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The Examination Method of Civil Service Appointments

An Interesting Correspondence Between a Critic of the Merit System and Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1895 Theodore Roosevelt was a member of the Board of Civil Service Commissioners at Washington, D.C. The Pendleton Act, which set in operation the method of appointing to the U. S. civil service by competitive examination, had been in force for some years, but was not fully understood or appreciated. The situation generally in the United States was not unlike that which at present obtains in Canada with regard to our own Act of 1908.

Among the opponents of the system were several more or less prominent publicists, one of whom, Mr. Judson Grenell, editor of *The Evening News* of Detroit, went to rather unusual pains to secure condemnatory information. It happened that in 1895 a special examination was held by the Commission in connection with the appointment of an assistant statistician to the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Grenell offered himself for the examination, not with a view to obtaining the appointment, but merely to see how the operations of examining, rating, and selecting appeared from the inside.

After taking the examination Mr. Grenell endeavoured to obtain still further data as to subsequent procedure by the Commission. On the announcement of the successful competitor, he wrote to the Commission asking to be furnished with a statement of the general averages of all the competitors. The Chief Examiner answered his letter, declining the request on the ground that the Commission simply notifies each

competitor of his own standing but not of the standing of others.

This rule did not meet with Mr. Grenell's approval, and a correspondence took place between him and the Commission. The closing letter of this correspondence from Civil Service Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt furnishes a particularly complete reply to much of the criticism still made by those unacquainted with the facts in regard to Civil Service appointments in accordance with the merit system. The correspondence appeared in a current issue of *Good Government*, and has been preserved as one of the milestones of progress in the United States. Though long, it is worth reading from end to end, in view of the present discussion in Canada, familiar to everyone who is following the career of Civil Service Reform in this country.

I.

Mr. Grenell to the United States Civil Service Commission.

Detroit, April 12, 1895.

Gentlemen, — The declination of one of your subordinates to give me the averages of those who took the civil service examination for assistant statistician, Agricultural Department, is not satisfactory. The reason given for not giving it is, in my opinion, not sufficient, either. I have not asked who took the examination; in fact, I have not the remotest idea who they were. I simply ask for the averages of those