

THE CIVILIAN

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

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PROMOTION EXAMINATIONS.

"The class barrier is largely artificial. It does not exist in commence. It is peculiar to the civil servant. It has never been heard of where those much talked of 'business principles' prevail. To set up academic tests in order to ascertain the eligibility of clerks to pass this artificial barrier is unquestionably a convenient way to arrest salary increases; but such tests have not necessarily any value for the purpose of establishing the usefulness of the candidate to his department. Moreover, they are tacitly inconsistent with, if not antagonistic to, those better methods of measuring capacity which would be applied by a deputy minister, upon whom rests primarily the responsibility of recommending any particular clerk for promotion. . . . Experience is better than a knowledge of parsing."—*Daily Paper*.

This sounds like excellent common-sense, but on examination it will be found at the best a

sort of half-truth. To begin with, classification of employment is not the wholly impracticable thing described. The labour unions have brought it to a fine art; and there is not a large employer in any sphere who does not to a degree resort to it. But the fallacy in the above lies in its assumption that private business in such a matter presents a safe analogy to the public service. It sounds like a platitude to say that the chief of any concern is the best judge of his men. So he may be. Yet it does not at all follow that in the civil service promotions may be left with safety to a minister and his deputy. The whole teaching of experience is that the moment you leave promotions in such hands you invite the meddling of the politician or friend. The minister and his deputy may be strong enough to resist such meddling, and they may be above such a thing as favouritism; but then again they may not. Clearly, there must be supervision by some other and unimpeachable tribunal if the thing known as Civil Service Reform is to have reference to promotions. And granted the tribunal, how is it to intervene? The examination test for such a purpose is not ideal, but those who criticise it should suggest an alternative. Frankly, how would you have the commissioners exercise their powers of supervision? "Those better methods" of insuring that experience and capacity be rewarded in the civil service, have been in force for forty years,—and "applied by the deputy minister" at that,—and if there has been any loud cheering among civil servants over the results it has escaped our notice.

The sooner we realize the double point of view involved in a question like that of classification and examinations for promotion, the sooner we shall have a sane and sufficient discussion of the many important issues which flow from them and which will be obscured until these