

**On a Poem by Mercurio, and on some recent Advice to Civil Servants by Mr. John Ewart, K.C. — With a Remark or two on Irony and the Reform of the Civil Service.— The whole being a Letter to the Editor.**

My Dear CIVILIAN:

May I preface some rambling comments I feel constrained to offer on the above rather variegated range of subjects with a word of true appreciation of Mercurio—the civil service bard. The appreciation must be shared to a degree with yourself, for if we had had no CIVILIAN we might have had no Mercurio. In particular, I would like to thank both of you for his "Faithful Philip" of your last, a bit of true poetry, conceived in genuine feeling, and showing again for the thousandth time how slight in this life of ours is the veil between laughter and tears. The gift of humour sometimes carries a penalty. When Mark Twain wrote his *Joan of Arc* he issued it anonymously. He was afraid it would not be taken seriously otherwise. Of Mercurio we will never exact such necessity, for we know him as a man of many gifts, of pathos as well as of humour, and now of that even more potent weapon—irony and the *saeva indignatio* of the old poets of all sorts of good causes:

Moral? There is none, my youngster; quite immoral, I should say,

That a man who does his utmost should receive a sluggard's pay.

That was years ago, however; no one can complain to-day.

This, of course, will long since have been read and relished. Good wine in any case needs no bush. But that the story of "Faithful Philip" should, by the printer's caprice (or was it your artfulness, Mr. Editor?) have immediately preceded the notable contribution by Mr. John Ewart, K.C., on Promotion in the Civil Service and How to Obtain it, is sufficiently unobvious, perhaps, to deserve pointing out. In its way, it was as neat a bit

of irony, almost, as Mercurio's own. And this may bring me to my point.

**Mr. Ewart to the Service.**

You do very well, Mr. Editor, to welcome with cordiality the interest of a man like Mr. Ewart in the civil service. For my own part, I find in the mere fact of Mr. Ewart addressing an article to THE CIVILIAN one of the most significant and hopeful signs of the times. Mr. Ewart is a well-known man, and he is plainly a well-wisher of the civil service. Being the man he is, he is not content to fold his hands. Multiply this phenomenon by even a few instances, and the service is free! It is because Mr. Ewart's letter is so important, both in itself and as a symptom, that I want to address to him a few words of counter-counsel, and to put him straight in a matter or two, wherein I think he is off the track—all with the selfish thought that he may continue in well-doing and to better purpose than in the past.

**Of Novels and Poetry.**

Of course, as a matter of mere detail and preliminary talk, I cannot say I hold with all of Mr. Ewart's advice. "Novel reading will never produce mental improvement"? That is ridiculous! Why, novels are practically the only satisfaction of the craving for art we can afford in Canada. We have few pictures, and no sculpture, and, as the government's action of the past few years in the matter of its buildings demonstrates, no architecture. Pickwick is "fantastic"? Not to quarrel with the word, of course he is,—if Gil Blas and Pantagruel and Don Quixote are fantastic! That is why they are so de-