

# SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1885.

## WHO SHOULD BE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE UNITED-STATES COAST-SURVEY.

THE course to be followed at Washington in the selection of a superintendent of the U. S. coast-survey, will be watched with the greatest concern by all who are interested in the conduct of that important bureau. Those especially who believe in maintaining the civil service in a high state of efficiency, and who look to the present administration for the faithful application of sound principles in the selection of officials for positions of high responsibility, will form their opinion of the wisdom and honesty of those in authority by the action which is about to be taken.

We are informed that actually an appointment has already been made; but we take it for granted that it is only an appointment *ad interim*, that the public service may not suffer any detriment in the emergency which has arisen. In all probability, the officer now in charge of the survey, however qualified he may be to pronounce upon many of the questions which are brought to his notice, — and we hear him spoken of in terms of great respect, — would decline the responsibility of guiding, even for a few months, the work of a scientific corps so numerous, so expert, and so special, as the surveyors and hydrographers of our coast.

The head of the survey must not only be competent to judge of results, as does the secretary of the treasury, or the observing member of congress, but he must be competent to point out the methods, and select the agents, and govern the various steps, by which the desired results are to be obtained. As these results — the accurate description of the coast, and the careful observation of the changes which are constantly in progress upon the marine highways of travel and commerce

— depend upon the most precise physical measurements, and the most accurate mathematical discussions, the superintendent should be a man who has been trained in mathematical and physical science. Other qualities are also essential, but they can be found in men who have been trained to this particular kind of scientific work.

If there should be a vacancy in the supreme court, none but a lawyer would be thought of for the position; if there should be need of a surgeon-general for the army or the navy, none but a physician would be appointed; only a military engineer would be competent to conduct the military engineering of the government. What is true of the older professions is true of the newer. The director of the coast and geodetic surveys of this vast country should be one who will command the professional confidence and respect of all who are themselves expert in hydrography and geodesy. He must be surveyor-in-chief, or surveyor-general. He should have high personal character, acquaintance with the structure and physics of the globe, skill in administration, and the power of complete and lifelong devotion to a work of great responsibility and honor.

It is not necessary to look for such a man in the army or in the navy. Indeed, there are grave objections to detaching any officer of either arm of the service to the conduct of the coast-survey; and it may be assumed, that no one will resign from the army or navy to enter upon the unpensioned and uncertain career of a civilian. Fortunately, there are several men in civil life whose pursuits and attainments qualify them for the superintendency, — men who have already won distinction in mathematical and physical researches. Among them are men of excellent business habits, of administrative skill, of honest, faithful, and industrious lives. Upon such a man we sincerely hope the choice will fall.