

# THE CIVILIAN

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## ONE OF THE OWNERS

*(The Editors hereunder carry on their avowed policy of presenting to the readers of The Civilian one article each month from the pen of some public-spirited man who is not a civil servant. Major W. L. Grant, the contributor of the present article, is the Principal of Upper Canada College, and is known far and wide as a propounder of a strong and clean Canadianism. His comments upon Patronage will be appreciated.)*

AS a great battle-ship lay in a northern harbour a burly Scot rowed out, climbed the ladder and stood on the deck. "Tell the captain I want to see him," he said to the nearest bluejacket. "Whom shall I say, sir?" "One of the owners," replied the undaunted Scot.

As a Canadian, born and bred, I feel that I am "one of the owners," and I should like to put on record my views of how I should like my servants, the Cabinet, to appoint their sub-staff known as the Civil Service.

The Patronage system will not do. It has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It is bad for the patron, bad for the appointee, extravagant and degrading for the Dominion of Canada. That the Civil Service of Canada contains so many splendid men and women and that the general level of work is so high is a proof of the native vigour of our people; that it contains so many weaklings, so many square pegs in round holes, and so many cases of three poorly paid men or women doing the work of one, is a proof that our system is wrong. It is not a question of individual wickedness. If for the present Parliament and Cabinet were substituted the members of the Presbyterian General Assembly, or of the Methodist General Conference, or of the Anglican General Synod, or of any other such body, I do not think that Canada would be governed one whit more honestly and efficiently than she is at present. It is the system that is wrong; not the men who run it.

The Patronage system originated, curiously enough, in the struggle for reform. In the early days the ranks of our small Civil Service were filled either by place-men from Great Britain, or by the needy friends of the

Governor. "I can do nothing for you here," wrote O'Connell to a disgraced friend, "but, if you will retire from Parliament for the sake of the credit of our party, I will get you a place in the colonies." In the struggle for Responsible Government, the reformers, headed by Baldwin and Lafontaine, naturally claimed that such a system must cease and that appointments must be under their control; and it was over a Civil Service appointment that their breach with Lord Metcalfe finally came. Unfortunately, into the room swept and garnished of Colonial Office jobbery, came the seven devils of Canadian Patronage. It is an accursed thing, and stoning is the fittest meed for its defenders.

No system will give us perfection. In all that we aim at in this life, save perhaps in the choice of a wife, we must be satisfied with the second best. But the citizens of Canada have at least a right to demand in their civil servants a certain educational standard, and must place its enforcement in the hands of a non-partisan Commission. Such a body must of course construe the word "examination" in a very wide sense. It must insist upon certain moral and physical qualifications in the candidates. In many cases, and in all demanding technical qualifications, testimonials and interviews must form a part of the examination; advice must be sought from many quarters; but the absolute power of appointment and the absolute responsibility must remain in the hands of the Commission. I confess to a feeling of pleasurable excitement on the rare occasions when I am asked to help a friend in getting an appointment, but that excitement I am willing to forego, and so I fancy are most of us.

The Civil Service should have a general manager. Each department has a deputy minister, but the departments so interlock and overlap that a special co-ordinator is necessary. A separate minister for the Civil Service seems to me to be unnecessary, an addition of further adipose tissue to our already unwieldy Cabinet; I would prefer a deputy minister working directly under the Prime Minister of Canada.

One of the first tasks before this deputy minister would be to get into the closest possible touch with the Civil Service Commission, of which indeed he might fitly be made a member. Gradually the number of positions should be reduced and the salaries correspondingly raised. For the next five years at least, few if any appointments should be made to the Civil Service, save of occasional technical experts. As members leave the Service, for whatever reason, their positions should either be cancelled, or filled by the appointment of existing members of the Service, whose positions should then be wiped out. But not a cent less should be spent on salaries, which should steadily and permanently be raised. Too many and too poorly paid officials have been the curse of more than one country in Europe, and are a distinct nuisance in Canada. At present we have so many of them that even in the approaching days of reconstruction, even when the Militia Department becomes comparatively unimportant and yields pride of place to the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment, I think that with intelligent selection from the ranks of existing members, at least ninety-five per cent of the new positions can be filled from within.