

THE CIVILIAN

Devoted to the interests of the Civil Service
of Canada.

Subscription \$1.00 a year;
Single copies 5 cents.

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THE CIVILIAN,
P. O. Box 484, Ottawa

Communications on any subject of interest to the Civil Service are invited and will receive careful consideration.

Ottawa, Oct. 20, 1911

ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS.

In an address on Education at the recent annual meeting of the British Association, Bishop Welldon seemed to contemplate an early return to the system of nomination to posts in the British Service. He pointed out that examination was once the obvious remedy for favouritism, but that it could never test some of the highest qualities of men and women for the Service of the State. He emphasised this remark by a curious one—he said that “a facility for answering questions upon paper was easily associated with gravedefects of intellect and character.” Then he forecasted a future (presumably no distant one) when examinations would lose their “fatal authority,” and other considerations (not specified) should govern election to the Public Service.

The Civil Servant is directly interested in the law governing appointments, for the man who enters with influence alone at his back may enter it at an unfair stage, or may bring his

influence with him. Bishop Welldon's perfunctory dismissal of examinations as “once the obvious remedy for favouritism,” implies, as a British contemporary points out, an enviable obliviousness of the essential features of this problem of executive government. For when he suggests that “favouritism” will ever “cease to be a public danger” he not only visualises the millennium, he surely is unaware that within living memory, Gladstone, Disraeli, Robert Lowe, Bulwer Lytton, Trevelyan, and Fawcett have felt compelled to denounce this favouritism as a very grave peril to the State. Indeed, the method of recruiting the Civil Service by open competition was the direct outcome of these denunciations, and the undoubted cause of that efficiency to which the Public Service of Great Britain owes its present reputation of being the finest in the world. All the objections that are now being made against the system of recruiting the Service by examinations were urged against the institution of that system during the years of struggle, 1853 to 1869. The great reformers named met and demolished them all, showing them to be in essence the specious arguments by which the privileged always seek to buttress privilege. Experience has in fact shown that the one source of weakness in the original charter of open competition was the exceptions it admitted. Moreover, subsequent investigations have proved only too conclusively that wherever the public interest in the British Service is not safeguarded by unrestricted open competition for appointments, caste will assert itself and privilege prevail. It is recorded in the proceedings of a certain Select Committee that under the blessed system of nomination then prevailing a confirmed lunatic was appointed to a Government Clerkship while another such post was given to my lord's greengrocer, desirous of a peaceful close to an uneventful life. No wonder Bulwer Lytton said, “admission into the Civil Service is indeed eagerly sought after, but it is for the