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HENRY G. PEARSON



A Memorial Address

BY

EDWIN L. GODKIN



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DELIVERED JUNE 21, 1894

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IMMEDIATELY after the death of Mr. Pearson, a spontaneous movement took place to commemorate in some suitable way his character and public services. A committee was constituted, consisting of the following gentlemen :

George William Curtis, R. R. Bowker, Charles R. Miller, Carl Schurz, William Potts, Dorman B. Eaton, Edwin L. Godkin, William J. Coombs, Thomas Maitland, Dean Sage, Alexander Mackay-Smith, Isidor Straus. Mr. Curtis was chosen Chairman of the Committee, and Mr. Potts Secretary and Treasurer. Upon the death of Mr. Curtis, Mr. Schurz became Chairman.

Measures were at once taken to raise by subscription the amount needed for the form of monument contemplated, for which it was deemed that between three and four thousand dollars would be sufficient, and this amount was promptly furnished by those to whom Mr. Pearson's work had commended itself.

A contract was made with Mr. Daniel C. French, the eminent sculptor, for a portrait bust of bronze of heroic size, to rest upon a suitable pedestal of Swedish granite. It was originally intended that the monument should be erected in some public place in the open air, but no suitable location being available, it was finally determined that it should be placed in the southern lobby of the general post-office at New York, the building which had been for so many years the scene of Mr. Pearson's labors.

At 5 o'clock on the afternoon of June 21, 1894, in the presence of a large number of persons, many of them connected with the postal service, the monument was unveiled with simple ceremonies by Gen. Thomas L. James, who was Postmaster-General of the United States when Mr. Pearson became Postmaster at New York. In the evening of the same day a meeting was held at the Berkeley Lyceum, in that city, at which Mr. Edwin L. Godkin, a member of the Memorial Committee, and Editor of the New York *Evening Post*, delivered the address given in the following pages.

Upon the pedestal of the monument appears the following inscription :

HENRY G. PEARSON,

Born July 29, 1844. Died April 20, 1889.

Postmaster at New York

April 1, 1881, to April 20, 1889.

An example of purest
fidelity to official duty.

ADDRESS

WE have met this evening to do what, without explanation, would to a stranger seem very extraordinary—that is, to pay honor to the memory of a postmaster for simply having done his duty as a postmaster. Henry G. Pearson, whose memorial bust we have unveiled to-day, for eight years faithfully and efficiently sorted and distributed the mails, and saw that his subordinates did their duty, at the leading post-office of the country—this and nothing more. He was first appointed by President Garfield, which, as he belonged to his party, was, perhaps, not unusual. But he was retained in office by President Cleveland, and it is this retention which will give point to most of what I am about to say. The stranger might, therefore, well ask how this had come to merit extraordinary posthumous honors—whether it was really true that most or all the other postmasters neglected their duty, and how it happened that the regular postal service of the inhabitants of New York had come to be heroic work, meriting a hero's reward.

To answer these questions fully would be to recount the whole history of the civil service of the United States. This I do not propose to do, and could not do, even if I had time. But I owe it to the good and brave man of whom we are trying to keep the public permanently in mind, to say enough to show that we are not really making too much of him ; that he had solid claims on the gratitude of his successors and of the public of this city, and that if there should ever be a real, thorough, complete, and enduring reform of the civil service, he will have just claims to be considered one of its precursors.

One of the peculiarities of the spoils system in the Federal service is that it is mainly visible in the cities and large towns, and above all in the great seaports. The country people know little about it. What they see of Federal officials is so slight that they feel that so much agitation over the mode of their appointment is

making a great fuss about nothing. This has always been one of the chief difficulties of the civil-service-reform movement. To give it life and vigor and point it has to be carried on in the neighborhood of a great custom-house or post-office, or else at the seat of government itself—that is, in some place where the people are familiar with the working of the spoils system on a great scale. The countryman, who sees nothing in a change of administration but a change of United States marshals or the substitution of one country grocer for another as postmaster, finds it difficult to understand what a prodigious fountain of political corruption a large custom-house or post-office may be made. This has made it very difficult to move the general public on behalf of the reform, to bring it home to them, in short, as one of the burning questions of the day, as the thing which stands in the way of much legitimate extension of governmental functions.

More than this, it has concentrated the energies of the reformer on the points where Federal servants most abound—and, above all, on the Federal offices in this city. It has compelled us to talk and act as if the purification of the New York post-office and custom-house were the great end and aim of our agitation. It has, in a measure, led us to feel that if we get a good man put at the head of either of these establishments our battle is won. It is at these points, too, that the spoils system makes the most energetic resistance. In truth, after a Presidential election, I venture to assert that there is no consequence of victory, legislative or administrative, which for weeks and months so occupies the minds of men interested in politics in this city, as the question who is to be postmaster and who collector. These offices are to the spoilsman the greatest rewards the President has to bestow, and the idea that they will not be bestowed as spoils always makes the politicians smile.

For fully fifty years, except during Mr. Pearson's terms, the postmastership of New York has never been filled except for political reasons, and with political men. Never during that period, except in his case, has the interest of the public mails been the leading consideration in making the appointment. The place was always given to politicians of some local prominence, some of them very good men, in the belief and expectation that they would use it to reward the people who worked at the maintenance of the party organization in this city.

This mode of disposing of the post-office leads me to say what may sound like an apology for the spoils system, but which the truth of history calls for. Government by universal suffrage, familiar, natural, and time-honored as it seems to some of us, is a new and modern idea. Until the beginning of this century, the notion that all should vote—the ignorant as well as the wise, the poor man as well as the man of property—never entered into popular thought. It is really an outcome of our own Revolution and of the French Revolution. But those who introduced it into politics had no idea how it would work. They were used to small communities in which every man knew his neighbor and shared his interests and ideas. Of the prodigious masses of population which have sprung up in all modern States under the influence of manufactures, improved agriculture, locomotion, and sanitation, they had no foresight or conception. Moreover, reasoning from what they saw around them, they thought that with the power to vote would come eagerness to vote, and that there never would be any difficulty in getting people to the polls. The trouble of finding candidates, too, acceptable to very large bodies of men never dawned on them. Such things in old times were settled by half-a-dozen gentlemen round a dinner-table, or by some individual taking it into his head to be a candidate and offering himself to the electors. For a while the work of presidential nomination with us was done by a volunteer committee of Congress. But I do not think I am rash in saying that the men of 1820 had no more idea of our present nominating machinery, from the primaries up to the national convention, than they had of railways and telegraphs and telephones. Its complication is very great, and increases in the ratio of the voting mass. Moreover, it is not a machine which once started will work of itself. It has to be kept in order by incessant activity from year's end to year's end. The managers can never for a day take their hands off it. The voting multitude has to be persuaded, placated, and informed; the ignorant have to be enlightened, and the indifferent have to be aroused, and the lazy have to be got to vote, and all this not in one day, but more or less every day in the year.

Now, it was not unnatural that the fathers or conceivers of universal suffrage, so to speak, as they found this work growing on their hands, should, in looking about for some one to do it, have hit upon the plan of making the office-holders do it, and

making their salaries the reward of both their official and party service. I am not either praising or condemning or excusing them. I am simply explaining. It was a policy which met a present and pressing need, and it seemed to add considerably to the interest and excitement of elections. These elections became what the day of battle is to an army, the test of all the drill and discipline and organization of preceding years, of the sagacity of leaders and the fidelity of followers. It soon became very popular, and more than this as it became familiar. It came to appear the natural, necessary, and above all the American way of preparing for political victory and of filling offices. National feeling was enlisted on its side. Other ways, or what are called "business ways," got to look foreign, monarchical, or, worse still, "English."

I mention this as perhaps the greatest difficulty the civil-service reformers had to face when they began their agitation thirty years ago. They found the spoils system thoroughly in possession of the public mind, with a certain show of utility behind it, and with national feeling to a certain degree enlisted in its favor. I remember, when Mr. Jenckes initiated the movement for a change, it was looked on as in some degree a Prussian whimsey—something the long-haired people were taking up to fill up their time, now that slavery was abolished. People got to believe that in no other way could the work of politics be carried on; that the office-holders must work or elections could not be won. Probably the formidable difficulty which the reformers had to encounter was this widely diffused feeling of the necessity of the thing, the belief that party government could not be carried on without it. One of our best weapons in this debate has been the example of England, the only country in the world whose political institutions and political habits resemble our own, and in which, although not over thirty offices are vacated on the change of ministry, the excitement of a general election reaches fever heat, and speakers and money abound. Another, and possibly a more powerful one, has been the fact that among ourselves the party which drives another out of power always wins without the help of the offices. To this it may be answered that the opposition also works hard because it expects office if it wins; but to the argument that the most lavish use of the offices has never yet sufficed to keep the party in power, there is no good answer. I do not like to cite

particular illustrations, because it might seem what is called invidious. But I may make the general statement that every President who, during the last fifty years, has failed to get a renomination or re-election has failed in spite of the vigorous use of all the patronage at his command, and that every opposition candidate who has succeeded has succeeded without anything better to offer than promises, which are by general consent treated in political circles as an uncommonly weak reliance. Anyhow, whatever view we may take of the question of necessity, the general effect of the system on our politics has been the effect of a standing army on the militia. The existence of a large body of regulars, as I may call them, among us has been to produce the impression that the winning of votes at an election, the persuasion of people to elect this man and reject that one, in which the work of popular government consists, was the duty of the office-holder only or mainly ; that it was something which only devolved secondarily, or not at all, on other members of the party, and that as long as these office-holders were ready to do it, other people need only take a languid interest in it. The general result is that although we talk of the excitement of a presidential election as something prodigious and unparalleled, it is not really so great and does not move nearly so many people as a general election in England. There is more racket made by our newspapers, and more of spectacular modes of working up enthusiasm, but the active participation in the work of persuasion of all classes and conditions of men is, I think, greater there than it is here.

Another consideration, and a more important one, is, I think, that the electioneering work of office-holders is more likely to lead to corruption than that of volunteers. A man who feels he is working for money, or, in other words, for his bread and butter, not unnaturally seeks to arouse the same motives in others. It would be very hard for him to excite in others an enthusiasm which he does not himself feel, or to appeal to a disinterestedness which he is not able to exhibit in his own person. So I venture on the opinion—which I admit is purely speculative—that canvassing done by office-holders is necessarily more expensive than that done by outsiders, or, rather, by the general public. This is, however, neither here nor there, as the saying is. What I have been seeking to bring home to you is the exceeding difficulty in 1884 of procuring such an appointment as that of Mr. Pearson to

the New York post-office by a President of the opposite party, in the teeth of the obstacles to it presented by long-established usage and what really seemed the necessities of the case. It is quite true that not only Mr. Cleveland, but a very large proportion of the public men of the party which came into power with him, were pledged, or in some manner committed, to the principle of the merit system. But, gentlemen, we all know the enormous distance which separates theory from practice. There is not one of us who does not feel how much easier it is to approve than to act. It is a common human experience that, just as men when they come into possession of great wealth seldom or never do the things they thought they would do when they were poor, so also, when men come into power, they seldom incline to the things which moved them before they achieved power. From the new standpoint come new ideas. I remember when civil-service reform first began to be discussed in Congress and the first attempts were made to pass the present civil-service act, the number of members who were in favor of civil-service reform, but could not bring themselves to support "this particular measure," was very large. It was a good while before "this particular measure" was able to find any favor. Any other measure that could be thought of was apparently always more meritorious than the one before the House.

You are familiar, too, with the way each of our great parties feels about the existing law, as administered by the other party. Neither ever owns itself as hostile to reform in general, but the reform the other party is administering is never real reform, it is something monstrous, abnormal, hybrid, and debauching. But in 1884, when Mr. Pearson was continued in charge of the New York post-office, although President Cleveland had shown himself in the Governor's chair a very good friend of civil-service reform and had said much in its favor, nevertheless I think I may venture on the supposition that the reform he had in mind was reform among the minor or subordinate officers, the clerks or messengers, and sorters, and carriers, the inspectors, and gaugers. The idea of applying the principle to the headship of the greatest post-office or custom-house in the country was rather new and startling. For it is a cardinal rule of the spoils system that it is not the nature of the duties but the number of men it commands or controls that constitute the importance of an office. No spoils-

man ever sincerely believes in non-interference with his subordinates in matters of politics on the part of the head of an office. He laughs when you tell him that they are absolutely free to vote as they please; that they need not do the political work unless they like, and may work on whichever side they choose. He feels sure that influence must trickle down through the ranks and keep the subordinate mindful that he owes his "bread and butter" to the party in power; consequently, no matter how well protected he may be by the rules against interference from on high, the mere fact that the superior has power to dismiss has immense importance in the politician's eyes. The bestowal, therefore, of an office employing many men, on one who has not been active in politics and had belonged to the other party, and with an eye only to effective public service, was in 1884—and may I not say, still is?—looked upon as an act of great hardihood—a great departure from sound and wholesome traditions.

In my opinion it could not have been brought about but for two things. One was that Mr. Cleveland not unnaturally felt grateful to the mugwumps for their support, for he owed a great deal of his reputation to their labors. He was, therefore, able to say to the spoilsmen that this was the only thing they asked for, and that they must have it, as the reward for their political activity. This was an argument which every politician could understand.

The other agency is what I may venture to call, for want of a better name, the course of events, by which I mean the increasing exactingness of modern society in the matter of business methods. I think we have owed a large part of what we have got in the way of civil-service reform to this exactingness. I believe we shall some day owe to it a reform in the consular service. It is becoming increasingly difficult to tell people what the consular service is for, and then to keep your face straight when showing them how it is filled. The world demands more and more in all service some kind of relation between your means and your ends.

It is said, and I believe with truth, that nothing has done so much to promote temperance as the greatly increased use of machinery in modern industry. One of the peculiarities of all good machines is that they cannot be managed by drunken men. The touch of a drunkard's hand sets them wild. A very large proportion of the skilled labor of the world is now employed

either in the superintendence or in the aid of machinery. An artisan, therefore, who wishes to get and keep employment, has, as a rule, to keep sober. The anger of a mismanaged machine is so serious in its consequences that no employer can afford to overlook even a single case of intemperance. The man who drinks goes, and cannot come back. So that by a beautiful process of artificial selection all the good places of the world are naturally passing into the hands of the sober men, a result which would probably never have been brought about by mere moral suasion. It has been brought about by the increasing damage done by drunkenness, if I may use the expression—a fine illustration, as I see it, of the moral government of the world, of the way in which even the dark things of our life assist in the progress of the race. Now, this course of events, or if you like the phrase better, the growth of business, is in like manner making for civil-service reform. The volume of affairs, especially in the matter of the collection of revenue and the carriage and distribution of letters, is growing so large in all modern civilized countries, that the use of the same men for two different services, or two different kinds of work, is becoming more and more difficult, and the public is at the same time becoming more and more exacting. The old custom of having a man collect customs duties or sort letters in the daytime and work at “politics” in the evening is becoming harder and harder to maintain. His official work is too voluminous; his mistakes too serious. The contrast of this system with the increasing specialization of private business is too marked. We are becoming more and more conscious that the road to excellence or efficiency in almost every branch of human endeavor lies through a rigid attention to one thing. This is true of science, of literature, of art, of law, and of medicine; it is also true of business of all kinds. The jack-of-all-trades, once an eminent and much admired person, has been cast down from his high estate. His very name is now almost a synonym for failure and incompetency. The world is insisting more and more that none of us shall do more than one thing, and more and more believing that the man who tries to do more than one thing will not succeed. Therefore, in my belief, the political office-holder, the man who both runs the primaries and the conventions and collects the revenues and sorts the letters, is destined to disappear at no distant date.

But, gentlemen, we must be careful about pushing too far the analogy between private and public business. We know very well that if an express company were to select its employees on the ground of their politics every four years, to turn out its best hands because they were Republicans or Democrats, or were to turn them out because they had been in their places long enough, or because it was time to give some other and inexperienced men a chance at the salaries, or because they were not active enough in some sort of outside business or amusement; because, for instance, they did not play baseball or lawn tennis well enough—we know that such an express company would soon come to grief. Its business would rapidly decline. Some rival would soon offer quicker despatch and greater security, and it would either go into bankruptcy or apply to the courts to be wound up. All private concerns are bound to use nothing but the best-known methods in the administration of their affairs, including the best-known methods of getting good service from their employees. They have to do for them the things, whatever they may be, which experience of human nature teaches us tend to secure diligence, honesty, and fidelity, and these are, mainly, sufficient pay, reasonable work, but above all security of tenure. No corporation or firm can get good service from men who know that good service will neither enable them to obtain promotion nor keep their places. Every corporation or firm knows this. If you go into any great and successful office or factory which is carried on for profit, and ask the managers what their system of employment is, you will find the principles and rules of what some of our friends in Washington used to call “snivel-service reform” in full force. If you will, for instance, visit the Pennsylvania or New York Central Railroad, or Adams Express, or any great trust company, and ask them in what manner they deal with their employees, you will not need to read one of our documents. Our whole plan will be as plain to you as a pikestaff, and you will find it far pleasanter than sitting down to study our tracts or listen to addresses.

But the penalty, or sanction, as the jurists call it, which keeps this system in force, is failure, or insolvency, or, in other words, financial ruin. Without this every one of them, I venture to assert, would go on just as the government goes on. Much as I respect the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, or of the

New York Central, or of the United States Trust Company, I am sure that were it in my power to go to them and tell them that no matter how they conducted their business, or how many losses they experienced, their deficit should always be made up to them, and funds for their dividends should be always supplied from outside sources, I firmly believe they would lay aside all restraint and establish the spoils system within a very few months.

In the government, as you know, we have no such penalty. No matter how it conducts the public business, the taxpayer makes up the deficit. But when the government gets into trouble, the gallant taxpayer comes forward and asks how much it needs, and whether it will borrow the amount or levy it in taxes, and tells it to cheer up, that the money is ready. Whatever happens, no matter who is to blame, no matter by whose folly or fault the deficit has been wrought, the credit of the government must not suffer. Consequently, we cannot look with any confidence to any speedy change through the mere course of events. Matters will not mend rapidly, for business reasons, as they would mend in a factory or railroad. Pressure has to be brought to bear on the men in power from the outside. Public opinion has to act on them. What interests them most is not remote, but immediate results. Their main interest is to keep the party in power, and keep themselves in favor with the men who make nominations. They are not particularly troubled by hearing from you that their doings will in the long run greatly injure the government. They know the government will last their time and somewhat longer. They will not hasten unless their personal prospects are threatened. This means that agitation, watchfulness, and incessant criticism are necessary for the advancement of the cause.

It does not do for its friends to trust to the good intentions of any man in office. It does not do to assume that he is doing as well as he can. These friends can never forget that all the strong influences of political life are silently working in Washington all the time against the change. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that every Congressman who visits the President puts in a word or exerts an influence of some kind against it. Every President who wishes to exert any influence in legislation finds himself under a constant temptation to disregard it. In fact, the minute he announces, or it appears, that he greatly desires the passage of

a certain measure, he, if I may use the expression, appears to Congressmen to announce that he has offices for sale, and asks for bids. Many of them say at once : " Now is our chance ; if the old man wants our votes, he can have them, but he must pay his price." The old custom of appealing to the public or forcing legislation through the pressure of popular opinion seems wellnigh to have died out. The method which has taken its place is just as corrupt and as hostile to efficient public service as if money passed instead of office. The more, too, a President is interested in public affairs, and the more he wishes to see his ideas embodied in legislation, the stronger is the temptation to resort to this cheap and easy method of influencing congressional action. Consequently, as long as there remains a single non-political office outside the rules, so long will the occasion for agitation and criticism continue. To escape criticism has been the great ambition of rulers ever since civilized societies were founded, but we owe everything worth having, both in political and social life, to the fact that they have never succeeded.

There are about two hundred thousand offices in the service of the United States. Of these about forty three thousand have been brought under the rules. A large proportion of the remainder are postmasters. But no rational man who was not familiar with the history of American politics would suppose that the despatch of the mails and the distribution of letters was the chief function of these officers, or, indeed, one of their duties at all. They seem to exist over a large part of the country as the reward for political activity and signs of victory. In many cases an election does not seem won unless the post-office has changed hands. After the last presidential canvass, an incident occurred in Ohio, I think, which illustrated in an amusing way the stronghold on the popular mind of the idea that the post-office is simply a part of the spoils of war. A German who held a post-office in Ohio under President Cleveland was turned out by President Harrison, and a soldier's widow put in his place. When President Cleveland was re-elected, as soon as the decisive returns reached the village, the German ran down to the post-office and said to the widow : " We have won the election ; the post-office is mine." And she was so keenly alive to the proprieties of the occasion that she promptly packed up her papers and handed the office over to him that very night, and had to be reminded from

Washington the next day that she was really still in office, and was responsible for the letters and accounts.

Now, gentlemen, I do not need to go again here over all the arguments against this state of things. You have heard over and over of the terrible and yet ridiculous demands made on the time and strength of the incoming President and his postmaster-general by the redistribution of these offices among his followers. At the beginning of every new administration, the post-offices take up fully three months of the time of the postmaster-general, and nearly as much of that of the President. You do not need to be reminded of all this, but I think a great many people are puzzled by the question how the trouble is to be avoided. The post-offices have to be filled; the filling of the smaller ones, the fourth-class offices, as they are called, which are mostly small affairs, takes nearly as much trouble as the filling of the larger ones. As they are often annexed to a store, and as there are often only two men in the place capable of filling them, the Republican and the Democrat, it would be impossible to put them under the rules, and award them to competitive examination. So all sorts of plans, including popular election, have been suggested for the selection of candidates, but the simplest expedient of all has, I think, been neglected; I mean the plan of not making vacancies. Our own is the only country in the civilized world in which the selection of postmasters, gives any trouble, and they have everywhere to be selected from much the same material. The reason is that we are the only civilized country in which vacancies occur, except through death, resignation, or misconduct. Vacancies which occur from these three causes are, of course, easily managed. It does not trouble any postmaster-general to fill them. They are necessarily comparatively few in number, and they have the supreme merit of being in the popular eyes what I may call business vacancies—that is, vacancies which cannot be avoided or which the good of the service calls for.

We must never forget that the manner of filling offices is a constant lesson in government to the bulk of the people, and worth any number of manuals or treatises or schoolbooks. The very worst effect of the spoils system—an effect which we see in our large cities more markedly than elsewhere—is the way it teaches the public to separate duties from public offices, to think of offices as places to which no duties are attached, or in which the

duties play a subordinate part to the privileges. In truth, I may ask, can any people receive a worse lesson in politics than the spectacle of fitness disregarded or treated as of secondary importance by its public men, and, in fact, by everybody who has to do with the filling of places? Now, in no way is this lesson taught so widely as by the filling and unfilling of our post-offices. The rural population, as I remarked in the beginning, sees little or nothing of the spoils system where it most abounds, in the great cities. And I do not mean to say that country post-offices call for extraordinary talent or training. What I do say is that the government can as readily as in any other offices indicate by its manner of filling them and making vacancies in them its principle of administration, its way of looking at the public service. When it turns the postmaster out, no matter how efficient he may have been, at the end of four years, and appoints another who knows nothing of post-office business in his place, on account of his political activity, it says as plainly as possible to the people: "This office exists primarily for the purpose of rewarding electioneering services. The manner in which it distributes your letters and carries your mails is a secondary consideration." He must be a stupid rustic indeed who does not cover the whole public service with this view of the post-office and see in the whole machinery of government a ponderous engine for distributing salaries among politicians. The Tammany men whom we all now abuse so much have simply carried the spoils system one step farther than the Federal administration, and avow it a little more cynically. Consequently, as long as post-offices remain an instrument of corruption, we shall never get the competitive system really rooted in the popular mind.

I know the continuance in office of a postmaster who is not in sympathy with the administration for the time being, or who cares nothing about politics, is now to the public of the rural districts a strange spectacle, and the reason is that the rural man has never seen any other. Half the work of life is done by the association of ideas. A man who only knew of post-offices as places where the public mails were opened, sorted, and distributed would be amused by our present system. But if he saw our system at work for a good many years, he would by mere familiarity be brought to see nothing peculiar about it. Two reform Presidents in succession could certainly bring the people back to the old

way of looking at post-offices solely as places for the distribution of correspondence. I know very well that there still lingers in the minds of a great many politicians the notion that no man will serve the government faithfully in any office, no matter how small, who has not at least voted for the party in power, and that this ought to furnish, even from the reformer's point of view, a justification for making a "clean sweep" on every change of administration. Nothing could better illustrate than this view the extent to which the spoils system has banished from people's minds the idea of country as having the first claim on their allegiance, and substituted that of party. For, of course, the man who in the service of his government wilfully failed in his duty to it, damaged its property, betrayed its interests, did things and left things undone to bring it into discredit, because the administration did not belong to his party, would be just as much a traitor as if he did all this to oblige a foreign enemy. If an army officer or a naval officer were to execute his orders slackly because he disliked the party in power, we should all agree that he deserved to be shot, and we are all perfectly confident that no such man could be found in either the army or navy, either in war or peace. Nothing would get us to believe that the officers of the Coast Survey and Naval Observation would make mistakes in their computations, play tricks with their telescopes or theodolites, in order to bring the existing administration into disrepute, and yet many of us try to persuade ourselves that if you left men permanently in the custom-house or post-office, with good wages and with security of tenure, they would, whenever a President was elected they did not like, begin to undervalue imported goods, cheat in the weighing, put letters into the wrong boxes, or throw them into the sewers instead of delivering them. Those who take this view of the American civil service ought to hide their heads for shame and yet they are very conspicuous and often very noisy.

Henry G. Pearson was born in the city of New York, July 29, 1844. His father, a native of Philadelphia, was a printer; his mother was the daughter of Mr. Thomas, an old merchant of this city, who lived on State Street, in whose house Mr. Pearson was born. His father was one of the California Argonauts of '49. In crossing the isthmus he contracted a fever and died shortly after his arrival at San Francisco. Mr. Pearson's mother died when he was but fourteen years old, when the young man started

out for himself in the battle of life. Michael Hoffman, then deputy collector of the port, secured for the boy a minor place in the custom-house, where he remained until some time in the summer of 1860, when Mr. Hoffman gave him a note to Gen. Dix, then postmaster, who appointed him to a place in the post-office. In 1862, upon the establishment of the railway mail service, he was detailed as a postal clerk on the route between New York and Washington. He drew the plans of the first postal car, which was built under his supervision. He remained in the railway postal service, becoming the chief clerk on the route between New York and Washington, until February, 1873, when he was appointed superintendent of mails in the New York post-office.

Upon the appointment of Bankson T. Morgan to the position of police judge, Mr. Pearson was made assistant postmaster by Postmaster James, in July, 1873. On the 7th of March, 1881, when Postmaster James was called to Washington by Gen. Garfield as postmaster-general, Mr. Pearson was appointed acting postmaster, and a few weeks later postmaster of New York by President Garfield. He was immediately confirmed by the Senate, and assumed the duties of postmaster April 1, 1881. He was reappointed by President Cleveland in April, 1885, and confirmed by the Senate. He died April 20, 1889, before the expiration of his term of office, but after his successor, Cornelius Van Cott, had been nominated by President Harrison and confirmed by the Senate.

This is the whole record of his official career. There would, as I began by saying, be nothing very remarkable about it but for one thing—that he was appointed, against all precedents, because he was the fittest man, and that he devoted himself during his whole term of service to the efficient performance of a postmaster's work and to nothing else. If you suppose that his reappointment was easily obtained, you would be very much mistaken. It was bitterly opposed, and it seemed at times on the point of miscarriage. I think all the working politicians considered the office in such hands absolutely thrown away, and they resorted to such means as were within their reach to prevent it. Among these means were "charges"—I forget what they were, but like all charges made for such purposes, they were very complete; in fact, they were too complete. They reminded me of the campaign

charge made against Schuyler Colfax. Not only did this gentleman repel one-armed soldiers when they called on him, but he insisted on their sending in their cards by a lackey in livery on a silver salver, and when the poor soldier had no card he was sent away sorrowful. I was, I remember, in Washington when the charges were made. I heard of them from President Cleveland, and learned from him that they must be answered. I accordingly telegraphed for Mr. Pearson to come on, and he came, and Mr. Dorman B. Eaton and I went to see the postmaster-general about them. Pearson very soon disposed of them when he reached Washington, and was then allowed to take possession of his office. I saw him often during the remaining years of it, and it was a great treat to see an official who was solely occupied with his official duties and who knew nothing and cared nothing about politics. He was interesting to me as probably the only one of the few civil officers of the United States government of whom it could be said that his sole preoccupation was the good of the service. But no one must imagine that he lay in a bed of roses. He and I were members of a small party who went together to Gettysburg in 1888 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle. It was the summer before the election. He had had a full trial of the place and of the tenure under which he held it, and he was not cheerful. He had found himself more or less during the whole of it an intruder, whose success but few political men desired, and to which hardly one was willing to contribute. He complained of a good deal of snubbing in high quarters, of indifference to his applications for better machinery or more help, and of an apparent desire to prevent such a thing as his appointment occurring again.

As a matter of fact, it has not occurred again. I see no sign of it. His immediate successor was a livery-stable keeper, and his again a lawyer, who knew nothing of post-offices except to draw his mail. I have not a word to say against either of them, except that they were not the stuff out of which you can make postmasters. If either of them was fit for the place, then the business experience of the human race must be at fault. Pearson got it because he had risen to it from the ranks, because he had undergone long training for it, and because he proved by his administration of it that the plan on which he was appointed was the right plan. But all my talks with him, on that trip, con-

vinced me that it was mainly as a martyr that he was to serve the cause. His health was doubtless already beginning to fail, and his hopefulness, I fear, was deserting him, but there seemed no abatement in his devotion to his duties. He has often reminded me since of a passage in Merivale's *History of the Romans*, which I think throws a flood of light on that perhaps most mysterious of all historical questions, the question why it took the Roman Empire so long to fall. Do not think I am comparing small things with great, or trying to make a paradox when I quote him. He says, speaking of the condition of Roman morality under the Emperors :

“The history of the Cæsars presents to us a constant succession of brave, patient, resolute, and faithful soldiers, men deeply impressed with the sense of duty, superior to vanity, despisers of boasting, content to toil in obscurity and shed their blood on the frontiers of the empire, unrepining at the cold mistrust of their masters, not clamorous for the honors so sparingly awarded them, but satisfied in the daily work of their hands, and full of faith in the national destiny which they were daily accomplishing.”

I have called the prolonged decay of the Roman Empire, the great length of time it took to go to pieces, “mysterious,” because all the known and visible reasons of downfall were so marked and so strong, such as the incessant and bloody contests at Rome for the imperial purple, the increasing power of the military garrison of the capital over government, and the increasing pressure of the barbarian hordes on every frontier. Well, what made the downfall of this wonderful organization so slow was undoubtedly the fidelity and efficiency of the subordinate officers of the government, both civil and military. They were distinctly “out of politics.” The Cæsars might come and go, and the purple might even now and then be put to auction, and the great men at Rome might betray each other and cut each other's throats as much as they pleased, but all through that vast dominion, from Mount Atlas to Hadrian's Wall, the minor officers stuck to their posts and did their duty. Justice was well administered, letters were faithfully carried, great roads, of which we see the remains to this day, were made in every direction, barbarians were civilized, and great cities and villages and temples arose in every province. I am not defending this civilization or recommending it. I am simply saying that it could not have flourished as it did, or have

lasted as long as it did, without the extraordinary fidelity and efficiency of the subordinated office-holders.

And, if I may come down to modern times for my illustrations, let me say that, although the remoter causes were numerous and powerful, the immediate cause of the downfall of the old French monarchy was the venality and incapacity of the minor servants of the crown. It was their oppression and injustice and determination to feather their nests which roused the peasantry to madness and made the Revolution bloody, for it was they, not the gentry, who ruled the country districts. And I don't think I exaggerate when I say that it was her wonderful bureaucracy, poor, competent, upright, and secure, which prepared Prussia to convert herself, when the time came, into the German Empire. A more striking illustration still is the British Empire in India, where millions of population are ruled in perfect peace and order by a few hundred civil servants, who are selected for their capacity, kept in office during good behavior, and rewarded by promotion and pensions, whose integrity as a body, although living among a barbarous and subject population in remote districts, has never been impeached. No more wonderful example of what a civil service, organized on high principles, can do for a government, was ever seen than this Indian civil service is.

I say wonderful, and yet when we consider the matter a little, it is not so very wonderful after all. For we must remember that the state, as an organization, is the civil service. What does any of us know of the state but through its civil service? What would laws be but literature if it were not for the judges, and marshals, and sheriffs, and the tax collectors, and the policemen? They represent the state to the citizen. It is through them that we get at its morality and its power; that we learn to respect or despise it. It has been said, and truly said, that the millions who pour into our cities from Europe, ignorant both of our laws and language, learn all they know of our government and polity from the police justice and police captain; but this is in a measure true of us all. We form our opinion of the government of the day from what we see and know of its officers. When we determine to turn one administration out and put another one in its place, it is largely because we think it will give us better official service. In truth, the state, apart from its officers, may be said to be merely a patriot's dream. It is the civil service which makes it blood and

bones, and which makes it palpable and concrete, lovable or unlovable, something to be proud of, or something to be ashamed of. If you will ask yourselves what the things are in our politics during the last thirty years which have made you either ashamed or proud of your country, you will find it is the behavior of certain men in the employment of the government or representing the government. A state grows, flourishes, and lasts, or declines and perishes through its servants. A good civil service will often arrest the progress, for great periods, of very potent causes of decay. A bad one will make the best constitution ever formed and the best laws ever enacted powerless to help or save any polity, however just, humane, or enlightened. When we consider in what a condition of mental flux we are just now upon nearly everything that holds civilized men together—our political economy and morality and religion,—what a very large population we have which is American only in name, what a very large body of Americans we have who care nothing about either law or political purity as long as it stands in the way of their getting rich, I think that you will agree with me that we cannot be in too great haste to give permanence, and the efficiency which comes from permanence, to the machinery of government. We civil-service reformers have been accused a good deal of making a great fuss about a very small matter, but I think the events of each day show us more and more clearly that our matter is the greatest of all matters; that if we are to preserve our form of government, and our social organization intact, and at the same time to preserve our dignity and respectability in the eyes of the world, it is to be done, not by increasing our navy and our army, but by giving the government the kind of service which the experience of mankind has shown to be the best. And it is as an example of the kind of men who should compose that service, in its higher no less than in its lower branches, that I have set Henry G. Pearson before you to-night.

