The Spoils System

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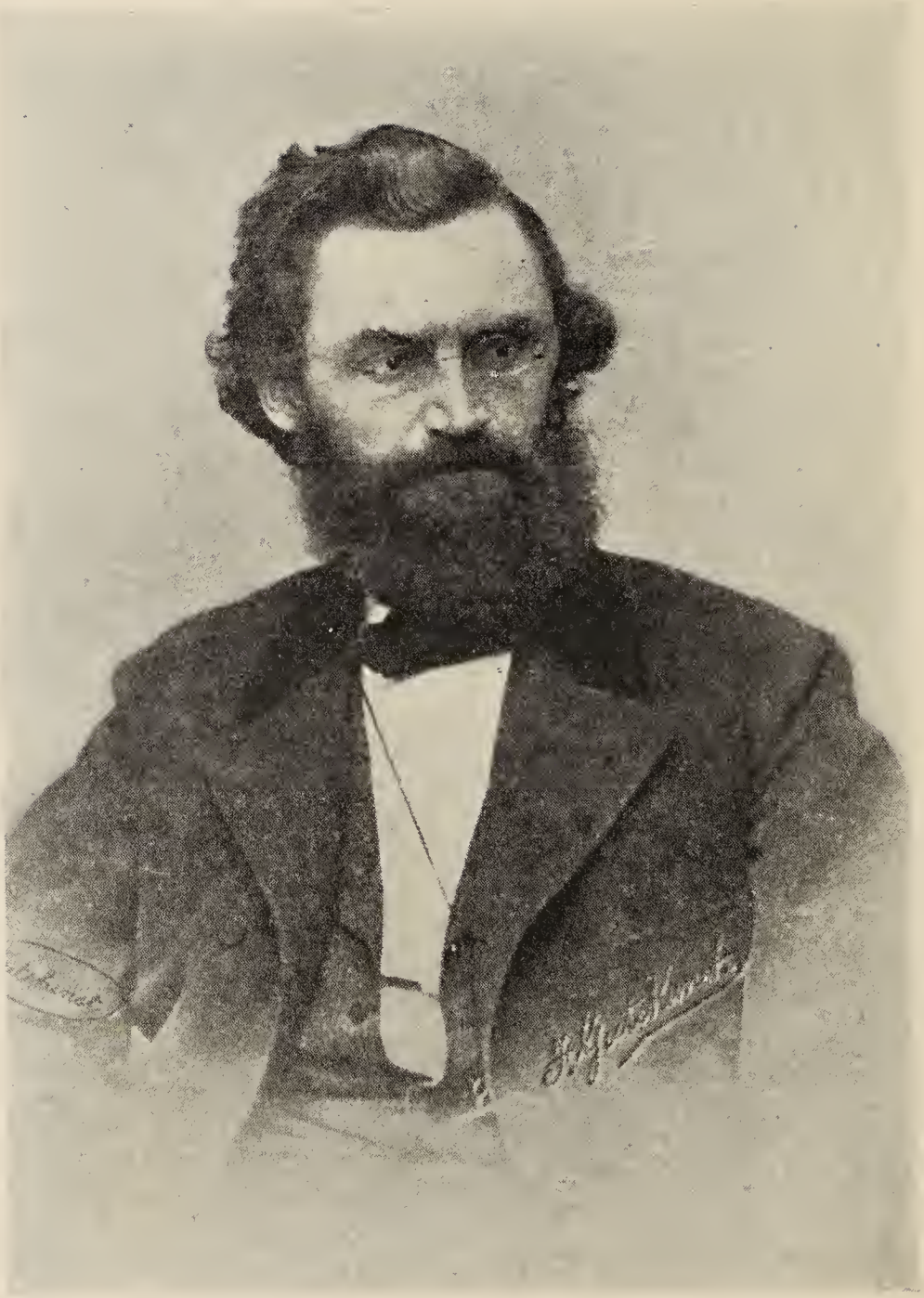

CARL SCHURZ.

The Spoils System

An Address to the
Civil Service Reform League

By Hon.
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THE SPOILS SYSTEM.

IT is with a feeling of peculiar satisfaction that I greet the fifteenth annual meeting of the national Civil Service Reform League at the seat of the National Government—the place where the necessity of the Reform we advocate has been most conspicuously demonstrated, and where also its most conspicuous and fruitful successes have been achieved.

No intelligent observer who visits Washington from time to time can fail to be struck with the evidence of the constant growth of the national Government in the magnitude and scope of its functions, corresponding to the multiplication of the public and private interests that come into contact with it. From a thin string of agricultural settlements on the Atlantic coast, here and there dotted with small trading towns, this Republic has in a century expanded into a vast empire spanning a continent, excelling in wealth and material power every other nation on the globe. With its growth it has changed its character. Its bucolic stage has long been passed. Its agricultural interests, however great, have lost their former predominance. That great store of rich virgin lands which formerly offered homes and sustenence to the advancing population,

has shrunk to petty proportions, and will soon altogether cease to play an important part in our social development. The expansion of our industrial activities and of our facilities of communication has attracted large masses of humanity to our cities, several of which are already far beyond the million line, while others are pressing hard upon it. According to present appearances the time is not very distant when a majority of the American people will be congregated in towns. Altogether, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that in some important respects we are approaching the social conditions of the old world. It is true, we still observe striking and essential differences, but they are gradually growing less.

Under these circumstances the municipal governments of our large cities are confronted by problems of unaccustomed and constantly increasing magnitude and complexity; and the State and national governments, too, find themselves burdened with new duties and responsibilities which force an enlargement of their functions and their machinery, and more exactingly tax their working capacity as well as their wisdom. I do not mean to inquire here whether this expansion of the province of government is desirable or undesirable, but merely to point it out as a fact and to invite attention to some of its consequences.

There are certain propositions so self-evident and so easily understood that it would appear like discourtesy to argue them before persons of intelligence.

Such a one it is, that as the functions of government grow in extent, importance and complexity, the necessity grows of their being administered not only with honesty, but also with trained ability and knowledge; and that in the same measure as this necessity is disregarded in a democratic government, the success and the stability of democratic institutions will be impaired. But while every sane man accepts this proposition as self-evident in theory, it may be said that every opponent of Civil Service Reform denies it in practice—and, I regret to add, a good many men deny it in practice who would object to being called opponents of Civil Service Reform.

DANGER TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

When I speak of the success and stability of democratic institutions being imperiled, I do not mean the danger of a sudden, grand and startling collapse, but I mean the danger of a gradual decay of those elements which are essential to their vitality. I have always been a firm believer in the excellence of democratic government—the government, as Abraham Lincoln defined it, of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is a government of the people, inasmuch as in the people all sovereignty resides. It is a government by the people, inasmuch as the people make the laws and direct the conduct of public affairs through their servants chosen by them for those objects. It is a government for the people, inasmuch as public

offices are instituted and charged with certain functions and endowed with certain powers to be administered solely for the service and benefit of the people, and for no other purpose. These are the vital requirements of democratic government. In the same measure as these requirements fail to be fulfilled—as any element of sovereignty passes away from the people, or as the making of the laws and the conduct of public affairs cease to be controlled by the people's will, or as the administration of the public offices is diverted from the purposes for which they have been instituted—that is to say, as the offices are used to serve ends other than the public benefit, or are entrusted to persons not apt to give to the people the best attainable service—in that measure democratic government fails.

It is said that democratic government is practically government through political parties. This can be true only in a limited sense. If political parties are what they ought to be—organizations of citizens caused by different currents of opinion as to principles of government or certain questions of public policy, and set on foot and put to the work of persuasion for the purpose of making this or that set of opinions prevail in the conduct of public affairs—they serve a legitimate end. But whenever they seek to divert the public offices, instituted solely for the service and benefit of the people, from their true purpose in order to use them for their own service and benefit, to this extent turning the govern-

ment *through* political parties into a government *for* political parties, they strike at one of the vital principles of democratic government. And in the same measure as they succeed in this, democratic government fails to be government for the people.

THE DANGER OF A MONARCHY.

The appearance among us of American men and women who have fallen in love with the splendor of monarchical courts, and who also please themselves by imaginative imitations of aristocratic society, has from time to time called forth ingenious speculation as to whether the great democracy of the American Republic will not eventually be turned into a monarchy. I am convinced that, if there be any such danger at all in store for us, it will not come from such coteries of weak minds and impotent ambitions; but it might arise either from a failure of democratic government to afford the necessary protection to individual rights, to property, to public order and safety, so that society would turn for that protection to a strong man, or from democratic government becoming an instrument of private cupidity and falling into the hands of the chief of an organization looking for plunder.

There has actually been such a monarchy on a small scale in existence among us. I have seen it in operation, and so have many of my hearers. We have witnessed in the greatest city of the United States one man wielding the powers of municipal government like a monarch, in some respects like an

absolute monarch, too. Standing at the head of a pretended political organization ruled by him with autocratic power, he made appointments and dismissals in the public service of the city by merely issuing his orders. He determined what candidates for office should within his dominion be submitted to the popular vote, and his followers with prompt obedience enforced his pleasure. He gave audience to citizens having business with the municipal government, and either granted or refused their petitions like a sovereign. He ordered his agents in the Legislature of the State to pass this bill or to defeat the other bill, and it was done. Citizens became accustomed to approach him as supplicants approach a king. Aside from the public taxes for his municipal government he levied a separate revenue, the payment of which could not be refused without danger—a sort of civil list, partly under the euphonious title of "campaign funds," partly without any euphony—for the use of which he never thought of accounting. He grew rich in a marvelously short time, and when a popular uprising against his rule broke out which threatened to become too formidable to resist, he abdicated and withdrew to his estates.

This was monarchy—not, indeed, a monarchy surrounded by the pomp of a court of nobles with ancient names, escutcheons and gold lace, and ribbons and stars and crosses—rather a very vulgar sort of monarchy whose vassals and high dignitaries were a Mayor and police commissioners and heads of munic-

ipal departments and district leaders and ward politicians with names and antecedents and manners and social standing anything but aristocratic—but a monarchy for all that, with most of the essential attributes. To be sure the title of this monarch was not that of king, but that of "Boss"—but a boss clad with regal power which he exercised with arbitrary authority until, like some French kings, he had to yield to a popular upheaval amounting to a revolution. Such things happened, as every one acquainted with the history of Tammany Hall knows, in this very Republic; and if we speculate upon the manner in which monarchy—not in name, but in fact—may rise up among us, here is the living example.

THE BOSS.

The development of political bossism into something like actual monarchy is, to be sure, an extreme case. But all political bossism has a tendency in that direction. When in a political party the selfish element obtains controlling influence, it will, for mutual benefit, naturally seek to organize itself into what we call a machine; and machine rule will usually, for the more certain attainment of its selfish ends through united and well regulated action, drift into more or less irresponsible one-man rule—the one man to rule the machine for its and his benefit, to rule through the machine the party organization, and to rule through the party organization, as the case may be, the municipality or the State. And this rule he does not exercise by bringing his fellow-citizens, through

persuasion, to his own way of thinking, if indeed he have any, with regard to principles, or policies, or measures touching the public interest, but by distributing among the selfish politicians composing his organized corps of mercenaries, in the true feudal fashion, as rewards for services rendered, or as inducements for services to be rendered, things of value, such as public offices with their emoluments and opportunities, which things of value do not belong to him, but to the public—he doling them out among his henchmen, not for the benefit of the public, but for his and their own.

How far the aspirations of bossism, thus established, are already reaching, found recently a curious illustration in the newspaper report that some of the State bosses, not content with their local autocracy, met together in conference to agree upon certain persons to be put forward as candidates for the Presidency of the United States—just as in the old times of the German Empire the princes wearing the high dignity and power of "Electors" met together to agree upon a selection for the imperial crown. Equally striking was another piece of news going through the press, that when the boss of one State was hard pressed in an election by an uprising of citizens impudently wishing to govern themselves, the boss of another State, although not of the same party, but inspired by a feeling of common interest and of comradeship, sent a strong troop of his own experienced and fearless repeaters to aid the struggling brother boss at the polls—just as the Czar of

Russia in 1849, when the Emperor of Austria was in danger from the Hungarian revolutionists, sent his hard-pressed brother-Emperor a Russian army to help him subdue the insurgent subjects and save the monarchical authority. Even if these stories had been wholly invented by newspaper reporters, it would be a significant sign of the times that they were generally believed as entirely natural occurrences. And as to their naturalness, given the premises, there can be no doubt.

Do you ask how such utterly undemocratic developments can become possible in a Republic like ours? Simply by the existence of the spoils system, which allows that which belongs to the public, especially the public offices, to be diverted from public to private use. Without that system, political bossism, in the form at least in which we know it, would not be possible. With that system and all its demoralizing influences kept alive in our politics, bossism will not only continue to exist in spite of occasional reverses, but it will propagate itself from State to State and bring forth results which, if predicted now, would severely tax popular credulity. Fortunately, with an intelligent and vigorous people like ours, the growth and recognition of such an evil usually bring with them the recognition of the remedy. As the spoils system evolved its most characteristic and most undemocratic products, the machine and the boss, to more and more conspicuous power, and the corrupt, rapacious and debasing tyranny of that power was more and more widely felt, the people in constantly

widening circles turned with a just instinct to the true corrective. It is a remarkable fact that Civil Service Reform, which twenty years ago struggled, apparently in vain, to win the favorable attention of the great mass of citizens, has of late years marvelously risen in popular interest. The reason is that the popular intellect, stimulated by disgust with existing abuses and by apprehension of worse things to come, began to see in Civil Service Reform the only effective method to destroy the spoils system which was robbing, oppressing and degrading them—that is, the only effective method to restore the public offices to the service of the public ends for which they were originally instituted, and make the government in this sense once more what it was designed to be, a government, not for the benefit of the politicians, or of machines, or of political parties, but a government for the people.

INTRENCHMENT OF THE REFORM.

Then the popular mind also readily appreciated the practical benefit conferred upon every branch of the public service in which the merit system, the essential feature of Civil Service Reform, has been introduced and faithfully enforced. And every day the popular demand grows more general and more energetic for its extension over wider fields. The merit system has stood the test of practical experience so triumphantly that the vociferous objections and revilings of it, in which the spoils politicians used to delight, have sunk to a mournful mutter. That awful spectre

of an overbearing, office-holding aristocracy consisting of Department clerks, revenue collectors and custom-house weighers has ceased to haunt our nights. The dire prediction that only college-bred men could, under the competitive examination system, become Government scribes, has withered in the frost of statistical showings. And the harrowing fable that candidates for letter-carriers' places are examined on the exact distance between the moon and the planet Mars has gone to sleep forever. All these and similar fictions are drowned by the declaration of one Department chief after another that they cannot understand how without the merit system the business of their offices could ever have been carried on; by the contentment of public servants working under Civil Service Rules, that at last they have escaped the debasing dependence on political favor and may be proudly conscious of standing on their merits; by the popular call for further extension of the system, such as the emphatic demand of the merchants that the consular service be put under Civil Service Rules; by the grateful satisfaction of the inhabitants of our large cities as the Reform gradually takes root in the different branches of municipal administration; by the sentiment rapidly spreading among all classes of our people that our political contests must cease to be scrambles for spoils and plunder.

Thus Civil Service Reform has no longer to struggle for its right of existence. So much is triumphantly established. The problem remains how to secure, by further conquest, what we have won; for the results the Reform movement has achieved will

not be entirely safe until its success is complete—until the spoils system is *totally* abolished, and the new order of things has supplanted it in the ordinary ways of thinking and the political habits of the people.

We all know that, as we owe to our legislative bodies the enactment of the existing Civil Service Laws, so it is in the legislative bodies that the most dangerous attempts are made to circumvent or subvert them. At the same time, whatever the Executive power may do in the way of extending the Reform, the aid of legislation is required to give it endurance and security. Now I must confess that of all those who are charged with public duties, the legislator, especially the member of Congress, seems to me by far the most interested in the total abolition of the patronage system. He should desire that abolition all the more ardently, as the growth of our Government and the swelling magnitude and complexity of the problems before the legislator demand the devotion of all his mental and moral faculties with constantly increasing severity for his real duties, and more and more sternly forbid any dissipation of them in unworthy employments. Permit me to discuss this branch of my subject somewhat elaborately. I shall not argue the constitutional aspect of the interference of members of Congress with the appointing power, but unfold the possibilities developed by existing custom; and in doing so, I speak to some extent from the personal experience gathered during six years' service in Congress and four years in an executive

position which kept me in constant official and personal contact with Senators and Representatives.

THE MEMBER OF CONGRESS.

Let us picture to ourselves a candidate for Congress in a large district and follow him in his career —a man of good character, fine abilities, and with an honorable ambition to serve his country. It is the year of a Presidential election, with a new deal of patronage in prospect. First, he has to get the nomination from his party convention. He enjoys the good will and respect of his neighbors, but he finds that this is not enough. The primaries which elect delegates to the Congressional district convention are in many cases controlled by the most adroit and pushing politicians, who want office and are especially keen when a change of administration is impending. Our candidate finds that to beat his rivals for the nomination he will need the aid of some of these alert politicians, and, in turn, they let him know what places he is to procure for them if elected. The candidate being once started, and, of course, anxious to succeed, tries to persuade himself that such things are always done, and that there is really no harm in opening a prospect of reward to persons willing to render the country the valuable service of making him a member of Congress. Still he recoils from the thought of striking a downright bargain for his nomination. Morally he cannot afford to purchase his nomination with a promise of office. Neither can he afford, he thinks, to lose

his nomination by bluntly refusing the promise. He begins to compromise with his conscience and honor, and calls up his diplomatic adroitness, answering the demand for office in ambiguous phrase: he will "take the matter into favorable consideration;" he will "do the fair thing;" he smiles, he winks, he nods, having not yet learned by experience that all these things are taken by the place-hunter as positive promise, no matter what his own mental reservations may be. And thus he is, without knowing it, soon deeply mortgaged, having, perhaps, in this vague way promised the same office to several people; and such promises are sure to be presented for redemption.

Well, he is nominated, and now the campaign begins. The district threatens to be close, and he looks for help. That help is freely offered. Some men take a sincere interest in the cause the candidate stands for, and give him their aid unselfishly. Others, who are effective local stump speakers, or whose influence can reach some particular class of people, or who can disarm certain opposition by personal work, or who are just the men to get out the vote, or who can do great good by the wise expenditure of some money, and so on, are of opinion that they should not be expected to "hustle about" for nothing. He accepts their services, and this gives them "claims" upon him—claims to be satisfied, of course, with offices. Carried away by the heat of the struggle he not merely continues to open up prospects by vague speech and to smile and wink and nod, but he makes positive pledges, perhaps

not a few of them. The mortgages rise to a formidable amount.

The election comes and he triumphs. His bosom swells with the proud consciousness of honors won and of distinction to be achieved in the service of his country. Being a man of honorable purpose he thinks of going to work at once to prepare himself for his legislative duties, the importance of which he earnestly appreciates. To these duties he wishes wholly to devote himself. But no; he has not yet time for that. Other more pressing business intervenes. His mail is heavy with petitions and recommendations for office, bearing long strings of names in favor of men of whom he may never have heard—covering all the federal appointments in his district many times over. Estimable citizens whom he cannot afford to offend seek places for their friends and dependents. But by the men who have "claims" upon him he is most strongly reminded that first of all his time and labor belong to his "friends." There will be a change of administration and, of course, vacant places without limit. In the first line it is to be taken for granted that, according to custom, he will have all the postoffices in his district at his disposal. Then it is suggested that he should consider it a duty of honor to fill some consulships from his district, if not even a foreign mission. And indeed there are gentlemen among his constituents who, having done valiant battle for him, now think that foreign air would do good to them and their wives, and that their daughters should have first-class

music lessons abroad. Then there are others who maintain that they have fairly earned Indian agencies, or revenue positions, or places as chiefs of bureaus or at least of divisions in some Department at Washington. They and their friends all insist that the new member of Congress is in honor bound to procure them these things, that he certainly can do it if he will, that it will cost him only a word, and that if he fails to do it, his party in the district will suffer grievously, and he himself in particular.

About the time the new President goes into power, our new Congressman, loaded with petitions and recommendations, rushes on to Washington to plunge into that fearful spoils-carnival called a change of administration. He travels in lively company; not a few of his constituents who hold, or believe they hold, his promises go with him to keep him to his work, each expecting him to make *his* case a special one. The poor man's first night in Washington is troubled with disquieting visions. Has he not seen among his traveling companions Smith, to whom he during the campaign opened a prospect of the postmastership at Blankville, while he had positively promised that postmastership to Jones? And here they are both in bodily presence, each anxious to close the final mortgage each holds on the same piece of property.

Our new member of Congress has always considered himself a man of integrity and honor. He now instinctively feels that he is in a situation in which a

gentleman ought not to be. Has he not done a thing which a gentleman ought not to do? It is often the case that we become for the first time clearly conscious of the true nature of an offence when we have to confront its consequences. But our friend has hardly time for self-reproach. How can he get rid of the conflict of claims between Smith and Jones? Both are influential constituents whom it would be dangerous to offend. Smith is perhaps the better man for that postoffice, but Jones holds the clearer promise. Our friend concludes that the clearer promise must be kept; that he will explain his embarrassment to Smith, ask Smith to give way to Jones, and tell Smith that he shall have "something equally as good," as the current phrase is. Ah, poor man, he has to learn yet what a terrible scourge he has prepared for his back by that promise of "something equally as good," for Smith will faithfully stay by his side until he gets it.

And a good many other expectant constituents will stay likewise. Wherever our unfortunate statesman is, they are. They are there when he goes to bed late at night, they are there before he gets up in the morning. There are the Joneses calling for their postoffices, the Smiths demanding "something equally as good," and many others "claiming" many other things—and all these things without delay. Our friend, his political creditors at his heels, rushes first to the general Post Office Department to satisfy his Joneses. There he finds the rooms and corridors thronged with other statesmen and their friends,

crowds of Joneses and Smiths. The same anxious faces, the same eager eyes, the same nervously twitching lips, the same pictures of misery. After hours of restless waiting he succeeds in being listened to about the postoffice in Blankville, the papers covering that place are sent for, and our friend is blandly informed that there is no vacancy in that postoffice. "What?" exclaims our Congressman. "No vacancy? Why, of course, you will make one. Remove the incumbent. I must have that place. I have promised it to Mr. Jones, this meritorious friend of mine." The answer comes, calm and cruel: "The present postmaster has been in about two years. His record as an officer is excellent. There have never been any charges against him. There is absolutely no cause for removing him."

This is to our friend a thunderclap from a clear sky. Is he to confess himself powerless to get Jones the postoffice he has promised? It would ruin his prestige in his district, and Jones would become his enemy. What is to be done? Appeals to the Postmaster General and even to the President avail nothing. But was not something said about there being no charges against the present Blankville postmaster? Might not that defect be remedied? Why not get up some charges against that postmaster, be he ever so good an officer and blameless a man? This is the way out. Now to work!

When our member of Congress is again alone with himself the recollection that he once was a gentleman painfully struggles up in his mind. What! Is he

to instigate or even to countenance the trumping up of charges affecting the official and perhaps even the personal character of an honorable man, to effect the removal of that man from an office efficiently filled, and this merely to enable him, the member of Congress, to redeem a promise which he never ought to have made? He would not look into a mirror at that moment for fear of seeing his own face. He does not dare to listen to a warning voice speaking within him. With cowardly haste he seeks refuge in the thought that politics is politics; that this is the custom of the country, and that so long as that custom permits and even obliges members of Congress to use the offices of the Government as rewards for their henchmen—why, such things will be done, whatever their character and effect. And thus the shameful game of trumped-up charges is played. And our friend has more Joneses to provide with more postoffices, which causes more conferences at the Department, in some cases the trumping up of more charges, the disappointment of more men who had promises, the making of more pledges to furnish "something equally as good," and more sacrifices of honor and self-respect.

But now comes the task of getting for his friends places which are not, like the postoffices, regarded as "belonging" to the member of Congress, but for which he must compete with other members, and even with the more formidable Senators—places in the Departments, or consulships, or foreign missions, or revenue offices, or Indian agencies, and what-not.

He visits the Departments, one after another, and humbly seeks in each the favor of that awful potentate, the appointment clerk, who can keep him informed of existing vacancies and who also may see to it that his papers are opportunely brought to the attention of the Secretary whenever a good chance for catching an office occurs. And, oh! those hours of desolate standing around, and of anxious waiting for a propitious moment when he can pour his supplications into the ear of the President or of Cabinet ministers, painfully aware that the more impressively he speaks the more he is in danger of being set down by them as an intolerable bore!

That, however, is not the worst of it. Presently he discovers that he cannot possibly secure all the places he asks for, that he cannot gratify all the hopes he has excited—perhaps only very few of them—and that he must concentrate his efforts upon those few and drop the rest, lest he lose all. As to the few to be favored he is sorely tempted to select those whom he may expect to be the most useful to him, with scant regard for their fitness as to the places desired. But how drop the rest? Can he tell them that he is unable to press their claims to a successful issue, while they see him press the claims of others? This would be the way to make enemies. It cannot be thought of. But what else can he do? Make them believe that he is pressing their claims, but that after heroic efforts he is defeated by superior influence; throw the responsibility upon the President or the Cabinet ministers. And then comes the distressing spectacle

of a member of Congress with a confiding constituent by his side appearing before a Department chief and making a glowing speech on the virtues of that constituent, and on his own ardent desire to see this excellent man placed in office according to his merits, assuring the Department chief, and charging him so to inform the President, that this is the Congressman's special request—while the Department chief thus addressed has been before advised by the same member of Congress that he cares nothing about this man but really wishes another to be provided for. And then the member of Congress accepts the warm thanks of the confiding constituent for this splendid effort of friendship.

In this manner weeks and weeks pass after the incoming of the new administration, and still our friend has on his hands a formidable number of pursuers to whom he has promised "something equally as good," and others, too, to whom he has promised nothing, but whom he thinks he cannot afford to offend by blunt refusals. Some have left Washington but flood him with letters. Others have stayed and indomitably dog his steps. Some owe boarding bills in Washington, and have no money left for the home journey. In his despair he pays their bills, and buys them their railroad tickets to deliver himself of the insufferable infliction, promising to move heaven and earth for them in their absence. But there are a few who still have funds and will not go, and from them the wretched statesman, jaded and disgusted, at last runs away himself and hurries home. But there he

finds no rest. Incessantly he is pestered by the reproaches of the disappointed, and by the impatience of those who are still expectants. He begins to doubt whether the patronage business has not made him more enemies than friends. Fortunate he is if he does not find himself forced to run away once more, without leaving his address behind, into some solitude far from the maddening crowd. And yet he may have to fear that quiet solitude more than the distracting bustle he has escaped; for it will bring to him moments of self-contemplation when memories will rise up before him of promises made to be broken, of confidence invited to be betrayed, and of honor and self-respect lost, never to be retrieved. And yet, of the political debts which the spoils system seduced him to contract, only the most pressing have been paid.

NEW DILEMMAS.

So far he has gone only through the experience of the first months after the incoming of the new administration while Congress was not in session. The time arrives for Congress to meet, and now he thinks he will atone for it all by giving his whole soul to that duty for the performance of which he really was elected. But, alas! the old torment will not let him go. The men with claims who have not been provided for are still dogging his heels or mercilessly pelting him with letters, and like an errand boy they keep him running from Department to Department. Every new chance opening revives the pressure.

The work is never, never done; and although it abates somewhat, it continues to trench most severely on the time, working power and good humor which should wholly belong to the legislator's real duty.

Well, our friend tries hard to do the best he can under the circumstances, and flatters himself with the belief that he has at least his political home machine tolerably well arranged, but new complications arise. One of the office-holders appointed upon his recommendation so grossly misconducts himself as to make his removal imperative. There is no doubt as to the facts. But the delinquent public servant calls upon his Congressional patron for protection. Has he not a right to do so? Has he not been appointed simply by way of reward for services rendered to the member of Congress? Has he ever been expected by his patron to earn his salary by downright hard work for the public? Was he not rather to "have a good time" while in office, and to make out of it what he could? And now because he did so is he to lose the reward he had earned, and to be disgraced by removal to boot? Will the Congressional patron leave his client in the lurch? Our friend is a little puzzled at first. In spite of the many rebuffs it has suffered the old conscience speaks once more. Does his sense of duty permit him to endeavor to keep in office, to the evident detriment of the service and of the public interest, a man he knows to have proved himself unworthy? But there is also another voice speaking to him. Has not this unworthy public servant friends or relatives who exercise influence in his dis-

trict? True, he ought never to have recommended this man for office, but can he now afford to make enemies of him and his clan? True, the integrity of the service and the public interest are entitled to consideration; but can he afford that consideration when one of his appointees is concerned and he himself has so much at stake? Well, he seeks to have the removal recalled. He does not find a willing ear. He begs, he protests, he blusters, he threatens, he entreats, he implores the Administration to do a thing which he knows it cannot do without being false to its public duty.

But still other complications come to plague him. The Administration follows some policy which he feels himself in conscience bound to oppose; or vicious practices are discovered in some Government Department which his sense of duty commands him to denounce. His first impulse is to obey that command. But—has he not appeared before the President and before the Department chiefs as a petitioner for favors in the shape of offices for his friends? Will he not have to solicit similar favors again, and if he criticises and opposes the Administration, will it not have the power not only to refuse further favors needed by him, but even to remove the persons appointed upon his recommendation? Nay, may not those very persons, his political retainers, the members of his home machine, if he opposes the Administration, turn against him and denounce him as a mugwump and a renegade, for the purpose of winning the favor of the Administration and of thus saving

their own necks? He keenly feels that here his moral independence as a legislator is at stake—that moral independence which, if he is to do his duty to his country, can never be surrendered. But can he afford to maintain it at the risk of losing all the dearly-bought results of the management of the patronage in his district, and even of turning his own handiwork against himself? No; unless there be in him some of the stuff of which martyrs are made, the moral independence of the legislator will die as a sacrifice at the shrine of that patronage. And to many legislators making that sacrifice, it will hardly occur that it bears all the features of a bargain essentially corrupt.

Here I will stop, although the catalogue of perplexities, embarrassments, seductions, debasements and abandonments of their true duty, which the spoils system imposes upon members of Congress, is by no means exhausted. But it is enough. Will you say that the picture I have drawn is, after all, only a creation of fancy? I call it a picture of the possibilities brought forth by the spoils system; but only too much of it is a picture of reality. Indeed, I have known Senators and members of the House of Representatives who with good conscience and just pride could affirm that they never made a direct or indirect promise of office to bring about their nomination or election; that they never recommended any person for appointment whom they did not honestly believe well qualified for the place to be filled, and that they never depended upon the

manipulation of the patronage to advance their political fortunes. Such men, however, while resisting its temptations and debasing influences, have by no means been exempt from the harassing and distracting effects of the spoils system, and, I am sure, they are among the foremost to condemn it and to favor its abolition. Neither do I ignore the fact that there are members of Congress who, moved by the impulse of gratitude or by generous sympathy, take hearty pleasure in doing a good turn to a friend, or in trying to aid a struggling ambition, by securing to them a comfortable living or an opportunity to rise, and who to this end submit to work and trouble without selfish motive.

DEBASING EFFECTS OF THE SPOILS.

But on the whole, the effect of the patronage system is certainly such as I have described it. In a number of instances, by no means small, the picture I have drawn is true in every touch, and in many more it is true in very great part. I speak of this with assurance, for I know it from my own personal observation. During the years of my official life I was not only myself exposed to the office-seeking pressure, but I have many a time heard the confessions of national legislators speaking of their experiences and doings just as I have portrayed them, some with the brazen indifference born of debasing habit, others with the accents of deeply mortified self-respect, of humiliation and shame. More than once I have listened to men of originally noble im-

pulses and high-minded ambition, as they told the story of their miseries—how, seduced by what they accepted as the custom of active politics, they had entangled themselves in the meshes of questionable engagements almost without knowing it; how they had sometimes been forced to recommend for office men whom they knew to be unfit; how the misconduct of such men, demanding protection at their hands, subjected them to abominable perplexity and self-abasement; how their pride was humbled by their attitude as beggars for favors not only before members of the Government but even before Department clerks; how, not seldom, their sense of honor and duty revolted when they had to urge the removal of a worthy officer simply to make room for one of their own henchmen; how they felt themselves like bondmen in their relations to those in power, on account of the persons to be put or to be kept in office; how the patronage business robbed them of their time, spoiled their working capacity, enervated their spirits, and hampered and clogged in every possible way their one time supreme ambition to devote themselves heart and soul to their legislative duties for the common good, and how they now cursed the galling, debasing, disgusting servitude to which the patronage had subjected them.

And more than that. Many a time when, as Secretary of the Interior, I had to remove public servants for peremptory cause which absolutely left me no choice, I received the visits of members of Congress who had recommended the appointment of the men in

question, and who now, although they had to admit the reasons compelling the dismissal, yet assailed me with remonstrances, threats, supplications, and even tears, to move me to a violation of my obvious duty. And I do not remember an instance of such appeal when, on the part of the supplicant, the matter of the public interest was in the least drawn into consideration. But I do remember more than one case in which the member of Congress demanding the revocation of such a removal, went so far as to threaten that unless I complied, the appropriationsfor my Department would have a hard time in passing the House.

It was in a magazine article written by Gen. Jacob D. Cox, ex-Secretary of the Interior, that I first found a description of Senators and members of the House of Representatives personally introducing to a Cabinet minister constituents of theirs as candidates for certain places, extolling the merits of those constituents in the warmest language, and with apparently earnest eloquence urging their appointment, while the Cabinet minister had in his desk notes from the same statesmen cautioning him not to pay any regard to their recommendations. I must confess that this startled me. Being at that time a member of the Senate myself, I inquired of two Cabinet ministers then in office whether any instances of such duplicity had ever come to their own personal notice. The answer was that indeed they had, and they were by no means infrequent. But I have not to depend upon other men's testimony; for a few years later I,

myself, sitting behind my desk as Secretary of the Interior, looked into the eyes of Senators and Representatives who played before me the same ignoble trick, and into the eyes of their confiding victims, and I did not know whom to pity most, the deceiver or the deceived. If there is anything I have to be sorry for it is that I contented myself with disregarding their recommendations altogether instead of uncovering the dastardly fraud on the spot.

PRACTICAL CORRUPTION.

There can be no serious doubt, therefore, as to the facts. No man of experience in our political life can honestly question them. Nor do I state these facts now for the first time. I discussed them in the Senate of the United States many years ago without meeting a denial. Can there be any doubt as to their significance? It means that the use of patronage by members of Congress is essentially corrupt and corrupting. It is not that gross form of corruption which consists in passing bribe money from hand to hand. But it is that more dangerous and demoralizing, because more insinuating, corruption which wraps itself in the garb of party zeal, of gratitude, of generous sympathy, and in this disguise is received and countenanced among respectable people. Never has there been a more elaborate combination of self-deception and deception of others. Look at the elementary facts. A public place instituted solely for the service of the people, and, according to legal intent, to be filled with a person fitted for that service,

is promised by the legislator to a person as a reward or inducement for service rendered or to be rendered to *him*, with slight, if any, regard for the fitness of that person for public duty. The performance of that promise the legislator calls an "honorable obligation," while in fact the honor was lost when the obligation was incurred. The legislator seeks to obtain that office for his retainer from the executive, representing it as an appointment to be made in the public interest, while in fact it is the carrying out of a private bargain. The legislator calls the obtaining of this office an exercise of his legitimate influence, while in fact he has accepted a favor which undermines his moral independence by putting him under the influence of the executive. Having bribed a useful politician with the promise, he is himself bribed by the executive by the fulfilment. This manipulation of the patronage the legislator calls taking care of his constituents, while in fact he is seeking to take care of himself. He calls it doing his duty, while in fact by meddling with the executive function he is doing something which the Constitution never intended that he should do; and he does this at the expense of the time, working power and moral force he should devote to the great duty which the Constitution really imposes upon him.

If, as we must assume, government to be honest and beneficial must be based upon truth, then the manipulation of the patronage by members of Congress is in the highest degree repugnant to good gov-

ernment, for it is the very hotbed of multiplied falsehood.

If, to make democratic government truly a government for the people, it is essentially required that public offices should not be diverted from the public purpose for which they are intended, then the manipulation of the patronage by members of Congress insidiously undermines democratic government, for of all the perversions known the most colossal in dimensions and the most demoralizing in effect is that which turns the legislator into an office-broker and a spoils-monger.

If it is true, which nobody will deny, that as our Government grows greater in the magnitude and variety of its functions, it requires, in the legislative no less than in the executive sphere, greater ability, knowledge, application and moral courage to deal with the vast and complex problems confronting it, then there can be no bitterer satire upon the growth of the Republic than the legislator to whom that growth is of especial importance on account of the increasing number of postoffices and revenue places he has to look out for; and no sadder spectacle than the legislator who, although possessing the ability as well as the ambition to serve the Republic according to the needs of the time, permits himself to be dragged away from his real duty, and to be crippled in power and wrecked in morals by the tyranny of so vicious an abuse.

ADMISSIONS.

I risk nothing in saying that there are very few

members of Congress who have not often at heart secretly cursed this abominable practice, and wished it had never existed—aye, very few who in their inmost hearts will not to-day admit every word I have said as literally true. I have indeed heard some proclaim with an assumption of superior manliness that they are gentlemen who think it a matter of honor never to forget their friends, and who believe in rewarding them for every service accepted from them. They may be told that there is no objection to their remembering their friends, but that they would be better gentlemen and also better legislators if they rewarded those who have done them a good turn at their own expense and not at the expense of the public.

I have heard others say: "Yes, the spoils system is a curse, a greater curse to members of Congress than to anyone else. We heartily wish it did not exist. But it has come upon us by tradition; it is part of the political customs of the country. We are its victims, its slaves. What can we do but submit and make the best of it?" This is the voice of despondent weakness. The answer is simple: "If you wish it did not exist, why do you not make it cease to exist? If you gave half the energy and labor you fritter away in manipulating the patronage, to the task of abolishing the detestable evil, it would soon completely disappear, and you would be free to give yourselves altogether to your duties to the country." Then, why not go to work with a clear purpose and resolute determination until the task is finished?

There are in fact only two classes of members of Congress who have a real interest in preserving the patronage. One of them consists of those who are so weak in intellectual ability and acquirements that they must despair of maintaining themselves in public life unless by bribing men with places and salaries they build up for themselves a mercenary following. And the other class consists of abler men, who by attracting to themselves through the distribution of spoils the selfish and unscrupulous element in politics, seek to organize for their own use and purposes a power strong enough to maintain itself by sinister means in defiance of public opinion, and thus to subjugate to their own will their party organizations, and through them their districts or States. And in a democracy so abhorrent and dangerous a power should never be permitted to exist. But these two classes of members of Congress, the hopelessly incapable and the aspirants to boss-ship, form together only a small majority. They are vastly outnumbered by those whose interests lie in the opposite direction, and who, it is to be hoped, will recognize that they have infinitely more to gain than to lose by the complete abolition of the patronage system.

THE VOICE OF DUTY.

Every member of Congress who cherishes the glory and well-being of his country, the safety of its democratic institutions, and the efficiency of its government, and who values his own honor and dignity as a man and his usefulness and moral independence as a legislator, will, therefore, heartily rejoice that

the merit system has gained so large and so firm a lodgment in our administrative machinery. He will, with a sense of relief, contemplate the deliverance of the clerical force in our great Government Departments at Washington, and in the larger Government establishments throughout the country, from the baneful touch of spoils politics. He will, whatever his party relations may be, give ungrudging credit to former Administrations for having established the reformatory system, and to this Administration for what it has done to advance it—for having put under Civil Service Rules the whole Department of Agriculture up to the very top, the Government Printing Office, and important parts of the Indian service, of the Customs service, of the Internal Revenue service, of the Postal service, and the Geological Survey, making, down to the first of November, an addition to the competitive list of more than 12,500 places. He will thank the Secretary of the Navy for the great improvements in the regulations governing his laboring force. He will watch with jealous care the enforcement of the Civil Service Law and of the Rules made under it, and never fail to expose and censure any neglect or violation of them, no matter by members of what party they be committed. He will go farther. He will understand that the vicious influences of the patronage system will continue to poison our political life and to vex and harass him especially, so long as there is subject to appointment by favor a number of places sufficient to keep alive the office-seeking mania, and to give a chance to the

spoils-mongering politician. He will therefore welcome with gladness every possibility to extend the operation of the merit principle, not only to every place within the limits originally contemplated by the Civil Service Law, but also outside of them.

Thus he will heed with eager satisfaction the universal and emphatic demand of the mercantile community that the consular service shall cease to be the football of political machination.

He will, therefore, applaud the recent order of the President instituting thorough examinations for aspirants to consular places, not, indeed, as a final measure, but merely as a "step in the right direction," as the report of the Secretary of State called it, an advance toward a more thorough and permanent reform to be embodied in appropriate legislation of which, it may be hoped, a provision for *competitive* examinations will form a distinctive feature.

He will earnestly endeavor to promote the practical adoption of that wise recommendation recently made by the Postmaster-General that the Assistant Posmasters-General, for obvious reasons, be withdrawn from the reach of political changes, and be put upon the footing of merit.

He will seriously consider whether there are not other Assistant Secretaries in other Departments who, with great advantage to the public interest, might for the same reasons be put upon the same footing, thus introducing in our Government the non-partisan under-secretary, the expert Departmental busi-

ness manager, who exists in almost every well regulated government, and is looked upon as indispensable. Even in our own Government, this system is not without precedent, as all know who remember the late Assistant Secretary Hunter of the State Department.

Our conscientious member of Congress will earnestly favor the recommendation recently made in the annual report of the Secretary of the Interior that the whole Indian service be rescued from the dangerous touch of party politics—especially dangerous in this instance—by giving it a non-partisan head and organization; and it will readily occur to him that there is not the slightest reason of a public nature why the rule of the merit tenure should not be applied to the various Commissioners in the Interior and Treasury Departments, and to the auditors, comptrollers, registers and so on, whose duties have nothing to do with the so-called "political policy" of the Administration.

THE POSTOFFICES.

But with especially keen interest will he remember the forcible plea made last year by the late Postmaster-General, Mr. Bissell, and repeated by his successor, Mr. Wilson, demonstrating the absolute necessity, for reasons of the public interest, of taking the whole Postal service, the postmasters included, altogether out of politics; and he will therefore hail with especial joy the recent order of the President, authorizing the Postmaster-General to consolidate with

the principal postoffices the smaller ones surrounding them, so as to make them mere branch offices, and to place all persons employed therein under the Civil Service Rules. This order, if acted upon with courage and energy, will bring forth inestimable benefit. It will give the people better service by localizing its direction according to local wants. It will immensely simplify the system of accounting which now has to deal with over 70,000 individual postmasters, a great many of whom, as they are at present selected, will never learn how to make a correct report—and thus lead to better business methods, prompter returns and greater economy. It will draw many thousands of postoffices, from top to bottom, under the protection and control of the Civil Service Law. And this involves to our member of Congress a blessing of incalculable value.

The postoffices scattered by thousands all over the land have done more than anything else to keep alive the spoils idea among our people. More than anything else they have been the prizes fought for in national contests by local politicians. More than anything else they have served to demoralize the popular mind with the notion that a change of party in power must mean a partisan change in all the offices, and thus to turn our party contests into scrambles for plunder. It is no exaggeration to say that the postoffice used as party spoil has been the bane of American politics. It has especially been the curse of the member of Congress, hounding, tormenting and degrading him every day of his

official life. To be rid of that curse will be to him a true deliverance. Every postoffice, the disposal of which he loses, will be so much gain to his working power, to his freedom and moral independence, to his usefulness and dignity as a legislator. He will, therefore, not only do the utmost in his power to aid the Postmaster-General in the work of reorganizing the postal service according to the President's order, but he will zealously promote the passage of a law bringing under effective Civil Service Rules those postoffices which the President's order cannot reach. He will contribute to this result all the more gladly, as, with the postal service taken out of party politics, the greatest citadel of the spoils system will have fallen.

He will go still farther. Candid reflection will convince him that the four-years-term law must be repealed. That vicious law was a fraud in its inception. Being passed under the pretence of utility, while it was in fact only to serve the wire-pulling machinations of a candidate for the Presidency, and signed by a well-meaning President without consideration, it has proved ever since one of the most prolific sources of demoralization and mischief to the service, to the public interest and to our whole political life. The foremost statesmen—Jefferson, Madison, John Quincy Adams, Clay, Calhoun, Webster, Benton and many more—have condemned it and demanded its repeal. What they did not accomplish should be accomplished now; for it must be clear to the plainest understanding that the merit

appointment must logically be accompanied by the merit tenure. Indeed, *merit appointment with merit tenure* comprehends the whole program of Civil Service Reform.

Need I say what this means to the member of Congress? Not the surrender of any privilege or power of value. It means the emancipation of Congress from the scandalous and debasing slavery of the patronage. It means the restoration of the legislator to his true functions. It means the removal from party spirit, from party contests and from party government of the demoralizing element of the meanest selfishness.

WHAT IS STILL TO BE HOPED FOR.

It may seem extravagant to hope so much. Why should we consider it so? There are some among us who stood at the cradle of the Civil Service Reform movement. They remember the time when the practical politician looked upon the Civil Service Reformer as a visionary dreamer of singularly hopeless conceit—as little better than a harmless idiot who might be tolerated at large without the slightest danger to the existing order of things. When we remember that time, which does not lie very far behind us, and then contemplate the marvelous change that has since taken place, will the hope for the complete triumph of the cause we advocate still appear extravagantly sanguine? Indeed, who would but a few years ago have ventured to predict that the entire ministerial part of the national service would

be under the merit system by this time? There is but very little of it outside now. And I trust my imagination does not delude me when I believe President Cleveland to be determined, as to the extension of classification, to leave to his successor little or nothing to do that can be done by executive action alone. Is it unreasonable to expect that Congress will also do that which the enlightened public opinion of the country and the development of the Republic so clearly and forcibly demand?

At our last annual meeting I spoke of the remarkable strength the Civil Service Reform movement had gained in public sentiment. I am happy to add now that the growth of that strength has continued. It was strikingly manifested by the overwhelming popular majority by which the merit system was adopted for the municipal government of Chicago, and by its successful introduction. Efforts are being made in various other places to follow this great example. We have indeed to deplore two occurrences which show that the spoils politicians have by no means given up the battle, but still strive to recover what they have lost. One of these occurrences is the passage by the legislature of Massachusetts, in spite of the Governor's spirited resistance, of a law striking a vicious blow at the integrity of the merit system in the public service in that State, and at the same time at the honor and the true interests of the war veterans. And the other is the utterly lawless conduct of the Mayor of Indianapolis, who has simply declared himself not bound by

the provisions of the city charter prescribing the introduction of the merit system in the municipal service. Such things admonish us that militant watchfulness must still be the order of the day in the Reform camp. I am glad to say that in Massachusetts the constitutionality of the obnoxious law is ably contested in the courts; and we all know that the champions of Civil Service Reform in Indiana are of too belligerent a spirit to let the refractory Mayor sleep on his spoils laurels in comfort.

On the other hand, in the State of New York and in its great cities the Reform system has made most cheering progress. The embodiment in the State Constitution of the Civil Service Reform clause, and its faithful observance by the Governor, the Mayors of the great municipalities and the respective Civil Service boards, have caused a very large extension of Civil Service Rules and a vigorous enforcement of them. One of the most important features of that progress consists in the adoption and the successful operation in the large cities of the labor-registration system, which rescues the laboring men doing public work from the tyrannical control and the rapacity of political bosses and machines. And now in Maryland, too, the day of Reform has dawned with unexpected brilliancy, and I trust that old State will step into the front rank of its champions. There are several others that promise to follow her.

Nothing could be more encouraging than this steady growth of the Civil Service Reform movement in popular favor. Most of its former opponents

in the press have become converts to its side. That without the introduction of the merit system no permanent overthrow of corrupt machine rule and no thorough reform of our large municipal governments can be expected, is now a truth generally accepted by the popular understanding. Such convictions bring to the movement the aid of organizations bearing different names but having ends in view of which Civil Service Reform is a prerequisite. The Civil Service Reform associations proper, which not many years ago led a somewhat lonesome life in the field of public endeavor, are constantly reenforced by additions to their number. It is one of the most cheering signs of the time that such associations are being established at our universities and colleges, enlisting in our work the rising generation that will speak the word of the future. We may especially congratulate ourselves upon the recent organization of a Women's Auxiliary Civil Service Reform Association in New York, several of whose members have already achieved enviable renown for important public enterprises successfully conducted, and all of whom will, no doubt, bring powerful aid and encouragement to this.

With such successes and such moral forces behind us, we may indeed hope to see the day when our party warfare will be contests of opinion free from the demoralizing and repulsive interference of the plunder-chase; when a change of party in the national Administration will no longer present the barbarous spectacle of a spoils debauch, torturing the

nostrils of our own people and disgracing the Republic in the eyes of civilized mankind; when our Presidents and heads of the executive Departments will no longer be the almoners of party government, in danger of their lives from the furious onset of the begging throng, but will be respected as officers of state having high duties to fulfil which demand all their strength and ability; when the public offices, national, State and municipal, will cease to be the feudal fiefs distributed by bosses, or the merchandise of spoils-jobbers, and again serve the true purpose for which they have been instituted, thus becoming once more an integral element of government for the people; and when our legislators, escaped from the shackles of the spoils bondage, no longer beset by the snares and pitfalls which have threatened to wreck their morals and their self-respect, no longer supplicants for executive favor, will be able and proud to devote all their energies to the great tasks which at a time so full of difficult problems the country imposes upon them. And thus, while in years gone by we found an incentive to strenuous effort in the greatness of the obstacles to be overcome, we may now work on inspired by the hope of complete achievement.

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