I am aware that the title I have given this book is open to miscon-
struction. It suggests an official, soured by failure, who feels that his
talents have not received due recognition. I hasten to say that this is not
the meaning I wish to give it. The sense in which I use the expression
‘all ambition spent’ is true of nine out of ten officials who have reached
the end of a longish career. Indeed, it is true of most elderly people
whose constructive years lie behind them. The young man’s ambition
is to ‘get on’ in life, to make a name for himself, to stand out from the
crowd. He realises dimly that it is not an easy task, that if there is really
plenty of room at the top, there is only one top rung of the ladder from
which to step on to the highest floor. But somehow he is going to get
here. At forty, if he has common sense, he knows whether he will or
will not. At sixty he has got there or he is more or less comfortably
installed on a lower floor. But one thing is certain: he has used up or
discarded most of the ambitions with which he had started out. If, as he
should be, he is somewhat of a philosopher, he will be content to have
made the best use of the brains with which nature endowed him and
to have achieved a fair modicum of success. His doings may not have
attracted general attention but what then? So long as he himself feels
that he has done a good job; that is all that is necessary.

For myself, I have no complaints against either providence or
the higher authorities. I look back with pleasure on the thirty-eight
years that I spent in the Consular service and, if I had the oppor-
tunity, I would not want them changed.