

# At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

## The American Invasion Continues

Your  
Humble  
Servt  
Silas  
Wegg

On December 14, 1920, certain young men and women, enticed from their homes by carefully-worded advertisements, gave themselves up for seven hours to the consideration of eleven questions propounded by the Canadian Civil Service Commission as tests of the ability of some or all of these aspiring folks to assume the duties of Junior Civil Service Examiners.

The questions are given in full on another page of *The Civilian*. I would reprint them under the Sign of the Wooden Leg if this department existed for humorous purposes, but the editor has instructed me so often to keep to my proper sphere of "moral uplift" that I dare not introduce into my articles anything that might provoke a laugh. He has permitted me, however, to quote from the examination papers, provided I use the quotations for the enforcement of some lesson. Let us see what we can do in that direction.

Consider Question No. 1 of the first part of the paper:

*Of what value might be what is generally called a liberal education, for a career in the Clerical Groups of the Civil Service?*

I thoroughly appreciate that question, its moods and tenses, its judicious use of capitals and lower case letters, even its little comma after the word "education", as if to say, "Take a breath here before you contemplate the awful importance of the future." One objection obtrudes itself. Why not a capital C for career?

How easily the classic fitness of the phraseology might have been spoiled! A careless examiner might have put it — "Of what value is a liberal education?" and let it go at that. Thank whatever gods there be, or might be, we have men among our commissioners who recognize the force and beauty of the conditional mood. "Of what value might be——". The phrase betrays the cautious man. He will not by any implication, not even by

example, commit himself to the theory that a liberal education is of value. He will not even grant that such a thing exists. Mark the guarded words: "What is generally called a liberal education", quite in line with the methods of a scientist who will not say positively that there is an ethereal substance pervading space but is willing to hold discussion on the hypothesis that there might be what is generally called ether. Surely our commission is composed of men who will not make any false steps.

Perhaps there may have been, or might have been, or should have been, some careless proof-reader at work here, and the question was intended to read: "Of what value is what might generally be called a liberal education", but this assumption is untenable. It postulates the existence of value in the world other than those assigned by the commissioners, and might prove the basis of a claim for reconsideration of his case by same unsuccessful candidate who actually happened to have what is generally called a liberal education. The question has been rendered burglar-proof against all who would creep or crawl into the fold, trusting to any proficiency they had attained in the arts or sciences.

Now, what is the lesson to be drawn from the consideration of this question? It is Staurday afternoon and so I cannot call up the commissioners to find out, but I think they would tell me the lesson is: Safety First.

I should like to write on Question No. 3 — "Service Work in the Government: Clubs and Associations", were it not so broad a field to enter. Maybe at some later time, when the clubs are converted into wooden legs and the associations begin to associate, I will have a word or two to say. Let us pass on to Question No. 4. Plain italics will do, Mr. Printer, as well as capitals. It is not the type but the tip that makes one's meaning clear.

*You are in charge of a staff of Clerks, and you are to give them an inspirational talk on efficiency. What would you say? Mention assiduity, application, alertness, energy, initiative, enthusiasm, etc.*

Why, this is pie. (Don't take offence, friend Printer. It isn't your kind, however much it may look like it.) Not only do we have the question: "What would you say?" but the answer as well: "Mention assiduity, application.....etc." Thank you kindly, sir, she said. I will try No. 4, and I will mention assiduity and all the others in strict rotation. 100 per cent.!

But not so fast. Did you not forget little etcetera? Oh, those foxy boys in the Hunter Building! You may think you have them tied hand and foot, but old Houdini is not in it with them when it comes to shaking the shackles.

Etcetera, like Cleopatra's "but yet", is a gaoler to bring forth some monstrous malefactor. Run over that golden roll of virtues from assiduity to enthusiasm, mention them, as desired, extenuating naught, setting down naught in malice, and still your knowledge will be as filthy rags if you cannot find some extra grace, some commonly unregarded official virtue, on which to dilate in your Inspirational Talk on Efficiency. The capitals are offered gratuitously by myself. The commissioners slipped up when they read the proofs.

You may in your calm moments be able to think of some inspirational idea lurking within the tough shell of that "etcetera", but imagine yourself in a crowded room, watched by argus-eyed attendants, and ever gleaming in front of you the long-hoped-for prize of a junior civil service examinership at \$1,320 a year, with bonus. I bet you would funk and the Commission win out again.

The lesson of this seems to be the same as that in the first case, to wit, Safety First. Yet what civil servant