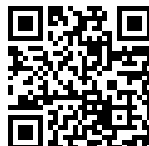

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THE NECESSITY AND PROGRESS

OF

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF

THE NATIONAL CIVIL-SERVICE REFORM LEAGUE

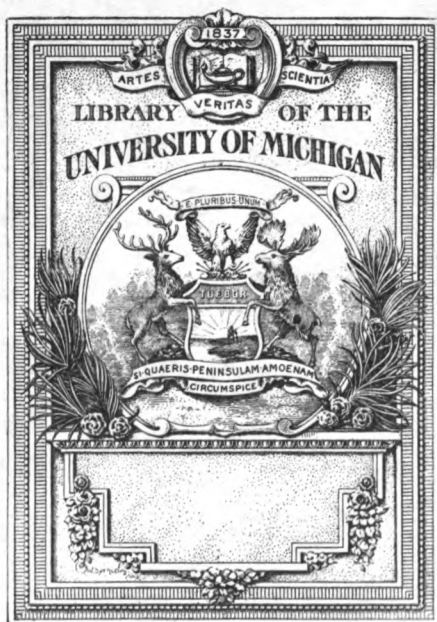
DECEMBER 12, 1894,

BY THE PRESIDENT

HON. CARL SCHURZ.

PUBLISHED FOR THE
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WASHINGTON, D. C.:
PRESS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT.

THE NECESSITY AND PROGRESS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

An Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the National Civil Service Reform League at Chicago, Ill., December 12, 1894.

BY HON. CARL SCHURZ.

This is the first time that the National Civil Service Reform League holds its annual meeting near the great Mississippi Valley; but we know that its cause is no stranger here. Not only has it in this region some of its most faithful advocates, but the practical sense and the public spirit which have wrought here such wonders, seem to produce the very atmosphere in which this cause should prosper; for Civil Service Reform is, in the sense of an enlightened, large and patriotic public spirit, a preëminently practical conception—practical in its principles, practical in its aims, and practical in its methods.

What Civil Service Reform demands, is simply that the business part of the Government shall be carried on in a sound, businesslike manner. This seems so obviously reasonable that among people of common sense there should be no two opinions about it. And the condition of things to be reformed is so obviously unreasonable, so flagrantly absurd and vicious, that we should not believe it could possibly exist among sensible people, had we not become accustomed to its existence among ourselves. In truth, we can hardly bring the whole exorbitance of that viciousness and absurdity

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home to our own minds unless we contemplate it as reflected in the mirror of a simile.

Imagine, then, a bank the stockholders of which, many in number, are divided into two factions—let us call them the Jones party and the Smith party—who quarrel about some question of business policy, as, for instance, whether the bank is to issue currency or not. The Jones party is in control, but the Smith men persuade over to their side a sufficient number of Jones men to give them—the Smith men—a majority at the next stockholders' meeting. Thus they succeed in getting the upper hand. They oust the old board of directors, and elect a new board consisting of Smith men. The new Smith board at once remove all the officers, president, cashier, tellers, bookkeepers, and clerks down to the messenger boys—the good and the bad alike—simply because they are Jones men, and fill their places forthwith with new persons who are selected, not on the ground that they have in any way proved their fitness for the positions so filled, but simply because they are Smith men; and those of the Smith men who have shown the greatest zeal and skill in getting a majority of votes for the Smith party are held to have the strongest claims for salaried places in the bank. The new men struggle painfully with the duties novel to them until they acquire some experience, but even then it needs in many instances two men or more to do the work of one.

In the course of events dissatisfaction spreads among the stockholders with the Smith management, partly shared by ambitious Smith men who thought themselves entitled to reward in the shape of places and salaries, but were "left out in the cold." Now the time for a new stockholders' meeting arrives. After a hot fight the Jones party carries the day. Its ticket of directors being elected, off go the heads of the Smith president, the Smith cashier, the Smith tellers, the Smith bookkeepers and clerks, to be replaced by true-blue Jones men who have done the work of the campaign and are expected to do more of it when the next election comes. And so the career of the bank goes on with

its periodical changes of party in power at longer or shorter intervals, and its corresponding clean sweeps of the bank service, with mismanagement and occasional fraud and speculation as inevitable incidents.

You might watch the proceedings of such a banking concern with intense curiosity and amusement. But I ask you, what prudent man among you would deposit his money in it or invest in its stock? And why would you not? Because you would think that this is not sensible men's business, but foolish boys' play; that such management would necessarily result in reckless waste and dishonesty, and tend to land many of the bank's officers in Canada, and not a few of its depositors or investors in the poorhouse. Such would be your judgment, and in pronouncing it you would at the same time pronounce judgment upon the manner in which the business part of our national Government, as well as of many if not most of our State and municipal governments, has been conducted for several generations. This is the spoils system. And I have by no means presented an exaggerated or even a complete picture of it; nay, rather a mild sketch, indicating only with faint touches the demoralizing influences exercised by that system with such baneful effect upon the whole political life of the nation.

Looking at the financial side of the matter alone—it is certainly bad enough; it is indeed almost incomprehensible how the spoils system could be permitted through scores of years to vitiate our business methods in the conduct of the national revenue service, the postal service, the Indian service, the public-land service, involving us in indescribable administrative blunders, bringing about Indian wars, causing immense losses in the revenue, breeding extravagant and plundering practices in all Departments, costing our people in the course of time untold hundreds of millions of money, and making our Government one of the most wasteful in the world. All this, I say, is bad enough. It might be called discreditable enough to move any self-respecting people to shame. But the spoils system

has inflicted upon the American people injuries far greater than these.

The spoils system, that practice which turns public offices, high and low, from public trusts into objects of prey and booty for the victorious party, may without extravagance of language be called one of the greatest criminals in our history, if not the greatest. In the whole catalogue of our ills there is none more dangerous to the vitality of our free institutions.

It tends to divert our whole political life from its true aims. It teaches men to seek something else in politics than the public good. It puts mercenary selfishness as the motive power for political action in the place of public spirit, and organizes that selfishness into a dominant political force.

It attracts to active party politics the worst elements of our population, and with them crowds out the best. It transforms political parties from associations of patriotic citizens, formed to serve a public cause, into bands of mercenaries using a cause to serve them. It perverts party contests from contentions of opinion into scrambles for plunder. By stimulating the mercenary spirit it promotes the corrupt use of money in party contests and in elections.

It takes the leadership of political organizations out of the hands of men fit to be leaders of opinion and workers for high aims, and turns it over to the organizers and leaders of bands of political marauders. It creates the boss and the machine, putting the boss into the place of the statesman, and the despotism of the machine in the place of an organized public opinion.

It converts the public officeholder, who should be the servant of the people, into the servant of a party or of an influential politician, extorting from him time and work which should belong to the public, and money which he receives from the public for public service. It corrupts his sense of duty by making him understand that his obligation to his party or his political patron is equal if not superior to his obligation to the public interest, and that his continuance in office

does not depend on his fidelity to duty. It debauches his honesty by seducing him to use the opportunities of his office to indemnify himself for the burdens forced upon him as a party slave. It undermines in all directions the discipline of the public service.

It falsifies our constitutional system. It leads to the usurpation, in a large measure, of the executive power of appointment by members of the legislative branch, substituting their irresponsible views of personal or party interest for the judgment as to the public good, and the sense of responsibility of the executive. It subjects those who exercise the appointing power, from the President of the United States down, to the intrusion of hordes of office-hunters and their patrons, who rob them of the time and strength they should devote to the public interest. It has already killed two of our Presidents, one, the first Harrison, by worry, and the other, Garfield, by murder; and more recently it has killed a mayor in Chicago and a judge in Tennessee.

It degrades our Senators and Representatives in Congress to the contemptible position of office-brokers, and even of mere agents of office-brokers, making the business of dickering about spoils as weighty to them as their duties as legislators. It introduces the patronage as an agency of corrupt influence between the executive and the legislature. It serves to obscure the criminal character of bribery by treating bribery with offices as a legitimate practice. It thus reconciles the popular mind to practices essentially corrupt, and thereby debauches the popular sense of right and wrong in politics.

It keeps in high political places, to the exclusion of better men, persons whose only ability consists in holding a personal following by adroit manipulation of the patronage. It has thus sadly lowered the standard of statesmanship in public position, compared with the high order of ability displayed in all other walks of life.

It does more than anything else to turn our large municipalities into sinks of corruption, to render Tam-

many Halls possible, and to make of the police force here and there a protector of crime and a terror to those whose safety it is to guard. It exposes us, by the scandalous spectacle of its periodical spoils carnivals, to the ridicule and contempt of civilized mankind, promoting among our own people the growth of serious doubts as to the practicability of democratic institutions on a great scale, and in an endless variety of ways it introduces into our political life more elements of demoralization, debasement and decadence than any other agency of evil I know of, aye, perhaps more than all other agencies of evil combined.

These are some of the injuries the spoils system has been, and still is, inflicting upon this Republic—some, I say; not all, for it is impossible to follow its subtle virus into all the channels through which it exercises its poisonous influence. But I have said enough to illustrate its pernicious effects; and what I have said is only the teaching of sober observation and long experience.

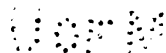
And now, if such are the evils of the spoils system, what are, by way of compensation, the virtues it possesses, and the benefits it confers? Let its defenders speak. They do not pretend that it gives us a very efficient public service; but they tell us that it is essentially American; that it is necessary in order to keep alive among our people an active interest in public affairs; that frequent rotation in office serves to give the people an intelligent insight in the nature and workings of their Government; that without it parties cannot be held together, and party government is impossible; and that all the officers and employees of the Government should be in political harmony with the party in power. Let us pass the points of this defence in review one by one.

First, then, in what sense can the spoils system be called essentially American? Certainly not as to its origin. At the beginning of our national Government nothing like it was known here, or dreamed of. Had anything like it been proposed, the fathers of the

Republic would have repelled it with alarm and indignation. It did, indeed, prevail in England when the monarchy was much stronger than it is now, and when the aristocracy could still be called a ruling class. But as the British government grew more democratic, the patronage system, as a relic of feudalism, had to yield to the forces of liberalism and enlightenment until it completely disappeared. When it invaded our national Government, forty years after its constitutional beginning, we merely took what England was casting off as an abuse inconsistent with popular government, and unworthy of a free and civilized nation. If not in origin, is the spoils system essentially American in any other sense? Only in the sense in which murder is American, or smallpox, or highway robbery, or Tammany Hall.

As to the spoils system being necessary to the end of keeping alive among our people an active interest in public affairs—where is the American who does not blush to utter such an infamous calumny? Is there no patriotism in America without plunder in sight? Was there no public spirit before spoils systems and clean sweeps cursed us, none between the battle of Lexington and Jackson's inauguration as President? Such an argument deserves as an answer only a kick from every honest American boot.

I admit, however, that there are among us some persons whose interest in public affairs does need the stimulus of office to remain alive. I am far from denying that the ambition to serve one's country as a public officer is in itself a perfectly legitimate and honorable ambition. It certainly is. But when a man's interest in public affairs depends upon his drawing an official salary, or having such a salary in prospect, the ambition does not appear so honorable. There is too pungent a mercenary flavor about it. No doubt, even among the mercenaries may be found individuals that are capable, faithful and useful; but taking them as a class, the men whose active public spirit is conditional upon the possession or prospect of official spoil are those whose inter-



est in public affairs the commonweal can most conveniently spare. Indeed, our political life would be in a much healthier condition if they did not take any part in politics at all. There would be plenty of patriotic Americans to devote themselves to the public good without such a condition. In fact, there would be more of that class in regular political activity than there are now, for they would not be jostled out by the pushing hordes of spoils-hunters, whose real interest in public affairs is that of serving themselves. The spoils system is therefore not only not a stimulus of true public spirit, but in spreading the mercenary tendency among the people it has served to baffle and discourage true public spirit by the offensive infusion in political life of the mercenary element.

The view that the spoils system with its frequent rotations in office is needed to promote among the people a useful understanding of the nature and workings of the Government, finds, amazing as it may seem, still serious adherents among well-meaning citizens. It is based upon the assumption that the public service which is instituted to do certain business for the people, should at the same time serve as a school in which ignorant persons are to learn something about the functions of the Government. These two objects will hardly go together. If the public service is to do its business with efficiency and economy, it must of course be manned with persons fit for the work. If on the other hand it is to be used as a school to instruct ignorant people in the functions of the Government—that is, in the duties of a postmaster, or a revenue collector, or an Indian agent, or a Department clerk—then we should select for such places persons who know least about them, for they have the most to learn; and inasmuch as such persons, before having acquired the necessary knowledge, skill and experience, will inevitably do the public business in a bungling manner, and therefore at much inconvenience and loss to the people, they should, in justice to the taxpayers, instead of drawing salaries, pay something for the instruction they receive. For as soon as

they have learned enough really to earn a salary, they will have to be turned out to make room for others, who are as ignorant and in as great need of instruction as the outgoing set had been before. Evidently this kindergarten theory of the public service is hardly worth discussion. The school of the spoils system, as it has been in operation since 1829, has educated thousands of political loafers, but not one political sage.

That the Government will not work satisfactorily unless all its officers and employees are in political harmony with the ruling party, is also one of those superstitions which some estimable people have not yet been able to shake off. While they sternly resist the argument that there is no Democratic and no Republican way of sorting of letters, or of collecting taxes, or of treating Indians, as theoretical moonshine, their belief must, after all, have received a rude shock by the conduct of the last three national Administrations, including the present one.

When in 1885, after twenty-four years of Republican ascendancy, the Democrats came into power, President Cleveland determined that, as a general rule, officers holding places covered by the four-years-term law should, if they had conducted themselves irreproachably, be permitted to serve out their four-years terms. How strictly this rule was adhered to I will not now inquire. At any rate it was adhered to in a great many cases. Many Republican officeholders, under that four-years rule, remained in place one, or two, or three years under the Democratic Administration. President Harrison, succeeding Mr. Cleveland, followed a similar rule, although to a less extent. And now President Cleveland again does the same. Not only did we have during his first term the startling spectacle of the great postoffice of New York City remaining in the hands of a postmaster who was not a Democrat, but recently of the Collectorship of the port of New York, once considered the most important political office in the country, being left for a year or more in possession of a Republican.

It is clear, the Presidents who acted thus did not believe

that the public interest required all the officers of the Government to be in harmony with the party in power. On the contrary, they thought that the public interest was served by keeping efficient officers in their places, for a considerable time at least, although they were not in such harmony. And no doubt all sensible people admit that the common weal did not suffer therefrom. The theory of the necessity of political accord between the administrative officers of the Government and the party in power has thus been thoroughly exploded by actual practice and experience. Being obliged to admit this, candid men, it is to be hoped, will go a step farther in their reasoning. If those two Presidents were right in thinking that the public welfare was served by keeping meritorious officers not belonging to the ruling party in place until they had served four years, is it not wrong to deprive the country of the services of such men, made especially valuable by their accumulated experience and the training of their skill, by turning them out after the lapse of the four years? If it was for the public interest to keep them so long, is it not against the public interest not to keep them longer?

This observance of the four-years-term law has the great merit of conclusively demonstrating, from the point of view of the public interest, the utter absurdity and viciousness of the law itself. And I fervently hope that the repeal of the law will before long follow this demonstration.

The question whether the spoils system, or whether the distribution of offices among its members, will make a political party strong or, which is practically the same thing, save it from defeat, has been answered by recent events in so drastic a fashion as to shake the faith even of the most inveterate spoilsman. When he remembers that the Republicans with all the offices, except the classified service, in their hands, were defeated in 1884, that the Democrats with all the offices in their hands were defeated in 1888, that the Republicans again with all the offices in their hands were defeated in 1892, and that all the offices in Christendom

could not have saved the Democrats from defeat this autumn—when he remembers this he may even begin to suspect that in our days the possession of the spoils, like the Nibelungen ring, must be attended with some mysterious fatality—a curse that attaches itself to ill-gotten good. Such a belief would not lack reason. There is the old and truthful story that the bestowal of every office as a favor makes one ingrate and ten enemies. Besides, the very aspect of the distribution of offices in the spoils-carnival way, with the gross mistakes inseparable from such a barbarous method, begins to be so disgusting to a great and constantly increasing number of good citizens, that it goes far to turn away their affection and confidence from the party responsible for it. And this counts for much, especially in times like ours, when the habit of independent thinking in politics is visibly weakening the bonds of party allegiance.

How do you explain the frequent so-called tidal waves which overturn now this and now the other party in rapidly alternating succession? It is not that the people have become more fickle in their purposes, but that they look more to the accomplishment of certain public objects, and less to mere party success; that they are becoming more critical as to the fulfillment of party pledges, and as to compliance with the requirements of good government, and that the thought of punishing his own party for misconduct or failure in meeting legitimate expectations is fast losing its terrors to the conscience of a party man. This is, as I think, a very promising condition of the popular mind. It marks a decided progress of the moral revival in our political life. I have never known a time when parties were so distinctly put on their good behavior as they are now; and, what is equally encouraging, they both seem to know it.

Under such circumstances it has an almost ludicrous sound when people still assert that parties must be, or can be, held together by the spoils of office, the "cohesive power of public plunder." The public mind, on the contrary, is fast accepting the opposite-

maxim, that when a political party has to rely upon the spoils to hold it together, it is high time that it should dissolve; because in the same measure as it needs the spoils as a means of cohesion, it ceases to be an instrument of public usefulness, and becomes a nuisance and a public danger.

A kindred question is, whether party government can be carried on, and more especially, whether an Administration can get along with Congress, without the use of the patronage. A discussion of this subject among Civil Service Reformers not long ago attracted wide attention. Mr. Josiah Quincy, as First Assistant Secretary of State, having the consular appointments in charge, had, during the first months of the present Administration, made an almost clean sweep of that branch of the service, removing Republicans from consulships and putting Democrats in their places with unprecedented vivacity. When speaking of Mr. Quincy's doings, I do not mean to ignore the President's responsibility in authorizing what was done; but Mr. Quincy, bearing the reputation of a friend of Reform, was the official adviser and became the defender of it. I speak of him as such. At a meeting of the Massachusetts Reform Club he explained his conduct, which had greatly shocked his friends, saying "that the personnel of the service had been decidedly improved by the changes made, taken as a whole, and that the methods of making appointments outside of the scope of the Civil Service Law could not be suddenly changed by any Administration so as to conform to the ideas of advanced Civil Service Reformers, without almost disrupting the political party which it represents, and destroying its influence with Congress." This is, as I understand, Mr. Quincy's own statement of the case.

I am sure I do him no injustice when I say that, in order to avoid the danger of following the ideas of the advanced Civil Service Reformers, he followed the practice of the most advanced spoilsmen; for no spoilsman in that office has ever turned over the consular service from one party to the other with greater

thoroughness and despatch. Nor am I doing him injustice in saying that he defends his course upon the exact grounds upon which professional spoilsmen in his position have always defended theirs: that the service was improved by the changes made—they always say that—and that the harmony of the party and the interests of the Administration required those changes—which they always say, too. In all this Mr. Quincy and the spoilsmen agree. For when Mr. Quincy speaks of not “disrupting the party” and of “preserving the influence of the Administration with Congress,” it means, stripped of euphonious circumlocution, simply this, that he took consulships from Republicans and gave them to Democrats to hold the party together by feeding it with patronage, and to win for the Administration the votes of members of Congress by giving them consulships for their friends and supporters. This is clear.

There was a time when in England prominent men openly avowed the doctrine that corruption was an indispensable agency in constitutional government—that without corruption constitutional government would not work—and when, with little exaggeration, the prime minister, or his agent, was described as walking about in the House of Commons with his pockets full of banknotes to be distributed among members for the purpose of “preventing the disruption of the party,” and of “preserving the influence of the Administration” with Parliament—in other words, of buying votes. When we read of this our moral sense is greatly shocked, and we are loath to admit that such a shameful state of demoralization could find a valid excuse in the loose notions and habits of the time.

Well, what is the difference between this and Mr. Quincy walking about among Senators and Representatives with consulships in his pockets to distribute them for the purpose of preventing “the disruption of the party,” and of preserving “the influence of the Administration with Congress”? The banknotes, to be sure, were downright money; but are not consulships money’s worth to members of Congress? In either case—win-

ning votes with money, or with money's worth—what else is it, to call it by its right name, than bribery? And what is the excuse with us? That it has long been a custom, and that it cannot be broken off without the risk of disrupting the party and of destroying the influence of the Administration with Congress. Was I not right in saying that the spoils system had so blunted and debauched the popular sense of right and wrong in politics as to reconcile many otherwise decent people to practices essentially corrupt? If this is one of the prevailing notions of the time with us, it cannot cease to be so too soon.

Mr. Quincy seems to think so too, for he said on the same occasion that he favored the enactment of a law placing the consular service under regulations protecting it against being used as he has used it. I am also warmly in favor of such legislation. But in England the corrupt practice mentioned was stopped, and the loose notion of the time was broken without a restraining law—by the courageous moral sense of men in power. Would not Mr. Quincy be more satisfied with himself now, had he at least made a beginning in the same direction while he had the power?

Looking at the matter, not from the moral point of view, but from that of practical politics—what has been accomplished? Has, in point of fact, all this manipulation of the patronage saved the party from disruption, and has it given the Administration smooth sailing in Congress? In the light of recent events it may have dawned upon Mr. Quincy that he would have not only served his country better, but also his party and the Administration, had he been less afraid of the ideas of advanced Civil Service Reformers, and had he bent all his talents and energies to the task of giving the country a consular service in the highest degree fitted to minister to the wants of American commerce, and to do honor to the American name abroad, by preserving and encouraging all that was good in the consular force then existing, by weeding out only what was bad, and by devising the best possible methods for ascertaining, not

the political claims or influence, but the character and business qualifications of the applicants for vacant places. Had he done this his party would certainly not be more defeated than it now is; the Administration would not have had more trouble with Congress than it has had, but both would stand before the country in a position far more desirable than they do. Let us hope that after such a proof of its practical futility, as well as its bad morals, this exhibition of the old spoils methods in the consular department, as it was the worst, may also have been the last.

As to the general policy, I have had opportunities for observing events under no less than ten Administrations, and I have never known the patronage to be extensively used for the purpose of pushing a policy by winning votes in Congress, without giving the Administration concerned far more trouble than influence, and without making for it more enemies than friends. It may capture the support of a man here and there, but it will always in a larger circle stir up jealousy, heart-burnings and bitterness, and it will so stimulate the mercenary spirit in Congress that at last the Administration can hardly obtain any support for anything without paying for it at the expense of its conscience and its honor.

The ordinary spoilsman cannot be permanently propitiated unless he gets everything he wishes. You try to please him by giving him the disposal of an ambassadorship, but he will become your enemy if you refuse him a small postoffice. And the appetite grows with the eating. No Administration can sufficiently satisfy that appetite to secure the reliable good will of the greedy without utter moral ruin and disgrace. This is the teaching of history.

Thus all the pretended political advantages ascribed to the spoils system dwindle into nothing; nay, on candid scrutiny they appear as added curses. It offers not the slightest compensation for the wasteful misrule, the sickening demoralization, and the appalling dangers to our free institutions which it brings in its train. It is

so unmitigated an evil, so barbarous an anachronism, so utterly unfit for a civilized, self-respecting, and patriotic people, that we must wonder how it ever could throw root or be tolerated in this great and proud Republic.

And yet we have to face the fact that there are still strong and stubborn forces standing behind it. There is the *vis inertia* of habit which persuades slow-thinking people that what has been so long must continue to be. There is the multitude of those afflicted with an almost morbid desire for public office as a sort of distinction and an easy means of support, to be had as a present for the asking. There are the political speculators who see in spoils politics opportunities for self. There are the political wire-pullers who know no other politics than dicker and trade, and whom the abolition of the spoils system would deprive of their occupation. There are the members of legislatures, and of Congress, and the Governors and other officials who feel that they cannot sustain themselves in public life by their ability as statesmen, and fall back upon the tricks of the patronage jobber to continue their superfluous public existence. There is the cowardice of the politician in high place who prays to be delivered of the burden and annoyance of the patronage, but whose courage collapses as soon as a constituent asks him for an office. And last but not least, there is the power of the party organizations that have the prestige of regularity and that are almost exclusively controlled by spoils politicians.

All these elements combined surely make a strong force, and this force has for years desperately contested every inch of ground against the onward movement of Reform. But on the other hand the friends of Reform rejoice to know that on their side a power is rising up with constantly increasing strength, to which in a free country eventually everything must yield—the power of public opinion. And this power has never made itself felt as strongly as now. It is not the mere critical fault-finding of the political philosopher, not a mere sentimental cry for something ideal, that makes itself heard.

It is the voice of the sober-minded citizen who may long have regarded the Civil Service Reformer as a visionary, but who now by stern experience has been made aware that something is essentially wrong in the practical working of our institutions, and that a remedy is urgently called for.

So we hear from all sides expressions of disgust at the scandalous spectacle of the spoils-carnival with every change of party in power, and the reckless distribution of public offices among political workers undeserving of honor and confidence. One public man in high station after another declares that the position of spoils-jobbers to which they are degraded puts upon them intolerable burdens, and that it must cease. In all parts of the country chambers of commerce, boards of trade and individual merchants protest that so many of our consulates abroad have long enough been held by incompetents, who merely wish to spend some time in foreign lands for their health or to get good music lessons for their daughters, that it is time we should cease to make such offices the laughing-stock and contempt of foreign nations, and that at last only men should be sent out known to be fit to serve the interests of our commerce as the consuls of our commercial competitors serve theirs. But, more significant than all this, where government comes nearest home to the individual citizen, its abuses have stirred up the strongest feeling. The people of some of our great municipalities are crying out that they have been scandalously misgoverned and robbed and oppressed by organized bands of mercenary politicians, who by hook or crook obtain complete possession of the municipal governments, or at least exercise a pernicious influence in them, and that there must be an end of this.

Nor are these complaints brought forth without the suggestion of a remedy. In every instance they are accompanied with the demand that the branch of the public service complained of—national, State, or municipal—must be “taken out of politics.”

Never has the popular instinct hit the nail on the head

more squarely than by this demand. For what does it mean to take a public function out of politics? It means simply that with regard to all the public offices and employments concerned, rules for appointment and promotion be introduced which rigidly exclude political and personal favoritism, and secure places and preference only to those who in some prescribed manner establish the superiority of their mental and moral fitness for the work to be done.

For a place in the administrative part of the Government not the mere henchman of some party leader or committee, but he who proves himself better qualified for the duties of the office than his competitors; for the consular service, not a mere political drummer or a man who has put some member of Congress under political obligation, but he who proves himself especially well versed in commercial affairs and law, and in command of the other necessary equipments for the performance of consular duty; for the police force, not a mere graduate of a whiskey-shop whom some party boss or ward-heeler wishes to wield the police club, but he who is found in point of moral character, as well as mental and physical qualifications, to be a person of superior fitness for the duties of a policeman; and for promotion in the service, not the mere favorite of some political magnate or of his wife or daughter, but he who has shown that he deserves that promotion by superior capacity, efficiency, and fidelity to duty! This is what it means to take public functions out of politics. And this is the merit system. This is Civil Service Reform.

Its methods are as simple as the principle itself, and their efficacy has been proved by experience. It has long passed the stage of mere experiment. Since the enactment of the Civil Service Law in 1883, the system has been in uninterrupted operation under the national Government, and there are now about 50,000 places in the national service covered by the Rules established under that Law. The bulk of these places are those of the clerical force of various grades, in the Departments in Washington, in the Railway Mail Service, in the lar-

ger custom-houses and postoffices in the country, and in the Indian service. Appointments to these places are made only after examinations which are accessible to all, and which subject the qualifications of the applicants for the places to be filled to appropriate tests. These examinations are, with few exceptions, competitive—that is to say, only candidates who come out at the head of the list are certified for appointment. They are appointed at first only for a probationary period, and if they prove themselves efficient, the appointment is made final. From the whole proceeding political considerations are rigidly excluded. Inquiry into the party affiliation of the candidate is prohibited. Political recommendations are not accepted. There the machine boss, the party magnate or committee, have nothing to say. And in the offices so manned Democrats, Republicans and Independents work harmoniously together, each one relying upon his efficiency in the discharge of official duty for continuance in office and for preferment.

Neither is the success of the system in increasing the efficiency of the service any longer a matter of the slightest doubt. Not only has one Department chief after another—even those who had begun to test it with a prejudice against its practicability—in the strongest terms borne witness to its beneficial results, many of them declaring that they did not see how without it they could satisfactorily do the business of their Departments, but there are instances in which its usefulness, aye, its indispensableness, can be demonstrated by figures. One such instance is the Railway Mail Service, which attends to the sorting and distributing of mail matter on railway trains in motion. The high importance of this branch of the postal service to the business of the country, which needs not only a safe but a prompt transmission of letters, requires no elucidation. The Railway Mail clerk, especially on the great through routes where the mass of mail matter is bewilderingly great, has a task to perform which demands not only considerable knowledge of the geography of the country, but also that

quickness of mind which makes such knowledge always available in a hurry, and withal much experience and dexterity. The Post Office Department keeps a minute account of the errors committed by each clerk on his route, and this account enters into his record.

The Republicans having been in power for twenty-four years, the Railway Mail Service consisted in 1885 of pretty well trained men. At that period there occurred, as recorded, one error to every 5,575 pieces of mail matter handled. But in 1885 the Democrats came into power, and the Railway Mail Service not being then under the Civil Service Rules, they pounced upon it as a part of the spoils of victory. Instantly the number of errors rose to the proportion of one to every 4,228 pieces of mail matter handled, and as the partisan changes in the service continued, in the following year to the proportion of one to 3,364. The new men becoming more experienced, the proportion improved again, until in 1889 it reached one error to 3,954. At the close of his Administration President Cleveland put the Railway Mail Service under the Civil Service Rules, the order to take effect some time after the beginning of his successor's term of office. But the Republicans, returning to power, availed themselves, with Mr. Wanamaker's—the Postmaster-General's—coöperation, of the intervening period to treat the railway clerkships as party spoils once more. Instantly the number of errors increased again, reaching the proportion of one to 2,834. Meanwhile, the Civil Service Rules went into force, and, although there was another change of party in power in 1893, the proportion of errors for that year fell to the unprecedentedly favorable proportion of only one to 7,144. And Postmaster-General Bissell hopes to see the proportion of errors reduced to one in 10,000 before he leaves office. This is practical Civil Service Reform in one of the most important branches of the public service, demonstrated by figures.

Other branches would show like results did the nature of their business permit a similar mathematical demonstration. A member of the United States Civil Service

Commission informs me that of the many thousands of men appointed upon competitive examination only 2 per cent. have failed to maintain the expected degree of efficiency; and, what is certainly no less important, that the number of persons among them who turned out to be dishonest has been so small as hardly to deserve notice.

But there is one point which demands the especial attention of American womanhood. The number of women employed in various capacities in the national service is very large. Under the spoils system almost every one of them owed not only her appointment, but also her continuance in office, to the recommendation, or, as it was called, to the "influence," of some man influential in party politics—in Washington usually a Senator or a Representative in Congress. With that "influence" behind her she could expect to stay in the place upon which, in most cases, depended her bread and butter. When that influence was for any reason withdrawn, she was in danger of being dismissed to make room for another woman only because that other woman had the necessary influence behind her. Surely to the most estimable women in the service—among them always women of the highest traditions and breeding—such a relation of dependence upon the favor of individual men must have been distasteful in the extreme. I need not point out the abuses which such a state of things was apt to bring forth, in order to show that the introduction of the merit system doing away with political influence was equivalent to the emancipation of the women in the service from a dependence so singularly unsuitable and so galling. Now they may be proudly conscious of the assurance that they hold their places by virtue of their own merit, and that their own merit is all the protection they need. I, therefore, commend to the high-minded women of America the cause of Civil Service Reform as a cause in which they have an especial interest. All women having the dignity of their sex at heart should be Civil Service Reformers, and resent as an insult to those of their sex

holding positions under the Government, everything that threatens a return to the old system or that impedes the extension of the new.

Since the establishment of this National League it has been customary to present in the annual address of its president a review of the progress of the Reform and of the manner in which its principles have been observed by those in power. This League is essentially a non-partisan organization. Among its members are Republicans, Democrats, Independents, and, for aught I know, Populists, who cultivate whatever party affiliations they may choose with perfect freedom, and are united only in a common endeavor for one common object. In the pursuit of this object they judge and criticise the conduct of political parties, and of Presidents, Department chiefs and other public officers, only from one point of view—that of Civil Service Reform principles; and if this judgment is to be of any value, it must with entire impartiality and justice, without fear or favor, apply to one party and its leaders the same rule that it applies to the other.

Certainly it is delightful to commend and praise, and it is irksome and distasteful to blame. But if praise is to have any weight, it must give evidence of that discrimination which proves it to be based upon a due valuation of the facts. Moreover, as spokesmen of this great cause, we are not permitted to declare ourselves fully satisfied with a mere partial fulfillment of its demands. We have to hold up the true standard. We cannot afford to suffer anything that remains below that standard to pass, unchallenged, as the Civil Service Reform we are aiming at. We certainly recognize the difficulties to be overcome, but we must insist that they be overcome. We certainly are thankful for every advance made; but we are bound to point out the further advance still to be made. It is, therefore, no disposition to be fault-finding or querulous if our commendation is accompanied with criticism. It is only a recognition of the plain and imperative duty we owe to our cause, and from that duty no displeasure of those criticised can swerve us.

First, then, what is the attitude of our great political parties as to Civil Service Reform? Both have made in their platforms most emphatic protestations and pledges in favor of the merit system, but neither has held those pledges to be of the same binding force as its pledges with regard to other subjects. In each party Civil Service Reform has warm friends, and in each it has bitter enemies. On each side we find a great crowd of politicians who are far more in favor of Civil Service Reform when they are in the opposition than when they are in power. What they loudly censure when in opposition, they do themselves with alacrity when the spoils fall to them. Neither party can therefore be called a Reform party. But neither would like to be looked upon as the opponent of Reform. There are politicians enough in each burning to repeal the Civil Service Law, and periodically such attempts are made in Congress, as well as attempts merely to disturb its operation, or to filch a few places from its domain. But these attempts grow gradually weaker, the prospect of a repeal of the Law becomes more and more hopeless, the politicians recognize more and more the necessity of submitting to the increasing force of public sentiment; and the political parties, after having plunged and kicked like unbroken mustangs, will soon pull quietly in the Reform harness, public opinion holding the reins.

The present Congress, some partisan efforts in the contrary direction notwithstanding, has already done something substantial for the Reform in giving to the United States Civil Service Commission, so far obliged to go begging to the several Departments for help, its own clerical force, which has greatly increased its working capacity, and is reported to be a model of organization, discipline and efficiency.

In reviewing the course of the present Administration I shall begin with its shortcomings, and then pass to the services it has rendered to our cause. While the so-called Presidential offices as well as the postoffices filled by the action of the Postmaster-General are not covered by the Civil Service Law, yet it was naturally assumed that an

Administration aspiring to the title of a Reform Administration would, with regard to those places, do what in 1888 the Republican platform pledged the party and its candidate to do when it said "that the spirit and purpose of Reform should be observed in all executive appointments." This could mean only that all the offices filled by executive appointment should cease to be party spoils, and that the non-political service should be given the character of a non-partisan service. How President Harrison failed to redeem that clear and emphatic pledge was at the time set forth by my lamented predecessor, George William Curtis—blessed be his memory—in words to which I have nothing to add.

But it was hoped that President Cleveland, who owed his elevation largely to the popular belief that he stood high above the ordinary politician's aspirations and practices, and who therefore enjoyed the advantage of an unusually independent position, would abstain from changes in the service not required by the public interest, or at least follow in a larger number of cases the great example set by himself at the beginning of his first administration when he reappointed Mr. Pearson as postmaster of New York, irrespective of his party standing, merely in recognition of his fidelity and efficiency in the management of his office. This hope has so far not been fulfilled. The interference of members of Congress with the appointing power has been largely tolerated, and President Cleveland, like his predecessor, has been exposed to sharp animadversions as to the reasons for which favors in the way of appointments were granted or withheld.

It must not be overlooked, however, that, excepting the headlong overturning of the consular service, the changes have, on the whole, been less rapid than under the preceding Administration. The President's adherence to the four-years rule has had the beneficial effect of mitigating the scandals of the clean sweep, and of familiarizing politicians with the experience of seeing in federal office men not in political harmony with the party in power. It has also, as before remarked, had

the merit of furnishing a most striking demonstration of the inherent absurdity and viciousness of the four-years rule itself by this very observance of it.

The same may be said of the application of that rule by the Postmaster-General to the fourth-class postmasters. But the result of this proceeding, if further adhered to, will after all be to put, before the close of the Presidential term, all the offices concerned into the hands of the party in power, and to leave so far to the service an essentially partisan character. It will have been a clean sweep—shamefaced and executed with evidences of a troubled conscience, but for all that a provocation to the party next coming into power to respond with another clean sweep in the opposite interest, and so on, *ad infinitum*, until we get a President who immortalizes himself by boldly breaking the vicious succession. We certainly do not fail to appreciate the fact that the President as well as the Postmaster-General, by doing as much as they did, have incurred the bitter hostility of the disappointed spoils-seekers and their friends. But that hostility would hardly have been more bitter or dangerous had the disappointment been greater. At the same cost of popularity and the same peril, the President and the Postmaster-General might have gone one step farther in order to leave to their successors as a great example and precedent a service not strictly partisan and not provoking another clean sweep as a retaliatory measure. But the end of this Administration is not yet, and there are reasons for hoping that its second half will be the most productive of good.

As to the observance of the Civil Service Law in the several Departments of the national Government, the Treasury Department under Mr. Carlisle has, I regret to say, won an unenviable distinction. Beginning with an act of gross nepotism, his management has not only furnished the strongest proof of the necessity of putting the chiefs of division under the Civil Service Rules, so as to protect those places, in the manifest interest of the service, against the encroachments of spoils politics, but in the matter of removals, reductions and promo-

tions shifts have been resorted to which, without perhaps violating the letter of the law, have run counter to its spirit in a manner but too well calculated to impair among the subordinates that reliance upon fidelity and efficiency for continuance in office and for promotion which is indispensable to uphold the morale of the force, and which prevails everywhere else in the classified service. In this respect the Treasury Department under Mr. Carlisle has conspicuously fallen below the standard maintained by his predecessors since the enactment of the Civil Service Law.

In other Departments a very gratifying progress is to be observed—notably in the Indian-school service of the Interior Department, whose superintendent, Mr. Hailmann, has recognized in the Civil Service Law the best friend of his endeavors; in the Agricultural Department under Secretary Morton, where the Civil Service Reform spirit has made perceptible advances; in the Navy Department, where Secretary Herbert, without being bound by the Civil Service Law, has faithfully maintained the non-partisan labor system introduced by his predecessor Mr. Tracy; and especially in the Post Office Department, which has been conducted by the Postmaster-General, Mr. Bissell, as to the observance of the Law, in a manner entitled to the highest credit. While he subjected himself to criticism by too great leniency with postmasters who at the moment of the passage of their offices under the Civil Service Rules filled the places under them with partisan favorites in the old spoils fashion, not even the most captious censor will find fault with his treatment of the classified service under him. He has made every person in that service feel the most confident assurance that in the truest sense of the term merit is the only title to appointment, security of tenure, and promotion. He has introduced a most valuable practice in requiring charges to be filed against accused persons, and giving them a chance to be heard. He has made in his Department not merely the letter but the spirit of the Law a living reality. Also outside of the scope of the Civil Service Law he has vigorously sought

to enforce that spirit by a Department order warning postmasters to occupy themselves with their official business and not with politics—an order which, as he himself says, has not only cleared away existing misconceptions, but also “produced a most favorable and permanent improvement in the efficiency of the service, which is daily evinced in many ways.” And now he has in his official report, in language of singular clearness and energy, demonstrated the absolute necessity, from the business point of view, of taking the whole Post Office Department completely out of politics, and warmly recommended the enactment of a law withdrawing the appointments to the fourth-class postoffices, now numbering over 66,000, altogether from partisan influence. The value of this brave utterance, which does great honor to Mr. Bissell, cannot be overestimated. Whether his recommendation be immediately carried out or not, its influence will not die, and in the course of time, perhaps before long, it will surely find its realization.

On the whole, it must in justice be said that, its shortcomings notwithstanding, President Cleveland’s second Administration has materially advanced the Reform cause. The President not only, when entering upon his office, invited Mr. Roosevelt, whose ability, zeal, watchfulness and fearless energy have long been of conspicuous value in that position, to remain a member of the Civil Service Commission, but he has further strengthened the Commission by filling a welcome vacancy in it by the appointment of Mr. Procter, a Civil Service Reformer of tried earnestness and judgment.

He has by recent orders extended the operation of the Civil Service Rules over several thousands of public servants who, until then, had stood outside of them. By the same orders he has effectually shut off many of the facilities which formerly existed for evading and circumventing the Law. Further enlargements are soon to follow. He has done these things in the second year of his term, while formerly it seemed to be the Presidential custom to order such extensions only in the expiring hours by way of last will and testament. And beyond this, he has caused

the partisan activity of public officers very much to decrease, so that at present there is far less of this abuse than at any time since the Civil Service Law went in force.

These are improvements the great value of which no Civil Service Reformer will fail to appreciate. Nor will any fair-minded man deny that, despite such isolated delinquencies as we witness at present in the Treasury Department, the Civil Service Law has under the national Government on the whole been faithfully enforced—more faithfully perhaps than any law ever was enforced that had so much of adverse interest and popular habit to encounter.

But the national Government is not the only field on which Civil Service Reform has achieved its success. In Massachusetts, that State to whose enlightened public spirit the country owes so much of valuable example, a Civil Service law is in wholesome operation, comprehending not only the State service, but also that of the large municipalities. One of the most important features of the Massachusetts system consists in the registration of laborers, enabling the laboring man, if he is fit for it, to obtain public employment without subjecting himself to the tyranny of partisan control or becoming a slavish tool of a party machine—a system which cannot be too carefully studied by those interested in municipal reform. In Massachusetts it has worked so satisfactorily to the community, as well as to the laboring men themselves, that, as I am informed, in spite of the ever unsatisfied appetites of the spoils politicians, no political party would now dare openly to countenance its overthrow.

In New York, too, there has been a Civil Service law on the statute-book, covering the service of the State as well as that of the larger cities. It was enacted in 1883 under Mr. Cleveland's Governorship, and put in operation by him in good faith. But the lamb was at the tender mercies of the wolf while David B. Hill and Roswell P. Flower occupied the Governor's chair. The violations and evasions of the law became at last so daring and shameless, that at the instance of the Civil Ser-

vice Reform Associations the State Senate ordered an inquiry, which mercilessly laid bare the misdoings of the unfaithful stewards. In the cities of Brooklyn, Buffalo, and more recently, in Albany, the law has been loyally carried out by friendly authorities, and is bearing excellent fruit. In New York City it fell into the hands of Tammany Hall, and I need not describe the sport that band of political sharpers made of it. The decalogue itself would become a farce if left for enforcement to the devil. But the arch-enemy of Reform, David B. Hill, now rests under a monumental mountain of condemning votes; on the 1st of January next Roswell P. Flower will cease to be Governor of the State, and Tammany rule will end in the city of New York. And then the Civil Service Law, revived by the voice of the people, will there also become a living and beneficent force.

Indeed, in the State of New York the Reform cause has recently won a triumph that is unique. The late constitutional convention proposed the embodiment in the State constitution of a clause making the introduction of the competitive merit system in the State and municipal service obligatory; the people have ratified the amendment, and thus in New York Civil Service Reform has obtained the sanction of a constitutional mandate.

But all these evidences of progress I regard as of less importance than the strength our cause has gained in public sentiment. Of this we had a vivid illustration when a year ago, upon the motion of Mr. Richard Watson Gilder, the Anti-Spoils League was set on foot for the purpose of opening communication and facilitating correspondence and, in case of need, concert of action with the friends of Civil Service Reform throughout the country, and when, in a short space of time, about 10,000 citizens sent in their adhesion, representing nearly every State and Territory of the Union, and, in them, the most enlightened and influential classes of society.

More encouraging still is the circumstance that now for the first time we welcome at our annual meeting not

only the familiar faces of old friends, but also representatives of other organizations—Good Government clubs, working for the purification of politics; municipal leagues, whose aim is the reform of municipal governments; and commercial bodies, urging the reform of our consular service. We welcome them with especial warmth, for their presence proves that at last the true significance of Civil Service Reform is being appreciated in constantly widening circles. The Good Government club understands that if the moral tone of our politics, national or local, is to be lifted up, the demoralizing element of party spoil must be done away with. The Municipal League understands that if our large municipalities are to be no longer cesspools of corruption, if our municipal governments are to be made honest and businesslike, if our police forces are to be kept clear of thugs and thieves, the appointments to places in the municipal service must be withdrawn from the influence of party bosses and ward ruffians, and must be strictly governed by the merit system. The merchants understand that if our consular service is to be an effective help to American commerce, and a credit to the American name, it must not be subject to periodical partisan lootings, and our consuls must not be appointed by way of favor to some influential politician, but upon a methodical ascertainment of their qualifications for the consular business; then to be promoted according to merit, and also to be salaried as befits respectable agents and representatives of a great nation. With this understanding, every Good Government club, every Municipal League, every Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade must be an active Civil Service Reform Association. But more than this. Every intelligent and unprejudiced citizen, when he candidly inquires into the developments which have brought about the present state of things, will understand that of the evils which have so alarmingly demoralized our political life, and so sadly lowered this Republic in the respect of the world, many, if not most, had their origin, and find their sustenance, in that practice which treats the pub-

lic offices as the plunder of victorious parties; that as, with the increase of our population, the growth of our wealth, and the multiplication of our public interests, the functions of government expand and become more complicated, those evils will grow and eventually destroy the very vitality of our free institutions, unless their prolific source be stopped; and that this source can be effectually stopped not by mere occasional spasms of indignant virtue, but only by a systematic, thorough and permanent reform. Every patriotic citizen understanding this must be a Civil Service Reformer.

You may ask how far this understanding has penetrated our population. President Cleveland answers this question in his recent message. Listen to what he says: "The advantages to the public service of an adherence to the principles of Civil Service Reform are constantly more apparent, and nothing is so encouraging to those in official life who honestly desire good government, as the increasing appreciation by our people of these advantages. A vast majority of the voters of the land are ready to insist that the time and attention of those they select to perform for them important public duties should not be distracted by doling out minor offices, and they are growing to be unanimous in regarding party organization as something that should be used in establishing party principles instead of dictating the distribution of public places as rewards for partisan activity."

With gladness I welcome this cheering assurance, coming from so high an authority. If such is the sense of "a vast majority of the voters of the land, growing to be unanimous," it may justly be called the will of the people. If it is the will of the people, what reason—nay, what excuse—can there be for further hesitation? Let the will of the people be done! Let it be done without needless delay, and let the people's President lead in doing it! Then no more spoils and plunder! No more removals not required by public interest! No more appointments for partisan reasons! Continuance in office, regardless of any four-years rule, of meritori-

ous public servants! Superior merit the only title to preferment! No longer can this be airily waved aside as a demand of a mere sect of political philosophers, for now it is recognized as the people's demand. No longer can Civil Service Reform be cried down by the so-called practical politicians as the nebulous dream of unpractical visionaries, for it has been grasped by the popular understanding as a practical necessity—not to enervate our political life, but to lift it to a higher moral plane; not to destroy political parties, but to restore them to their legitimate functions; not to make party government impossible, but to guard it against debasement, and to inspire it with higher ambitions; not pretending to be in itself the consummation of all reforms, but being the Reform without which other reformatory efforts in government cannot be permanently successful.

Never, gentlemen, have we met under auspices more propitious. Let no exertion be spared to make the voice of the people heard. For when it is heard in its strength it will surely be obeyed.

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