

regarded as the first and paramount duty of Parliament, has come to be esteemed, measured at least by the relative time and attention bestowed on it, as a matter of minor importance.

Surely it is not too much to say that to this cause is due the irregular and impulsive action of these Governments, by which the national expenditure is allowed to become progressively and unreasonably inflated, and is then subjected to sudden and violent contraction, inflicting severe hardship if not positive injustice on individuals, and disturbing that element of stability and confidence in the Civil Service, upon which, as in all sound commercial establishments, efficient and economical administration depends. For it is obvious that the work to be done, and the fair value of such work, is the same before as after such an economical crisis, and that, with the constant and vigilant control over the Public Service which Parliament is supposed to exercise, the necessity for such convulsions need not have existed.

It is perhaps, at the same time, not to be wondered at that in these communities, coming, in the prime of a vigorous youth, into the rich inheritance of political liberty and the enjoyment of parliamentary power, with its accompaniment of Responsible Government, the more attractive fruits of their new possession should have first commanded their attention, and that the contests of party and the struggles for office should have occupied so much of the time and energies of the popular assemblies; nor would it be fair to attribute such strife merely to a vulgar greed for place or profit, instead of to that honorable ambition to guide the fortunes of their country, upon the existence of which the whole system of popular government can alone hope to be successful.

To the cause above referred to must be ascribed the fact that the special duties of Parliament as a whole, independently of any section or party whether in or out of office, have not been sufficiently realized. Thus the Estimates for the coming year, which in almost all European countries are required by law to be brought before the Houses at the beginning of the session, and are subjected to severe scrutiny according to fixed rules which provide for their consideration independently of and prior to all other business, are in all these colonies only submitted to the Parliaments at the convenience of the Government, generally accompanying the Budget speech of the Finance Minister; so much so indeed that it has become almost a habit for the Lower House to refuse to consider the Estimates until the Financial Statement has been made; that is to say, to refuse to settle what are the various offices and services required for the country, until it is informed what has been the result of the last year's finance, and what are the proposals of the Government for meeting the expenditure of the coming—or rather, as is generally the case, of the current—year.

Thus the ancient process is reversed; and instead of first determining what is necessary, and then considering how to provide the cost, the first consideration is, what funds will be available, and then how shall they be spent. And yet it will surely be admitted that the great bulk of the services in every country should be determined solely on the grounds of their necessity, and that the cost should be settled on a fair estimate of their market value.

Quite true is it indeed, and not inconsistent with what has been said above, that a part of the expenditure, especially in new countries, and especially that upon public works, must depend upon the prospect of having the means to pay for their execution, or the desirability of raising moneys for the purpose; and such parts of the Estimates may always rightly be left until the scheme of the year's finance has been disclosed. But surely even such contingent services would have a better chance of patient consideration, if Parliament had already disposed of those fixed and annually recurring services which are necessary for the good government of the community, and for which it is indispensable that means should be provided.

When it is said, as we frequently hear, that the House will not enter upon the Estimates until the Financial Statement has been made, and that that Statement cannot be made until the accounts of the previous year are prepared, and so that it