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### *Sir Charles Trevelyan at the Treasury*

DURING the nineteen years that Sir Charles Trevelyan was assistant secretary at the Treasury (1840 to 1859), copies of his semi-official letters were transcribed in chronological order into manuscript books, and apparently taken away by him when he left. At any rate they were found a few years ago at his home, Wallington, Northumberland. There are thirty-eight volumes of these letters containing over 11,000 pages of correspondence. This material does not appear to have been used previously by any historian, and it therefore seems worth while indicating its scope and suggesting some of the things which can be learnt from it.<sup>1</sup> The volumes are labelled 'Private', meaning 'not official', that is letters not written by direction of the lords of the Treasury. A great deal of important business was then, as now, dealt with by semi-official correspondence, a practice which at that time had an added convenience, as official letters had, it seems, to be published if called for by parliament. Trevelyan therefore took much less care about the content of his semi-official, than of his official correspondence, a fact which, combined with his notorious tendency to be rash and outspoken, enhances the value of these volumes. The subjects covered by the letter-books may be roughly classified into three broad groups:

- (i) the commissariat;
- (ii) the public finances and the civil service;
- (iii) Trevelyan's own particular interests.

In ordinary times responsibility for the commissariat (group i) involved mainly staff matters, the buying of provisions, fixing the amount of specie to be held by commissariat officers all over the world, and other miscellaneous subjects such as ordnance maps, mailships, and overseas mails. In extraordinary times, such as the Irish and Scottish famines, the scope of the work expanded greatly, and for long periods virtually all the correspondence is concerned with famine relief measures and their aftermath, *e.g.* the repayment of loans, drainage awards, schemes for land improvement, &c.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Sir Charles Trevelyan's grandson, the late Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Trevelyan, Bt., for giving me access to the correspondence and allowing me to transfer it temporarily to the Bodleian Library, where as a result of Lady Trevelyan's kind agreement, it is now on revocable deposit. Besides the thirty-eight volumes discussed in this article, the collection in the Bodleian includes another six volumes, which contain copies of letters written by Trevelyan between 1859 and 1865 when he was governor of Madras and Finance Minister in India.

There are also many letters about staff and supplies during the first year of the Crimean war.

In group ii one can include letters about the expenditure and accounts of the Treasury and its dependencies (*e.g.* audit office, post office, &c.) and indeed of all government departments. These range from such comparatively minor matters as allowances to messengers, economies in office equipment, the printing and distribution of government and parliamentary papers, to major re-organizations of financial and accounting systems, the internal organization of many offices, and finally the whole method of appointment to the civil service itself. There are also many letters about bullion and minting.

Trevelyan's own particular interests (group iii), were wide and miscellaneous. He had something of a passion for information on almost any subject, and many of the letters consist of requests to commissariat officers and others to write to him at length about the country in which they were stationed or on any other matter. In return he would send them letters of encouragement, but usually coupling this with an exhortation to 'keep it up', and perhaps reminding them of some shady incident in their past. There are also many letters to the editor of *The Times* asking him to publish something, and often complaining a day or so later that this had not been done. Then there are letters about military affairs, *e.g.* the disposition of troops in all parts of the empire in peace and war; others about India especially during the late eighteen-fifties; letters to Indians whom he was trying to help, and a few to relatives usually about their financial affairs. There are also many on his favourite hobby horse, the substitution of the roman for the arabic alphabet in oriental languages, which would, he thought, *inter alia* solve the problem of India by spreading the Christian spirit.

This is by no means an exhaustive survey of the scope of the correspondence, but it indicates the formidable array of topics involved, which range even more widely since, whatever the subject, Trevelyan was often as much interested in compiling a history of its past and securing records for the future as in solving the immediate problem. Often he did this in response to, or in anticipation of, parliamentary demands, but at other times he seems to have been motivated by a rather indiscriminating desire for records for their own sake. The limitations of the material are that it does not include the letters received by Trevelyan, nor quite all his semi-official correspondence: copies of some letters of which the originals are in the Gladstone papers are absent, for no obvious reason; others also may be missing. Nor does this collection enable one to get a comprehensive view of all the work of the Treasury; for Trevelyan, though often referred to as its 'official head', was not concerned with some branches of its work. In particular he had

virtually no control over the appointment of staff to the Treasury itself. Moreover many of the letters are, if taken by themselves, not of much intrinsic interest, though even these, if looked at in bulk, throw some light on the civil service at this period.

To a great extent the correspondence confirms and amplifies what was already known about Trevelyan from other sources: he does not emerge as lazy, corrupt, weak, tactful, cautious or defeatist. Thus his obsession with the importance of hard work is constantly apparent. He himself worked extremely hard: his normal office hours were 10 a.m. to about 6 p.m. for six days a week, with no interval for lunch; and he would refuse any invitation which interfered with his working hours, even if it was in aid of a cause which he supported, such as mechanics' institutes.<sup>1</sup> He hardly ever took more than one day off at Christmas, a few days at Easter, and at the most one month in the summer. In abnormal times (*e.g.* during the Irish famine) he worked literally all hours, late at night and early in the morning, starting often at 6 a.m. and once at 3 a.m. He even moved into lodgings to save two hours a day for his public duties, sending his family away from home. He hardly took any annual leave during the Irish crisis, and if he did go away his work went with him. And he expected others to work as hard as he did. When he took a holiday, he was at pains to impress on other officials that he was going on strictly public grounds, that he was not idling even when he was away, and that on his return he would not leave his place at the Treasury for another year. He frequently advised or told senior officials in Ireland not to leave their posts, even when their health was failing, and he would not allow them to come to England except on public business. He was particularly hard on the chairman of the Board of Works (Col. H. D. Jones). Thus in June 1848 Trevelyan would not let him take a month's leave in the autumn; Jones had after all, he pointed out, not been at his desk all the time, but on tour, so his health could not be too bad; if Trevelyan agreed to Jones taking leave, he would be guilty of 'an unpardonable weakness' and would be doing 'a serious injury' to Jones.<sup>2</sup> In another case a wretched official suffering from the climate of Sierra Leone was severely reprimanded by Trevelyan for saying that he felt jaded every day after his duties were over: his expressions were 'inconsistent with the propriety of official correspondence'.<sup>3</sup> To Trevelyan pleasure and ease were clearly suspect if not positively wicked. It is not surprising to find that he preferred the Germans to the French (and what were the English but improved Germans? he once asked),<sup>4</sup> or that he feared the 'enerivating and in some respects debasing influence of a long peace'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letters of 3 May 1852 and 1 Dec. 1855. Unless otherwise stated, all date references in footnotes are to Trevelyan's letters.

<sup>2</sup> 23 June 1848.

<sup>3</sup> 17 May 1852.

<sup>4</sup> 8 Dec. 1852.

<sup>5</sup> 28 May 1853.

That Trevelyan was energetic and 'took the side of improvement' as Macaulay put it, is also amply confirmed. For instance he made many changes in the commissariat which he found in a depressed state when he came to the Treasury. He tackled the estimates, accounts and auditing systems of many offices (*e.g.* woods and forests, Board of Health, and the naval and military departments), the finances of the London *Gazette*, the organization of the mint, the arrangements for publishing and distributing parliamentary papers: he got Spottiswoode's rates down and then turned to Hansard's; and he was particularly relentless about the prison and poor law reports, over half of which were, he discovered, not disposed of. He considered Edwin Chadwick a reckless spendthrift who 'had never shown any feeling about the public money except to get as much as he could of it' which alone 'disqualified him from office'.<sup>1</sup> Other matters to which he directed his reforming energies include the payment of fees on appointment to certain posts, the abolition of hereditary pensions, the improvement of government buildings, and minor economies in government offices on candles, wax and stationery. Whenever he could detect anything which he thought obsolete or rubbishy, he was on to it. Could the practice not be abolished, or at least performed more economically? Thus writing to Shaw-Lefevre (the deputy clerk of the parliaments) he pointed out that sixteen hundred and fifty people (M.P.s and others) were being supplied at the public expense with comparatively costly copies of forms of prayer and thanksgiving as perquisites for their own use which they could and should buy for one penny each.<sup>2</sup> On another occasion he wrote that 'No shadow of excuse existed for maintaining the Edinburgh Gazette'.<sup>3</sup> His hair stood on end at the immorality, as he saw it, of certain legal establishments, and at the evidence of jobbery they supplied, and he did what he could to get improvements made. He was also scandalized by the state of the public records and was in constant communication with the master of the rolls about their profusion and neglect. All these activities of Trevelyan's provide further evidence for Professor Edward Hughes's statement that Trevelyan 'laid the basis of modern Treasury practice',<sup>4</sup> and they illustrate how Trevelyan set about accomplishing his aim of making the Treasury 'really a *supervising office*'.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover in his concern for the reform of financial and administrative practices, he did not forget the improvement of the mind. Thus he took great trouble building up a library at the Treasury; one of his methods was to ask public figures to present to it copies of their works, and if they did not respond, to remind them he

<sup>1</sup> 14 Feb. 1853.

<sup>3</sup> 10 May 1853.

<sup>2</sup> 6 April 1850.

<sup>4</sup> *Ante*, lxiv (1949), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Trevelyan to Gladstone, 9 Feb. 1854, *ubi supra* n. 4, 207.

was still waiting.<sup>1</sup> Every clerk in the Treasury was to be supplied with a list of the works in the library in the hope that he would profit by it.<sup>2</sup> Trevelyan would suggest to officials on sick leave how they could improve their professional knowledge, adding that this was not incompatible with the restoration of their health.<sup>3</sup> The method prescribed was usually to read Adam Smith. On one occasion he sent to Dublin extracts from the *Wealth of Nations* and from Burke's *Thoughts on Scarcity* and asked that all the staff should be given copies. Moreover the inscribers of what Trevelyan called 'bungled hieroglyphics' were relentlessly pursued: officials were reprovved for their punctuation and writing, and for not starting a new paragraph for each subject, and they were advised what authors to study in the winter months in order to improve their style.<sup>4</sup> Even Sir John Herschel, the master of the mint, did not escape strictures on his writing, though this did not secure him authority from Trevelyan for an extra clerk for copying.<sup>5</sup> These are only some of the spheres which engaged Trevelyan's reforming zeal.

Nor did he in these pursuits display any more tact than we have been previously led to believe. For instance he sent Sir Randolph Routh, chairman of the Relief Commission in Ireland, a copy of a letter from Labouchère, the chief secretary, which said that Routh 'provoked him not a little now and then'. When Routh complained, Trevelyan would not apologize for his *gaucherie*; on the contrary he asked Routh to reassure him he would not mind this sort of thing happening, as otherwise Trevelyan would in future have to expurgate letters.<sup>6</sup> Once he included in papers laid before parliament some semi-official letters from Sir John Burgoyne, who was then chairman of the Relief Commission. When Burgoyne complained, Trevelyan merely asked him 'to continue to write with freedom in full reliance that nothing will be published contrary to his wishes'.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1842, writing to Kay-Shuttleworth, who was then secretary to the Committee on Education, Trevelyan said 'our treasury notions of official regularity are set on edge by the summary and informal nature of your answers to our references', and he then detailed curtly the deficiencies in Kay-Shuttleworth's answers.<sup>8</sup> And when Trevelyan was awarded a gratuity of a year's salary for his extra work on Irish relief, he sent a copy of the chancellor's minute to Jones in Ireland asking him to show it to his colleagues 'all of whom I flatter myself will be pleased with it'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 31 March 1853.

<sup>2</sup> 22 Dec. 1851.

<sup>3</sup> 26 March 1856.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. 5 Nov. 1849 and 27 Nov. 1851.

<sup>5</sup> 10 June 1852.

<sup>6</sup> Dec. 1846.

<sup>7</sup> 15 April 1847.

<sup>8</sup> 7 March 1842.

<sup>9</sup> 15 Sept. 1847. Trevelyan's salary at this time was £2,500 a year. It had risen to this figure in March 1845 apparently as a result of a claim made by Trevelyan. Previously, from 1840, it had been £2,000, and not £2,500 as is stated on page 30 of the reprint in *Public Administration*, vol. xxxii (1954) of Mr. Hughes's article in *History*, xxvii (1942).

Sometimes when he was offering advice on matters outside his official *ambience*, he seems to have anticipated resentment, and to have tried to overcome it by stating his qualifications for advising. Thus when telling the military and even the secretary of state for war how to dispose troops, which he was constantly doing, his excuse, apart from his concern with the commissariat, was sometimes that he had been enormously impressed by a paper written by Sir Charles Metcalfe many years ago (about 1815) concerning the distribution of forces in India. And when writing to a friend at India House about the army in India at the time of the Mutiny, his justification was that he had given evidence before the army purchase commission.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion his excuse was that he wanted to be of use to someone who had been kind to him: thus Sir Charles Metcalfe was given Trevelyan's views on Canadian finance when he was appointed head of the Canadian Government in 1843.<sup>2</sup> But at other times he could think of no better excuse than 'If you are not above receiving a hint in your new capacity as . . .'.<sup>3</sup> Or quite blatantly, he had 'a larger experience of this class of subjects [state assistance for soldiers' wives] and had bestowed more thought on it than most people', so he would fail in his duty to his correspondent and through him to the public weal if he did not give his opinion against such aid.<sup>4</sup> One wonders what the officials at India House felt when they received an apparently unsolicited letter from Trevelyan saying 'he had observed with great pain' a growing relaxation in the practice and feeling in regard to the acceptance of presents by officials from natives.<sup>5</sup>

As to his famous integrity, his 'rigid integrity' as Macaulay called it, he emerges on the whole unscathed. Thus he always refused to relax rules, for instance those regarding promotion, however great the pressure put upon him. He saw himself as waging a perpetual war against private interests,<sup>6</sup> and whilst he would quite often accept gifts, he would always tell the donor there must be no more.<sup>7</sup> But it would seem that his reputation does not emerge higher than *on the whole* unscathed. For there seem certain blemishes here, mainly in connection with getting appointments for his own relations. It was already known that he approved of a system under which officials could be rewarded by the nomination of one son to a post, in order to goad them on to greater exertions; but it does not seem to have been realized that Trevelyan freely applied this principle to himself, and that he considered that his exertions warranted the appointment of many of his relations or connections,

<sup>1</sup> 27 June 1857.

<sup>2</sup> 3 July 1843.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 18 Dec. 1841.

<sup>4</sup> 5 Jan. 1858.

<sup>5</sup> 7 Feb. 1842.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. 10 May 1853 where he writes: 'This preference of private to public interests is becoming more glaring every day.'

<sup>7</sup> E.g. 13 Feb. 1846 and 9 June 1848.

though in the case of other claimants he normally drew the line at more than one.<sup>1</sup> The most flagrant instance of this is his efforts to get his brother various jobs in India. He was constantly commending him: the recipients of these solicitations include Sir Charles Napier, Lord John Russell, Lord Fitz Clarence and Lord Elphinstone, and the excuse is always Trevelyan's own services, past and future, to India. He had no personal claim on whoever the patron was, but he 'had worked hard for India in his youth . . . and had neglected no opportunity of promoting the interests of India in his after life'.<sup>2</sup> Whether the appointment of his brother would promote the interests of India, he never mentioned. In another instance, he recommended a man because he was the son of someone whose brother-in-law had stood by Trevelyan in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Similarly when recommending a cousin (Digby Neave) as an assistant poor law commissioner, he said he could not judge of his fitness for the post, but it would be gratifying to him (Trevelyan) if he were employed.<sup>4</sup> He also helped his brother-in-law, Charles Macaulay, to get various appointments. Trevelyan continued to press the claims of his relations even after he had been badly let down in 1847 by a dissolute cousin for whom he had obtained employment.

Indeed the extent to which he approved the practice of appointing officials' sons was not, it would seem, previously known. Moreover his actions in this sphere seem to be slightly inconsistent with his views. For if he was so keen to improve the quality of entrants to the civil service, why did he not try to raise the standard of that part of it over which he had some influence or control? Instead of which, he seems never to have considered a candidate's qualifications, but only whether the father 'had a claim' on the government or deserved encouragement, or whether the appointment would stir others to greater exertions.<sup>5</sup> The answer would seem to be that Trevelyan, like many others, regarded the right to have one son or relation appointed, if one had worked hard, as part of one's emoluments;<sup>6</sup> also that he had a rather simple belief in the possibility of improving people by exhortations and moral sermons of various kinds. He seems to have thought that anyone could do virtually anything if he tried: hence his perpetual emphasis on exertions and on the stick and carrot method. Nevertheless it is queer that

<sup>1</sup> Requests for the appointment of his relations other than his brother were made on 29 June 1843, 26 Nov. 1846, and 6 March 1849.

<sup>2</sup> 21 Nov. 1853.

<sup>3</sup> 10 and 20 Nov. 1848.

<sup>4</sup> 6 March 1848.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g. letter of 31 May 1843 in which a commissariat officer was told his son could not have a Treasury clerkship because the father had not distinguished himself by a more than ordinary degree of merit.

<sup>6</sup> Thus on 6 Feb. 1856 Trevelyan wrote of the need to compensate civil servants by improved superannuation for the loss of this right through the introduction of examinations.

Trevelyan stuck so firmly to a belief in the value of this practice, as he was only too well aware of some of the unfortunate appointments which resulted from it in the Treasury itself—the inefficient son of his predecessor, Sir Alexander Spearman, who had to be constantly reprovved, and the feckless son of Sir George Clerk who had been secretary to the Treasury from 1841 to 1845. In the latter case Trevelyan wrote constantly to the father during a period of five years (1848–53) pointing out the boy's delinquencies: he had arrived punctually only a dozen times during a whole year; he had taken three months annual leave; he had been absent without excuse for nearly half the time, &c. . . . In the end Trevelyan suggested the army as a cure for his indolence, with what success is not apparent.

It is not possible here to deal fully with the vast correspondence about the Irish and Scottish famines contained in the letter-books, and a few points only will be made. A great deal of material consists of long sermons from Trevelyan to government officials and organizers of private charitable funds on the demoralizing effect of getting something for nothing, whether the recipient was a landlord or a peasant. 'To give to those who are not in want must do unmixed harm.'<sup>1</sup> 'The bolstering and cockering system has been carried to the utmost—people under it have grown worse rather than better.'<sup>2</sup> Dependence on others was a 'moral disease' and must be eradicated.<sup>3</sup> Trevelyan believed the Irish famine was the judgment of God on an indolent and unselfreliant people, and as God had sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson, that calamity must not be too much mitigated: the selfish and indolent must learn their lesson so that a new and improved state of affairs would arise.<sup>4</sup> However as the distress was aggravated by ignorance, efforts should be made by individuals (not by the government if possible) to relieve it; but they must not distribute relief with such a liberal hand that what was meant for a blessing was turned into a curse. He regarded deaths by starvation as 'a discipline', a painful one admittedly, but nevertheless a discipline, and he considered that they were a smaller evil than bankruptcy, for through them a greater good was to be obtained for Ireland and the whole British nation.<sup>5</sup> Similarly high prices were a check imposed by God and nature when there was a scarcity.<sup>6</sup> He constantly emphasized that indirect permanent advantages would accrue to Ireland from the crisis, not because improvements would be made on the land by, for example, drainage (in fact he was always trying to prevent improvements being made on landlords' properties at someone else's expense), but because there would be a sort of social regeneration: society would inevitably right itself though the process would

<sup>1</sup> 30 March 1847.<sup>2</sup> 28 May 1847.<sup>3</sup> 15 Jan. 1848.<sup>4</sup> 6 and 9 Oct. 1846.<sup>5</sup> 11 Feb. 1848.<sup>6</sup> 6 Jan. 1847.



be painful. This belief buoyed Trevelyan up through what even he, tough as he was, felt as a painful time, and his only moments of doubt were when he feared the Irish might not after all be better for the calamity. His own conscience was clear for he exerted himself day and night to draw out local effort and mobilize local resources. That this was Trevelyan's general attitude at this period was already known,<sup>1</sup> but the fervour with which he held these views and the insistence with which he propounded them have perhaps not been fully realized.

The correspondence illustrates the ignorance of Irish affairs which has often been noticed before. Thus in August 1846 Trevelyan asked Routh for information about the territorial divisions of the country,<sup>2</sup> and he often complained about the difficulty of getting full and accurate knowledge. Trevelyan himself seems to have had little contact with the Irish problem before he was plunged into the relief operations in November 1845. He had been to the country once for a short tour in 1843, but he did not go again, except for about a week in October 1847 at Lord John Russell's suggestion, and then he went only to Dublin.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Hughes writes of him as 'back in London' in 1848,<sup>4</sup> which suggesting as it does that he had been administering Irish relief from Ireland, is perhaps a little misleading. Trevelyan no doubt built up some knowledge about Ireland in a remarkably short time, but one cannot help thinking that it would have been better if he had left his desk more often and gone to test his theories on the spot, particularly his views on self-help and charity, before they became entrenched dogmas.

On Ireland as on many other matters, Trevelyan's analysis and cures were too simple and naive. Thus in August 1846 he advocated one united effort of all classes in Ireland to get through the crisis,<sup>5</sup> and in the spring of 1847 he hoped that 'a new era of active industry and exertion on the part of all classes of society in Ireland had commenced'.<sup>6</sup> He seems to have been unaware of the aggravation caused by the religious situation: for instance he was constantly trying to get the roman catholic church to support the government and to help generally by inculcating the duties of obedience to the law.<sup>7</sup> He admitted there was an agrarian problem, but he was against tenant right and all agrarian reform schemes:<sup>8</sup> the remedy lay in stimulating the landlords to behave better. The officials in Ireland must make the landlords less selfish; they had risen to the occasion in 1839; he 'cannot believe they are less kind or liberal now'.<sup>9</sup> Lord Sligo should remit rents in bad times,<sup>10</sup> and, as Col.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Great Famine*, edited by R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (1956), *passim*. <sup>2</sup> 31 Aug. 1846.

<sup>3</sup> His visit lasted from about 4 to 11 October 1847.

<sup>5</sup> 31 Aug. 1846.

<sup>6</sup> 30 March 1847.

<sup>4</sup> *Ubi supra*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> *E.g.* 31 Dec. 1847.

<sup>8</sup> 8 Dec. 1847.

<sup>9</sup> 4 Feb. 1846.

<sup>10</sup> 30 Oct. 1846.

Wyndham had for many years enjoyed a large income from his estates, it was not unreasonable he should make some sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> Trevelyan had no doubts that his views were correct: he had, he considered, wide experience of the size of tenures and such matters; Irish affairs had been represented as all mystery and obscurity, but they were perfectly plain and well understood by those who had given ordinary attention to them.<sup>2</sup> Like many other Englishmen, he wanted to produce a better state of society in Ireland without interfering with property rights, for he was clear that to do so in Ireland would destroy confidence in landed property in England too.

Mr. Hughes refers to Trevelyan's book *The Irish Crisis*, which appeared in 1848, as 'a modest memorial to an outstanding administrative achievement'.<sup>3</sup> The vast apparatus of relief committees, inspectors and so forth, which operated under Trevelyan's general supervision, is certainly impressive, and no doubt saved many thousands of lives; but nevertheless in some ways the organization was weak. The correspondence abounds with hectic requests for facts and figures on all kinds of issues, or about this or that district; but Trevelyan never seems to have instituted a regular system of proper returns. Moreover he easily got side-tracked into asking for information of purely historical interest, for instance about the famine of 1740, or the number of roads built in certain areas in 1822 and 1831. For someone in his position he paid a fantastic attention to details: thus when Lord John Russell had a small fund for distribution, Trevelyan wished to know the individual cases of greatest want and most distinguished exertion among whom it might be divided;<sup>4</sup> he wrote a great many letters about small sums which had been raised privately recommending how they should or should not be spent; on one occasion he reported that the proceeds of the Celtic ball were £38 29s. 11d., not £36 7s. 5d.<sup>5</sup> A remarkable amount of his time and energy was devoted to technical matters, such as sending to India House for a specimen of a handmill, getting stone masons to make a different one according to his instructions,<sup>6</sup> deciding whether boilers should be bricked up or not, finding recipes for soup, telling people how to boil down the heads and tails of cattle into jelly, or pursuing some scheme which took his fancy because it was 'correct' (*i.e.* provided incentives), for instance prizes to the crews who caught most fish or stayed out longest at night. This may have been inevitable at a time when the civil service contained very few technical experts, but it was no doubt intensified by Trevelyan's own natural interest in gadgets and semi-scientific devices. The correspondence does not of course reveal what the recipients of his letters thought of him; and one

<sup>1</sup> 24 Dec. 1846.

<sup>2</sup> 30 Nov. 1847.

<sup>3</sup> *Ubi supra*, 53.

<sup>4</sup> 10 March 1847.

<sup>5</sup> 22 May 1847.

<sup>6</sup> 28 Oct. 1846.

would like to know what Routh felt when he and his wife were asked to see if one pound of Indian corn would satisfy them for a day;<sup>1</sup> officials cannot have relished the bombardment of communications to which they were subjected—often one every day at least. Moreover even if *The Irish Crisis* is modestly written, Trevelyan was certainly not modest about it. He sent it to everyone he could think of from the pope, the king of Prussia, and Guizot, to minor officials in the commissariat; and he was always quite certain the recipients would read it with interest, especially as it was ‘prepared with so much labour and attention to accuracy’, and since he was, in his view, in a better position than anyone else to write it.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Hughes does not confine his praise of Trevelyan as an administrator to his performance on the Irish famine; he says, speaking more generally, that he had ‘superlative administrative gifts’.<sup>3</sup> Clearly he had many great qualities as a civil servant: enormous energy and drive; a capacity to make quick decisions (often, indeed, too quick); a zeal for reform—he never saw any reason why the *status quo* should be accepted if it were not satisfactory; a passion for economy, which in so far as it was applied to governmental processes, was probably healthy; and that fearlessness of which so many people speak—though it is arguable that he was more thick-skinned than brave.

But he also lacked some of the attributes of a good official. For instance, being convinced that he was indispensable, he was clearly bad at delegating work. Even during the Irish famine crisis, he would normally open all letters himself. And at all times he wrote letters on many minor matters which in a properly organized office would have been a subordinate’s responsibility. It was obviously absurd, if true as Trevelyan stated, that his absence from the office for over an hour in the middle of the day was attended with considerable inconvenience.<sup>4</sup> He was in fact in many respects a bad organizer. If something needed doing, his first instinct was to do it himself. He did not sit back and calmly survey what others were doing to see where the machine needed strengthening. Rather he would rush impetuously into the breach, or write off a dozen letters exhorting everyone to work harder in imitation of him.

Moreover in judging Trevelyan as an administrator, one must remember that he was in charge of the commissariat during the first year of the Crimean war. It would undoubtedly be wrong to assign a large share of the responsibility for the disasters to him, but the correspondence does not add to his reputation, though it illustrates his great confidence in himself. Thus at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> 3 Dec. 1846.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. 20 Dec. 1847, and 4, 12 and 14 Jan. 1848.

<sup>3</sup> *Ubi supra*, 53.

<sup>4</sup> 3 Sept. 1846.

he sent out to Lord Raglan a man whom he recommended as chief commanding officer by saying that he was attached to the army in the Peninsular War and, Trevelyan added, he would have 'as efficient a department as ever accompanied a British army into the field'.<sup>1</sup> Then follows a mass of correspondence about every conceivable detail: the purchase of mules, the drying of oats, biscuit, beer, the merits of roasted and unroasted coffee, &c. . . . But the general impression gained is that the organization was very amateurish, and that Trevelyan wholly failed to realize the shortcomings of the commissariat. Thus he argued and fought fiercely against its transfer to the secretary of state for war: the practice worked well on the whole, he said, though it could be improved; and one should not make a hasty change.<sup>2</sup> This was six weeks after the first reports of scandals in *The Times*, which Trevelyan regarded as unreliable. In fact throughout he referred to the alleged failure of the commissariat as a misrepresentation and an 'immense crop of lies', which had wounded him a lot.<sup>3</sup> The task was clearly beyond him, and his only remedy was to write more and more hectic letters, and to dissipate his energies on eccentric schemes such as getting pamphlets about eastern languages prepared for the troops, and in sending commissariat officers New Testaments in Bulgarian and Serbian, asking them to let him know what differences they observed between the Bulgarian and Russian languages.<sup>4</sup> On the Florence Nightingale issue he seems to have been sound, giving orders that she should be helped,<sup>5</sup> but even she, one would imagine, might have welcomed fewer religious periodicals for the sick and more efficacious medical supplies.

On civil service reform, the main addition to our knowledge made by the letter-books is that they supply some information about those enquiries into government departments which took place between 1848 and 1853 of which particulars were not made public in parliamentary papers or elsewhere. The existence of these enquiries is referred to in general terms by Mr. Hughes in his article in this REVIEW where he writes: 'In the early fifties all the principal offices came in for investigation and report.'<sup>6</sup> It is now possible to supply some detailed information about them and to date them rather more exactly. There are references in the letter-books to investigations into the following establishments: the Home Office in 1848, the Irish Public Record Office and the law courts in 1849, the Foreign Office in 1850, the War Office in 1852, and the Board

<sup>1</sup> 13 Feb. 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* 8 and 13 June 1854.

<sup>3</sup> 23 April 1855.

<sup>4</sup> 22 July 1854. In 1857 he had a scheme to distribute to all private soldiers in India a New Testament in Hindustani and English.

<sup>5</sup> 19 Oct. 1854.

<sup>6</sup> *Ubi supra*, 53.

of Control in 1854.<sup>1</sup> There is also a suggestion that the Admiralty and dockyards were investigated in 1848-9. The correspondence reveals that the membership of the committee of investigation in the case of the Home Office consisted of Trevelyan, Gibson Craig (a lord of the Treasury) and Sir George Cornwall Lewis (under secretary at the Home Office); that for the War Office of Trevelyan, Lord Chandos (a lord of the Treasury) and R. M. Bromley (secretary to the Audit Board); and that for the Board of Control of Trevelyan, Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Thomas Redington (secretary to the Board). The reports themselves are however unfortunately not amongst the correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

A little light is also thrown on the procedure of the committees of investigation into the separate departments, the thoroughness of their enquiries, and the implementation of their reports. The time which elapsed between starting work on an enquiry and producing a draft report seems to have been about two months. Trevelyan's procedure was usually to draft the report himself if he was on the committee of enquiry, though Bromley seems to have done the one on the War Office; next, to ascertain that the political head of the office concerned agreed with it; then to send it to the department officially for observations, and finally to get the chancellor of the exchequer to authorize the necessary action. But these processes did not always work smoothly. Thus long and bitter battles took place between Trevelyan and both the War Office and the Foreign Office. Benjamin Hawes of the War Office suggested in December 1852 that the committee had not taken enough time over its investigations. Trevelyan replied that they could really not enter into an official correspondence then; he pointed out that the committee had urged a new registry system, for it was doubtful whether the existing one could cope with an increase of business in war time, even if enlarged, and that Hawes had not even been to look at the Treasury registry. On 14 January 1853 Hawes produced a counter report, an action described by Trevelyan as a 'flagrant breach of trust and dereliction of duty'. Hawes was backed by Sydney Herbert who condemned Trevelyan's report as inaccurate and too hasty. Trevelyan then issued a rejoinder to Hawes's report. After

<sup>1</sup> The statement made by Professor Wheare on pp. 9-10 of his lecture on *The Civil Service in the Constitution* (University of London, 1954) that the Home Office, Foreign Office and service departments were not investigated therefore needs correction. The Home Office enquiry was referred to by Mr. Hughes in his article in *History*, xxvii (1942), 61.

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear why only some of the reports were published in parliamentary papers; but the answer may be that this was not done when the department concerned did not accept the recommendations made in the report. Alongside those which were published, Trevelyan was able to place an official letter from the department accepting at any rate most of the report, and a Treasury minute authorizing the necessary action. The letter books reveal that this would certainly not have been possible in the case of the Home Office, Foreign Office and War Office.

that the correspondence seems to have petered out for a time, except for a rather rude letter from Trevelyan to Hawes which cannot have improved their relations, telling him not to ask by official communication for the return of letters. This was, however, nothing compared to the later occasion when Trevelyan sent back to Hawes a badly written letter which had been enclosed by the War Office when writing to the Treasury.<sup>1</sup> Trevelyan asked when the writer was appointed and by whom he was examined. But Hawes had a perfectly good answer: the letter came from the Home Office. Undaunted, Trevelyan then sent the correspondence to the Home Office saying that 'if this artist is a public servant, the public time and money ought not to be thus wasted'. But clearly even Trevelyan was defeated in his attempts to reform the War Office, and he himself realized this, for in December 1858 he wrote to G. A. Hamilton, the financial secretary to the Treasury, as follows:

Although it grieves me to say so, it is my duty to state my opinion that the war office establishment has not been reduced to order and is under no real control. The waste of power and money from the overgrown unorganised bulk of the body of 400 to 500 clerks, from the habit they have all acquired of interminable written remarks, and from the absence of consolidated and revised regulations, is extremely painful to every person who has the public interest at heart. Look at this correspondence and at that . . . sent to you yesterday, and at the weak and superficial attempt in the accompanying printed memorandum to pursue the eccentricities of this monster establishment.<sup>2</sup>

Trevelyan was not, it would seem, much more successful in getting his way with the Foreign Office. In August 1852 he complained to Gibson Craig that Addington, the permanent under secretary, had neglected the report, and was now asking for extra clerks without making any reference to the investigation.<sup>3</sup> And in January 1853 Trevelyan complained to Addington himself that his 'department had of late years shown a great disinclination to co-operate with the treasury in matters in which the treasury is charged with a responsibility and is entitled to an influential voice'. Addington, the letter continued, had had the report on the Foreign Office since August 1850, but no notice had been taken of it except to quote it as an authority for a retrospective rise in salary, which was connected in the report with reforms to which no allusion was made. Moreover in October 1850, Addington had been sent a report on office keepers in secretary of state offices, establishments 'which abound with obsolete, expensive and unfair anomalies', but absolutely no notice had been taken of it, although it was concurred in by the Foreign Office member of the committee. Trevelyan added that he made this observation in perfect good humour.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 May 1856.

<sup>2</sup> 31 Dec. 1858.

<sup>3</sup> 5 Aug. 1852.

<sup>4</sup> 25 Jan. 1853.

Whether this was believed or not, his next letter written four days later cannot have improved his relations with Addington, for he returned to him a letter signed by the Foreign Secretary, asking for £5,000 extra for messengers, in order that the Foreign Office could re-apply giving a proper explanation of their demand. Later, on another issue, Trevelyan complained to Gladstone that the Foreign Office assumed to itself an exclusive and superior position, but he added that this pretension was by no means admitted by the Treasury or by the other secretary of state offices.<sup>1</sup>

As to the main Trevelyan-Northcote enquiry into the civil service as a whole, the letter books confirm the view that it was the culmination of many years of thought and work, mainly on the part of Trevelyan, and not just a flash in the pan. Thus writing on 14 March 1854 to John Parker who had been a joint secretary at the Treasury, Trevelyan said he had brought the result of fourteen years continued labour to a distinct issue. There is in fact no evidence to suggest that he had begun to think about the civil service as a whole until the middle of the eighteen-forties, but he was probably right in claiming in May 1848 to Sir Francis Baring that he had for long had a deep impression of the importance of improving the character of the public civil service.<sup>2</sup> At any rate Trevelyan seems at this time to have been contemplating something fairly radical, for he wrote to Earl Grey:

I cannot abandon the hope of the very important reform which I know may be made in the constitution of the principal government offices without affecting any existing interests, except a temporary curtailment of the patronage system may be so called; and the prospective changes proposed would go much beyond the mere diminution of public expenditure, the principal object being to improve the spirit and character of this important branch of the public service, by employing the gentlemen composing it from the first on duties worthy of them.<sup>3</sup>

In September 1848 Trevelyan sent Cornwall Lewis a paper on the public establishments which he seems to have written some time before; and in December 1848 he wrote to Lord John Russell:

If all that is in progress is carried through in the spirit with which all the parties now appear to be animated, the financial reform associations will have nothing left to do, and the present period will be distinguished above all others in this country for practical executive improvements. There never was a subject which promised so largely to reward the pains bestowed upon it, for there cannot be a doubt that practical executive administration has, as a general rule, been very much neglected in this country. Everything is sacrificed to parliament, and the main object to which all others yield is to get well through the session and then after some necessary

<sup>1</sup> 28 April 1854.

<sup>2</sup> 24 May 1848.

<sup>3</sup> 5 May 1848.

relaxation, to consider how to get through the next. Most of the civil establishments are so much in excess that the mere fact of reducing them increases their efficiency by forcing people to work and substituting habits of activity for an idle, listless state of half employment.<sup>1</sup>

In July 1849 Trevelyan sent Macaulay a paper on the mode of appointing persons to civil departments in this country, asking him for his opinion on the plan and manner of expression, and added that they must try to give the general call for more efficient service, which existed, a better direction than if the crude and superficial views of certain M.P.s were to prevail.<sup>2</sup> The next month he sent another paper of his to Lord John Russell, adding that he was not blaming the dispensers of patronage but the system, which involved gross though often unintentional abuses.<sup>3</sup> From Trevelyan's next letter it looks as if Russell had been interested in his ideas and had suggested appointing a committee on the matter. For Trevelyan was 'gratified and encouraged' by his reply and took the opportunity to give Russell his views on the value of promotion by merit, and on the stimulating influence of adequate rewards, and he promised all assistance in his power in carrying out any course of proceeding Russell might determine on.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, when sending his memorandum on fees and stamps on civil appointment to Sir Charles Wood, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said that the subject had an indirect bearing on what appeared to him more called for than any other administrative reform, namely an improvement in the character and efficiency of the permanent civil service.<sup>5</sup> The next day he sent the paper on fees to Russell, adding that it was almost a necessity something should be done about the civil service. Moreover a month before the appointment of the Trevelyan-Northcote committee, Trevelyan wrote to a friend in India House saying he was engaged on a committee of revision of government offices and asked for a copy of Lord William Bentinck's 'merit-fostering minute' which might be of use to him.<sup>6</sup>

But in spite of these many years of cogitation and consultation, it seems probable that Trevelyan did not begin actually drafting the main report until the middle of October 1853; for when writing to Gladstone on 15 September 1853 before going on a month's leave, sending him copies of some of the reports on individual offices, and reporting the position of others, he said:

But by far the most important work which we have before us is the preparation of the general report to which our attention was called by the second paragraph of the treasury minute of 12 April last, the object of which will be to suggest improvements applicable to the whole of the civil departments.

<sup>1</sup> 16 Dec. 1848.

<sup>2</sup> 17 July 1849.

<sup>3</sup> 7 Aug. 1849.

<sup>4</sup> 13 Aug. 1849.

<sup>5</sup> 27 Aug. 1849.

<sup>6</sup> 15 March 1853.



The letter-books throw some light on Trevelyan's relations with Northcote, and on the part Northcote played in civil service reform. One might well imagine that Trevelyan would have despised Northcote, or been impatient with him; for as Professor Wheare says, he was 'a sober and cautious character; the politics of passion were not his field'.<sup>1</sup> But in fact Trevelyan seems to have thought well of Northcote and to have relied on him a good deal. Thus Trevelyan suggested him for inclusion on the committee of enquiry into the Poor Law Board in April 1853 after he had had experience of working with him on the enquiry into the Board of Trade. And writing to Northcote in May 1853 when Northcote had announced that he was hoping to be adopted as a candidate for parliament, Trevelyan urged him not to forget the serious address he had made to him as to the vital importance of the series of enquiries into the public establishments 'in which we are engaged together', and his assurance that his election to the house of commons would not prevent his going through with it. Northcote possessed (Trevelyan continued) the qualifications for this great work, which are so rare, in so remarkable a degree, that if he were to fail him, Trevelyan would despair of its ever being accomplished in his time. When Northcote was not adopted as parliamentary candidate, Trevelyan wrote that his loss was Trevelyan's gain. Then he typically kept Northcote up to the mark by saying that though he could not meet him for a few days, Northcote would no doubt be able to occupy his time usefully by going on with the poor law report or in other ways.<sup>2</sup> On another occasion Trevelyan referred to Northcote as his friend whose assistance had enabled him to bring the result of fourteen years of continued labour to a distinct issue.<sup>3</sup> But there is nevertheless confirmation for the view that Northcote's part in preparing the main report was a minor one. Thus when writing to Gladstone on 15 September 1853, Trevelyan said:

The accompanying official letter from Sir Stafford Northcote . . . defines his personal engagement in connection with these Enquiries. I regret that he does not consider it proper to receive the salary which has been assigned to him for any period subsequent to 13 August, for his services entitle him even to a more liberal remuneration. The work in hand is of the biggest importance, and he possesses remarkable qualifications for it. We must however be thankful to have his assistance on his own terms; and if he completes the remaining Enquiries and Reports indicated in his letter, the Public will be under a great obligation to him.

Looked at as a whole these passages suggest that Trevelyan did not question Northcote's faith in their joint work, and that he found Northcote positively useful, perhaps particularly on the detailed enquiries into separate departments rather than on the main report.

<sup>1</sup> *Ubi supra*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> 20 May 1853.

<sup>3</sup> 14 Mar. 1854.

Some of the strictures passed on the civil service at this period do not seem to be borne out by such evidence as is offered by the letter-books, which are for the most part legible, neat and accurate; spelling mistakes or other errors are almost non-existent, and there is an elaborate and carefully compiled index to each volume. Letters were answered normally by return of post, not only by Trevelyan himself. All offices seem to have worked on Saturday afternoons except the audit office and one or two smaller ones. On the other hand there are some bad examples of slackness in attendance, which were often allowed to continue for a long time before investigation. Thus on one occasion Trevelyan asked a Treasury clerk (T. P. Courtenay), who had been reprimanded before, why he had not signed the attendance book for five months and had been late on the few occasions when he did come to the office.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion Trevelyan asked a Treasury official (Harrison) for an explanation of his absence from the office on 178 out of the last 310 working days.<sup>2</sup> Other things which shock us are the offer of sale in the *Civil Service Gazette* of a government position as late as 1855,<sup>3</sup> and the actual sale of a post in 1858, though admittedly in Ireland.<sup>4</sup> But at least the official who asked that his brother's service should be counted as his own in the reckoning of his pension was refused.<sup>5</sup>

As to Trevelyan's politics, the letter-books confirm that he was a keen whig with no leanings towards the radicals, though he co-operated in some economy drives with Joseph Hume. Indeed adherence to the whigs was even a recommendation for appointment to a judicial post in Trevelyan's view.<sup>6</sup> But he was very careful to keep aloof in public from party politics: he was so strict about this that he never even voted in a parliamentary election whilst holding an official position, and he thought this was the only correct conduct for a senior public servant.<sup>7</sup> As to the social system, he was perfectly clear that it was not unjust. He distinguished between misfortunes and injustices, and considered that the poorer classes suffered misfortunes but not injustices: there was no inequality between them and members of other classes since all could labour to advance their condition in life. He pitied the poor not because they were poor, but because they were dependent, and in so far as he wished to ameliorate their lot, he was more interested in their mental and moral welfare than in their material conditions. Thus his concern with working-class housing mainly took the form of wishing to provide such things as a 'library of philosophical apparatus', lectures, and means of religious quiet.<sup>8</sup> He was worried by 'the chartist poison and urged his friends to

<sup>1</sup> 1 April 1848.

<sup>4</sup> 13 Oct. 1858.

<sup>7</sup> 16 Dec. 1854 & 17 Sept. 1847.

<sup>2</sup> 8 May 1855.

<sup>5</sup> 24 Jan. 1852.

<sup>3</sup> 21 Feb. 1855.

<sup>6</sup> 1 May 1848.

<sup>8</sup> 2 May 1856.

write pamphlets to disseminate 'correct opinions among the working classes', by appealing to 'old English feeling' and to people's obvious interest, in order to assist in supporting the 'wonderful fabric of English society'.<sup>1</sup> Like Gladstone he saw civil service reform as a means of strengthening 'our aristocratical institutions'.<sup>2</sup> The only occasions on which he made any adverse comments on the aristocracy were in connection with Ireland, condemning some landlords for selfishness and the upper classes in certain districts for their 'criminal apathy'.<sup>3</sup> But he thought much less in terms of class than of race. Indeed the only consideration which seems to have restrained him in his abuse of the Irish was his belief that he himself was of the same race; but even this did not provide much of a brake, for in his view he belonged 'to the class of reformed Cornish Celts, who by long habits of intercourse with the Anglo-Saxons have learned at last to be practical men'.<sup>4</sup>

This is not the occasion for a full scale account of Trevelyan's character and views, though the letter-books throw much light on them. But it would be misleading to end this article without recording the general impression they give of a man imbued with a tremendously high sense of public duty. Indeed the word 'duty' seems to occur more frequently than any other in these volumes. It is not surprising therefore to find that the correspondence ends with Trevelyan accepting the governorship of Madras in 1859 although it involved a great domestic sacrifice, as he felt his duty was plain.<sup>5</sup>

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JENIFER HART

<sup>1</sup> 3 and 25 April 1848

<sup>2</sup> 7 Feb. 1856.

<sup>3</sup> 27 Jan. 1847.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Oct. 1847.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Hughes says, *op. cit.* p. 234, that Trevelyan became governor of Madras in 1858. He was no doubt unofficially approached about it in 1858, but he did not accept the post until 10 Jan. 1859, after thinking over the formal offer made a few days before. He left England for India on 20 Feb. 1859.