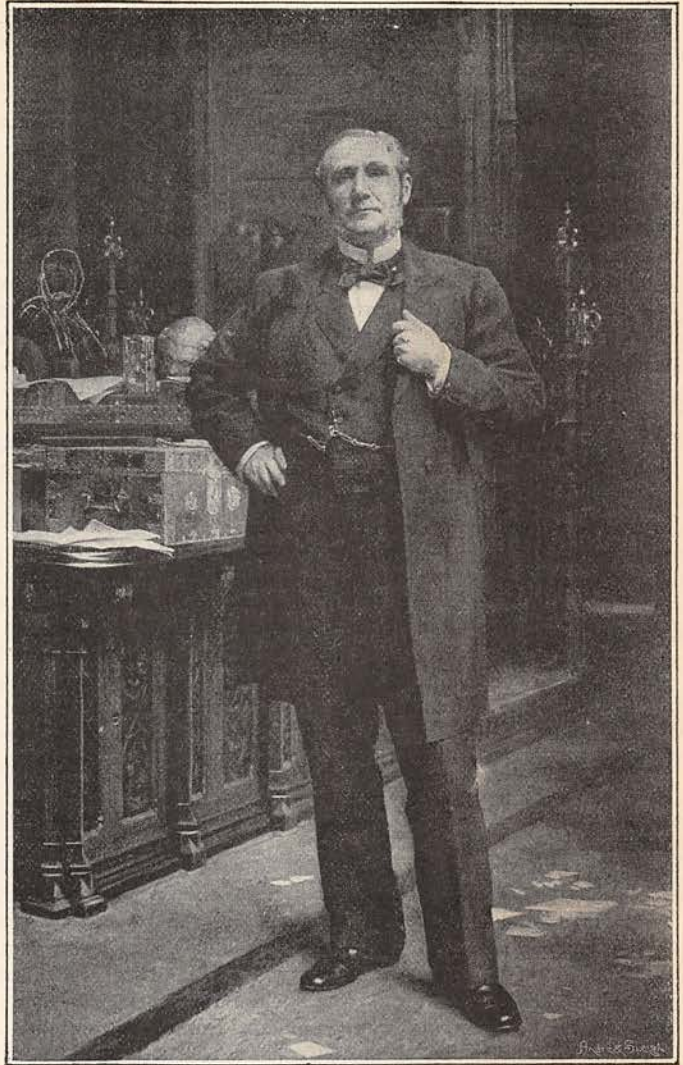
The two things combined result in a man, therefore, who is admirably suited for a post in which knowledge of official details is no less necessary than a wide, a commanding, and an original—I might almost say a picturesque—capacity for regarding the whole broad question of the local government of our great country. That he possesses

these popular characteristics Mr. Fowler has shown good evidences in the admirable and really interesting speeches which he has delivered from time to time from his seat upon the front bench of the Government in the House of Commons.

It is not unknown, I believe, that he does now and again occupy the pulpits of the Wesleyan denomination, of which he is an earnest and a very helpful member, and those who have heard him tell that he preaches a very admirable sermon. Such, then, is the man, and the conversation of him.

“But now, Mr. Fowler,” said I, being, I fear, sadly ignorant of the work which is specially connected with the office over which he reigns supreme, “what *is* the Local Government Board?”

“Well,” he smilingly replied, “as a matter of fact, I am the Local Government Board, by Act of Parlia-



THE RIGHT HON. H. H. FOWLER, M.P.

(From the painting by Mr. Arthur S. Cope, in the Royal Academy, 1893.)

ment, I and nobody else. There is no Board; it has never sat since it was founded in 1871. Those who form what I may term the *theoretical* board, which scarcely exists save in the minds of the general populace, are the Lord President of the Council, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and myself, the President. But, as I tell you, this Board has never sat, and so everything being left in my hands, I am the Local Government Board. Questions of national importance, of course, come before the Cabinet, but the President has all the work to do, and the responsibility rests on his shoulders alone. You can scarcely imagine,” he very thoughtfully remarked, “what a tremendous responsibility it is. You see, the work is so varied, it covers such an extensive field. In the first place, the special duties of the Board comprise

the powers and duties of what was formerly known as the Poor Law Board. I have power over all sanitary matters; the questions concerning contagious diseases—except as regards animals, which still remains as before—and epidemics, which came once within the sphere of the Privy Council, are now in my special province. All the powers and duties concerning the public health and public improvements, concerning, for instance, artisans' dwellings and the like, local government, local taxation, etc., which once were in the hands of the Home Secretary, are now placed in my hands. You will therefore understand something of my responsibilities.

"I need scarcely add that I am assisted by an admirable staff of workers, for it would be impossible for the work to be done without a competent staff. I have a permanent Secretary, Sir Hugh Owen. I sometimes think I should be lost without his services," added Mr. Fowler; "he is an admirable man. Then there are four assistant secretaries. There is a very competent Queen's Counsel who acts as legal secretary, and I have a strong medical staff under the supervision of Dr. Thorne Thorne. Ask the gentlemen to wait," said Mr. Fowler, turning to a messenger who had handed him three or four cards. "There," said he, as the man left the room, "no small part of my duties consists in seeing visitors who come to me on every conceivable matter under the sun. I need scarcely say I don't see one half of them—my work would never be done if I did."

"Is the London County Council under your supervision?" I asked.

"Not immediately," replied the Minister, "for although I have in my charge such legislative work as that which is involved in the Bills for the Registration of Electors, and Parish Councils, the London County Council works generally on its own responsibility. All Bills, however, before the house relating to the London County Council are in my charge. For instance, I am just about to introduce a Bill with reference to their powers and rates. With regard to the general work of the Board," said Mr. Fowler, as he rose from his seat to fetch a book from the well-stocked shelves behind him, and I noticed how unerringly and in a moment he laid his hand straightway upon the book he wanted—a sure index of a methodical and a studious man—"Mr. Chalmers, a barrister-at-law, has published a very admirable paper in which he very briefly comprehends the functions of the Board under three heads:—advice, administration, control and financial control. You will readily understand," continued the President, as he indicated a huge pile of very official-looking reports, "how essential it is that the various local authorities should afford the Board the fullest information on the matters in which they require our advice. We demand that reports of every sort and kind shall be frequently returned to us. This in itself is a tremendous undertaking. Many years ago Sir Charles Dilke, who was once President here, estimated the amount of statistical returns at no less than ten millions. The returns are vastly increased since then, for increased population

and increased legislation impose fresh duties and immensely widen the area of our work. We have to advise and report on private Bills relating to private matters. The public has no idea how many of these Bills come before us. We have the advising of Local Authorities in matters of hospital construction, and on sanitary matters in general. I have just refused the Tooting Authorities permission to build the fever hospital in that district. Careless vaccination cases come before us, outbreaks of fever; all these things are under my control. I need scarcely say I have inspectors everywhere, some of whom at the present moment are inquiring into the management of the Lynton workhouse, and the necessity for a hospital at Tottenham. The reports these gentlemen send in on various subjects are of great scientific value; we are gradually accumulating a mass of experience which will in time go far towards solving many difficult problems of sanitary science. Our administrative control varies considerably. In Poor Law matters it is complete. I have power to create, dissolve, and amalgamate unions, and to regulate the proceedings of the guardians in the minutest particulars."

"And a very good thing, too," I could not help interjecting, mindful of a past wherein poor-law abuses, although not even wholly absent in the present day, were so shamefully frequent.

"Over municipalities proper," continued Mr. Fowler, "I have no direct control; it is only when the borough wants to borrow money that the Board can step in and impose conditions. For instance, I am at this moment responsible for the rearrangement of the Liverpool Finance, and I have just refused Manchester permission to buy an estate in Notts for sewage purposes. We have power also to amend or to abrogate the by-laws passed by the Sanitary Authorities, under the Public Health Act in 1875. In one instance, we have disallowed a by-law prohibiting all boys from throwing stones in the town."

The abrogation of which, as I listened to Mr. Fowler, I confess I greatly sorrowed over, and my regret will be shared by many of my readers.

"And," continued the President, with a smile, as he went on to enumerate some further instances of the Board's wide-minded regard for the public convenience, "we allow people to sing hymns in the street; that was strictly forbidden at one time. Strangers under our rule may bring dogs into the town, and we do not regard 'lounging' on Sunday afternoons as an offence against the law. The rates have received our especial attention, and I can assure you it was full time they did so. You would scarcely believe the extraordinary purposes to which they were sometimes applied," continued Mr. Fowler, with a smile of dry humour as he looked back into the past. "In 1879 when the highway accounts were first brought under the audit, some very curious applications of these rates came to light. In one parish a sparrow-shooting club for the farmers had been supported by the highway rate. In another parish the mole catchers' bills were paid out of the same source. Rewards for killing foxes were paid out of the rates in several cases—a queer thing in a country

where fox killing is ranked only just beneath murder itself. Then again the Board had to disallow champagne and plovers' eggs, visits to the theatres, journeying expenses when no journey was taken, presentation portraits, 'suitable demonstrations' on the chairman of some local board's wedding day, memorial keys, and the like. To such purposes was the public money of old too frequently devoted. But the Local Government Board has altered all that, and those halcyon days are now strictly of the past."

"And are the clergy in any way under your control, Mr. Fowler?" said I.

"No," he replied, doubtless with a feeling of relief that he was, at all events, relieved of responsibility for one section of the community; "no, we have no power over the clergy at all, except as regards chaplaincies of workhouses. There the chaplains are appointed by us, and their salaries are subject to the approval of the board, and in cases of unfitness they can be removed by us."

"And as regards the day in the life of a Cabinet Minister, Mr. Fowler, how may I describe one day as a specimen?"

"As a day of work from the moment when I come down here at ten in the morning to twelve o'clock at night when I walk home. I never dine at my own house except on Wednesdays and Saturdays; it is work all day long without a single intermission. As I say, the eight hours' law could not apply here. I have

been a hard-working business man all my life, but the last ten years of political life I have done more than I ever did before. When the office work is done I go down to the house; there I sit on committees, answer questions, meet my constituents. Then there are cabinet meetings, attendances on Her Majesty. There is any amount of public work in the way of receiving deputations; there are all sorts of functions, dinners, meetings to be attended and speeches to be delivered. From first to last mine is a life of really hard and responsible work;" and even as he shook hands with me, he took up a sheet of closely-written foolscap, in which he was deeply immersed long before I had reached the door.

In such hands we may feel certain that the righteous government of our provincial cities and towns is well-assured, and how far the power of the Board should be extended becomes, under the present circumstances, a scarcely necessary matter for debate.

"Power," says Mr. J. S. Mill, "may be localised, but knowledge, to be useful, must be centralised. There must be somewhere a focus at which all its scattered rays are collected, that the broken and coloured lights which exist elsewhere may find there what is necessary to complete and purify them."

This eloquently-expressed theory completely finds its realisation, I fancy, in that centre of our vast and seething municipal life over which Mr. Fowler so ably, so energetically, and with such ability, presides."



MR. FOWLER'S ROOM AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD.