Swedish Royal Archives some twenty-five years ago, but was later given up and the papers, which had been removed from their original collections, were restored to the same.[2] A similar attempt was once made in the National Archives of France and this also ended in confusion and failure.[3] In our own country we find in the early arrangement of archives that papers have been grouped in special collections such as revolutionary papers, military papers and papers concerning lands. Such an arrangement destroys the original files of the offices, which carried on the processes of government in the early days, hides the gaps in the files and makes it almost impossible to know what kinds of papers are missing. In short the records with which the political anatomy of those days could be reconstructed, have been taken out of their original places and scattered so widely that it is almost a hopeless task to replace them.[4]

It is generally agreed by archivists in both Europe and America that the "summum bonum" to be desired in the classification of archives is that they shall reflect the political organism of their time. Whatever information they may contain upon special subjects or whatever light they may throw upon certain individuals or events, is a side issue and should not be the determining factor in their arrangement. They are the recorded image of the state and should be preserved as such. Special information concerning men and events can be brought out by special indices without interfering with the arrangement.

This opinion regarding the classification of archives has given rise to the principle known as the "respect des fonds," which has been briefly and clearly defined by Dr. Müller, of Utrecht, as "the method of classifying archives according to which each document is placed in the collection and in the series of that collection to which it belonged when that collection was a living organism."[5]

[2]Amandus Johnson, The Lessons of the Swedish Archives, Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1909, p. 366.

[3]Waldo G. Leland, The National Archives, American Historical Review, XVIII, p. 24.

[4]A. J. F. van Laer, The Work of the International Congress of Archivists and Librarians at Brussels, August 28-31, 1910, Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1910, p. 285.

[5]Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1912, p. 260.

A. J. F. van Laer, archivist of New York, has defined it in more detailed terms as "a system of arrangement of public archives whereby every document is traced to the governmental body, administrative office or institution by which it was issued or received and to the files of which it last belonged when these files were still in the process of natural accretion."[6]

European archivists are almost unanimous in their support of this principle. The uniform rules and regulations for classification in Belgium read as follows:

"The archivists take as a rule in the work of classification:

"1. To assemble the documents with respect to their sources; that is to say, to form a particular collection of all the titles, which belong to the same body, the same institution, the same administration or the same locality, without mixing the acts of one body with those of another.

"2. To classify the documents in each source according to their nature or contents, arranging the material as the case may be, chronologically, topographically or alphabetically.

"It is necessary to respect the source, or, as the Germans say, the principle of the origin, and give in the inventory an exact image of the organization or the institution, the archives of which one wishes to make known."[7]

In France the departmental archives are kept in the various departments and carefully arranged and classified in each.[8] The records in the National Archives "are grouped according to the nature of the public institutions with which they are concerned."[9]

The Royal Privy Prussian State Archives in Berlin are arranged by departments and, for the most part, chronologically within each department.[9a]

The creed of the archivists of the Netherlands is so heartily in accord with this principle that it maintains that no archivist, who has not studied carefully the organization to which the archives he is working with originally belonged, is fitted to classify them.[10]

[6]Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1910, p. 285.

[7]First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records, London, 1912, I, Pt. II, 129b-130a.

[8]First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records, London, 1912, I, Pt. II, 134.

[9]First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records, London, 1912, I, Pt. II, 132a.

[9a]Learned, M. D., Carnegie Publication, No. 150, p. 17.

[10]Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1912, p. 260.