

The Next Step in Reform

By Arthur Reed Kimball



HE extension of the Civil Service Law has been so unobtrusive and noiseless, while so many more exciting questions have centered public attention during recent administrations, that the progress of that extension has largely escaped public notice. But, though noiseless, it has been satisfactory. Civil Service Commissioner Lyman in his last report stated that the law now covers upwards of forty-five thousand places in the Government service, whereas, when it was first put in operation, it covered only about fourteen thousand places.

In a real debate in the Senate last winter—it was a “real debate” because it was sprung upon the Senate by the introduction of a harmless little resolution, and the Senators had no chance to make “set speeches,” but talked out back and forth, giving their real opinions on a subject in which they were all intensely interested—the patronage—Senator Berry, of Arkansas, complained that the law “has been extended to railway mail clerks, to post-office inspectors, to physicians at Indian Agencies, and in various and divers other directions which were not contemplated, as I conceive, by the original Civil Service Law.” In this same debate Senator Cockrell, of Missouri, another anti-reformer, also complained that “President Harrison and President Cleveland, during their two terms of service, placed fifteen thousand officers who were eligible to appointment under the Civil Service Law, and extended the system very largely.” Thus the enemies of reform testify unwillingly to its growth. It is well to remember this, and take courage when some such display of partisanship as the looting of consulships under Mr. Quincy seems to betoken a wholesale return to the barbarous practice of the past.

In this debate Senator Lodge, of Massachusetts, touched upon the weak spot of the present law—the spot which is attracting the attention and centering the discussion of all actively interested in Civil Service Reform—when he said: “The Senator from New Hampshire [Mr. Gallinger] made a point in regard to the injustice of arbitrary promotions, reductions, and removals. The point is very well made. There are arbitrary promotions, reductions, and removals, and the reason for these injustices to meritorious clerks arises from the fact that neither promotions, nor reductions, nor removals come within the scope of the law in any respect; they remain within the range of favoritism and patronage. That is the reason why they bristle with injustice at every point.” That it was the intention of the framers of the law to leave promotions, reductions, and removals at the mercy of partisanship was expressly stated by Senator Cockrell, who was in the Senate when the law was passed. He said: “It was intended, and was so declared by Dorman B. Eaton and others, who wrote in regard to the proposed law, simply to guard the entrance into office, and had nothing to do with the back door, or exit. It protected no man in office. It was simply to relieve the departments and all from the pressure of appointments and changes in subordinate positions in the departments, and to make a test of fitness and qualification for those places before appointments were made.” That the law only aimed, originally, to check the pressure of patronage, and to protect Government employees by indirection, merely through lessening that pressure, is striking proof of the progress of the reform sentiment since its enactment. Such an aim seems now wholly insufficient to a public opinion educated by the excellent practical operation of the law.

The “injustices” to “meritorious clerks” with which the practical operation of the law “bristles,” as Senator Lodge put it, owing to the fact that it governs appointments simply, and not promotions, reductions, and removals, are constantly illustrated. For example, take this

statement from a Washington special dispatch in a Hartford paper, one which has not been contradicted, so far as I have seen: “Among those dismissed from the Pension Office to-day was Mr. Mack, of Middletown, Conn. He was a \$1,400 clerk, and had been in the service for twelve years. He had a good record, and was in the classified civil service.” But, some one may ask, if Mr. Mack’s place has to be filled from the list of eligibles furnished by a civil service board, what does the spoilsman gain by removing him to fill his place with another competent man, selected without regard to politics?

This was the question that I put while in Washington recently to a personal friend, now at the head of one of the largest and most important Government departments, himself a practical reformer, who has not so far made a single removal for partisan reasons. His answer was, in substance, this:

“When I took charge of this department, I was struck by the number of Republicans in office. Perhaps there were four to one Democrat. As Cleveland was in office for four years, and as during those four years there must have been many Democrats appointed in this department, it seemed strange that almost none of them were still in office, that so few of them survived the four years of Mr. Harrison’s Administration. I asked an acquaintance, a spoilsman who was prominent in the department under Harrison, how ‘it was worked’ under the civil service rules. He laughed, and told me it was ‘simple enough.’ The spoilsman who wants to substitute a man ‘with a pull’ for a good man holding a given place sends for a list of eligibles, with the announcement that a certain removal is to be made, ‘for the good of the service,’ of course. If the spoilsman’s man is on the list of eligibles, why, the substitution is made at once. If not, the civil service people are informed that it has been decided ‘not to make that change just at present.’ Then the spoilsman waits until he thinks his man is on the eligible list all right. The process is repeated until the man ‘with a pull’ gets the job.”

This way of “beating” the civil service “machine,” to borrow a phrase from current slang, was tersely described by the Buffalo “Express” (Republican) when it said: “It is a common practice with the heads of departments to keep on rejecting and dismissing until they finally get the desired henchman in line of appointment.”

The next step, then, in reform, obviously, is to limit the absolute power of removal as now exercised by heads of departments. This is what is aimed at in the proposed Letter-carriers’ Tenure-of-office Bill, a bill approved by Theodore Roosevelt, who writes that the letter-carriers, “I am glad to say, realize that the only trouble with the Civil Service Law is that it does not go far enough. The Commission should have much more power than it has now, so as to prevent dismissals for partisan reasons, and to allow every public servant a chance to see any charges made against him and to be heard in his own defense before he is dismissed.” The Buffalo “Express” strongly states the argument for the bill: “The ‘Express’ has never regarded the privilege of unlimited removal as anything but a concession to the spoilsmen, which may have been politic in the early days of the reform, but which the movement is now strong enough to abandon. Why should the entrance to the civil service be carefully guarded and the exit left wide open? It is absurd and unjust to require a man to undergo severe tests before he receives an appointment, and then to give him no guaranty of retaining it during good behavior.”

But the argument is not wholly with the advocates of the change, even from the reform standpoint. The “Civil Service Chronicle” of Indianapolis, whose standing as an able and zealous advocate of reform is not open to question, says, in discussing the Letter-carriers’ Bill: “The

executive department should have the power of dismissal; this is essential to discipline and efficiency. The Civil Service Law is right in this respect. It is true that heads of offices take a mean and dishonest advantage of this power, as was done in Topeka, Terre Haute, Fort Wayne, and elsewhere. The remedy for that is public opinion and punishment by the President. Information, however, is an absolute necessity, and to this end the Civil Service Commission should have power to investigate every change in the public service within its charge, and to report the facts. Upon such facts public opinion and the President could act, and the time would speedily come when heads of offices would be ashamed to trick employees out of their places. It is unnecessary to repeat that every dismissed employee should be entitled at the time to an honest and fairly complete written statement of reasons, and that those reasons should be a part of the office records."

The question of the next step in Civil Service Reform—a question which is likely to attract no small share of public attention in the immediate future—amounts simply to this: Is it better to impair, possibly, to some small extent, the efficiency of government departments by depriving executive officers of the absolute power of removal? or is it better to leave "meritorious clerks" at the mercy of partisanship, when the removal of such clerks, and the consequent defiance of the spirit of reform, must also impair the *morale* and efficiency of the service? If one were sure of the interposition of that public opinion on which the "Civil Service Chronicle" counts, it would be easy to accept its view. But public opinion is slow to be aroused to the point of making itself felt. Meanwhile, the artificial checks which represent the best public opinion are its surest protection, even if at times they prove hampering and obstructive. For these reasons it seems probable that a majority of Civil Service Reformers will come to agree with Mr. Roosevelt in his view of the wisdom of limiting the absolute power of removal.

It seems not out of place, in closing this discussion, to cite two or three recent illustrations of the growth of the reform sentiment, though not bearing specially on the question at issue. One of these is the recent address made to the employees by Mr. Washington Hesing, the new Democratic Postmaster at Chicago, on assuming office. Mr. Hesing said, in part: "If any one of you fails in doing your duty, prompt retribution will follow. No influence, no delegation, no political 'pull,' will save you. On the other hand, if you do your duty and serve the Government faithfully and honestly, you will be retained in office, and no power on earth can remove you." Another is the announcement of the Milwaukee "Sentinel" that the platform on which the Republicans recently carried that city—a platform promising the further extension of the merit system—"means that purely clerical positions will, under Republican control of the affairs of the city, be conducted upon strictly business principles." A third is the recent announcement of Mayor Schieren, of Brooklyn, who is thus far proving his faith by his works: "I am here for the interests of the city. I am not here to give patronage to the Republican party pure and simple, or to any other party."

With Civil Service Reform made a live issue in local campaigns and in the management of local offices, the task of the reformers in arousing public sentiment to reform as a National issue at once becomes vastly easier. For the merits of reform are thus brought home to the people. They are thus familiarized with the practical aspects of a question which, as bearing upon departments in Washington, seems to concern them only remotely.



Gacinto Gallina, the Italian playwright and poet, has been granted a yearly pension of \$500 by the syndic and municipality of Venice to enable him to continue writing without continually facing the necessity of seeking other employment to keep the wolf from the door. For twenty years he has been writing plays which may rank some day alongside Goldoni's in mirroring actual Italian life, and his admirers will rejoice to know that his long struggle against poverty is practically ended.

The "Industrial Army" at Omaha

By the Rev. Joseph T. Duryea

On Sunday, April 15, at 8 A.M., a company of twelve hundred men, under command of "General" Kelly, arrived in Omaha by the Union Pacific Railway from Ogden. At the request of the railway officials the train was taken across the river into Council Bluffs. The men remained in the box cars at the depot, and were supplied with food by the people of Omaha. It was anticipated by the railway officials that they would capture an outgoing train. The Sheriff of the county was invoked to restrain them and protect the property of the companies. He was not confident of his ability to control them with the force at his command, and was advised to ask of the Governor of Iowa a detachment of the militia. Under the escort of a local company the men were removed to the grounds of the Chautauqua Association, situated about two miles east of the city. There the men found fuel for fires, and were supplied with food by the people of the neighborhood. On Tuesday, the 17th, a storm came on, with cold winds, rain, and flurries of snow. On the grounds there is an amphitheater with a capacity for seating six thousand persons. Although the owner of the grounds, Mr. Hart, had not been asked to permit them to be used, he went out in the afternoon to see what he could do for the comfort of the men. He found them corralled by the militia and exposed to the severe weather, and determined to allow them the use of the amphitheater for shelter. He returned to the city, sought and found Judge McCabe, and requested him to draw up an instrument granting the use of the building to General Kelly on condition that no fires should be made in or near the building. When the paper was drawn, the Judge read it to him and gave it to him for his signature. He put a limit upon the grant of forty-eight hours, and signed his name. By a singular mishap the Judge dated the document April 15, and did not detect the inadvertency, and accordingly the order reached the Sheriff without correction. When he read it, after nightfall, he said, "The time has expired." However, touched by the sufferings of the men, he examined the paper anew, and, concluding that there must be a mistake as to the date intended, asked the captain of the military company to allow the men to get under cover. This officer knew nothing of the character of the men, was timid, and refused consent, because it would bring the men too near his quarters. The men accordingly had to do what they could to screen themselves from torrents of rain and from a driving wind. Most of them were compelled to lie under the open sky and the falling water on the soaked ground.

The distresses of the men touched the hearts of the people of both cities, and the next day great numbers went out to their camp, with abundant food, and such articles as might afford comfort to the men. All who visited them were surprised at the character of the men, and were moved to respect their leader. They were neither tramps nor vagrants. Most of them were skilled mechanics, some of them professional men, and the rest intelligent and well-disposed laborers. The greater portion had sought work, and had not been able to find it. There were some who had joined the company because of their interest in the demonstration, and their hope that it might induce the Government to begin a system of public work in connection with irrigation, and give employment to the hundreds of laborers in destitution on the coast. A few had left their employments in order to aid the movement. General Kelly proved to be a man of intelligence, sound judgment on ordinary matters, complete self-control, calmness, and patience, resolved to conform to the civil laws, and governing his personal conduct according to Christian principles. He has not committed a single unlawful act since the company started, nor have the men. During their march no liquor had been allowed in the ranks, and all improper language had either been suppressed or had not been prompted, since none had been heard by the chaplain. The Sheriff testified that the men were orderly and disposed to respect the laws. He himself informed