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Can it ever happen again?

By "Old Hack."

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Christmas did not loom very large for Harvey Grey as he sat, moodily, at his desk filing away land office returns. For eighteen years he had been in the service of the Government, and for one-half of them at the top of his class. He had sat in the same place, watching the progress of men who had won the promotion which he had every right to expect. From his desk he had seen juniors, with no particular ability, and with no other asset than an accident of birth, pass him in the race, until his heart was sick. From some of these juniors he was now receiving orders.

But it was a pretty good desk.

How well he remembered his first entry into the service, just after his graduation from the university. The Minister had offered him a position in his department. How large the modest salary had seemed to him and his friends in his little home town! How dazzling the prospects of promotion! Could anybody's career have looked brighter? Several halcyon years passed, years in which Grey put the best of himself into his work, wondering at the lack of ambition and enthusiasm about him. Then there came an opening. Someone had to be promoted. His hopes ran high.

Burwell got the place.

Burwell had entered the service by the "back door." He possessed what Harvey lacked—assurance. After failing to pass the necessary entrance examination, he had exerted a "pull" sufficient to have his name inserted in the estimates, and was appointed to a clerkship, "notwithstanding anything in the Civil Service Act to the contrary"—as the item read. Such was the iniquitous system which then prevailed! A sense of injustice stung Grey to the quick. What civil servant who has worked faithfully, giving the best that is in him, is ignorant of these heartaches? What one has not smarted under these indignities? Grey determined to see his Minister; his patron, who had appointed him to office. He surely would not permit such a flagrant case of favouritism to pass unquestioned!

The Minister was sympathetic. When Grey had laid his case before him he said:—

"I will keep you in mind, Grey, for the next opening."

Years—and men—passed him. Even women were brought in and placed over his head, as though to add to his humiliation. Ambition wavered. It would have tottered and fallen, but for his unquenchable faith in the ultimate triumph of the principle of promotion by merit, which he felt must finally prevail.

Then the Ministry changed. The party under which Grey had entered