

The Conservative.

J. STERLING MORTON, Editor.

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A NEGLECTED FALLACY OF SPOILSMEN. Recent agitation for the repeal of the civil service law has given occasion for renewed expression of the opinion, current among the inexperienced, which assumes that the application of the spoils system to the Federal civil service would insure the selection of public servants from among those only who have demonstrated their fidelity to the party in power as well as their ability to serve it by rendering valiant and more or less honorable assistance during its contests for supremacy. Those most noisy and disingenuous in their advocacy of the repeal of the law have based their strongest appeals to partisanship upon the advisability of cementing "the organization" by the judicious distribution of appointments to office especially among the young and ambitious workers, and many otherwise upright men, whose love of system and organization has been highly developed, have, deluded by these pretensions, been led to regard it as sometimes reputable and frequently advisable to subordinate the efficiency of the public service to the apparent necessities of their party. To the latter as well as to those among the rank and file of partisans who have been led to believe that the struggle for the re-adoption of the spoils system is in their interest, the perception of the truth, easily demonstrable, that there has never been and never can be any consistent or general application of a partisan test in the selection of minor officials may be accompanied by something in the nature of a shock. The spoils system does not, as some of its advocates would have a misguided public believe, give over the public service to a political party thereby charged with full responsibility for the results, but it does do that which is almost infinitely worse; it permits places to be treated as the personal perquisites of a few politicians. Sometimes these politicians constitute the dominant faction of the party in power, at others

they are reinforced by members of other parties whose support of doubtful measures is desired, but at all times and on all occasions their distribution of the appointments allotted to them is with regard, solely to their personal interests. Their needy relatives, their associates in business, their unsuccessful schoolmates, their social companions, their political henchmen, and the purchasable supporters of their rivals all have much more numerous chances of sharing in the distribution than those whose contributions, however considerable to the success of the party have been inspired by regard for its principles. That something more than mere partisanship was required under the spoils system would be sufficiently evident from the fact that under successive republican collectors of the port of New York, prior to the passage of the civil service law of 1883, there were 1,678 removals during 1,565 secular days but it is wholly unnecessary to revert to such an early period in order to investigate any phase of the spoils system. The latter is in full operation in connection with the employees of congress and will not be wholly eradicated in the executive departments of the Federal government so long as appointing officers are permitted to receive and consider recommendations and requests from legislators and others outside their own offices in regard to the retention and advancement of those in office whether the latter were appointed through favoritism or as a consequence of merit established in open competition. Those who have observed it carefully in any branch of the service do not need to be told that genuine partisan considerations are excluded almost as regularly as those which relate to the ability and integrity of applicants and with little less open acknowledgment. The most exhaustive labors in aid of the campaign of the successful party are of but little weight against the claims of the energetic henchman whose ante-election activities brought to the successful candidate the support of a needed delegate to the nominating convention or against the importunities of an impecunious and incompetent relative of the dispenser of patronage. There is not a cabinet officer or other intelligent person in the public service at the present time who does not know that a great majority of the requests made by spoilsmen in behalf of employees or applicants for appointment, though ostensibly based in many instances upon political expediency, are really prompted by personal considerations too frequently of the most unworthy type. Bad as a merely political civil service would unquestionably be the real spoils system is incomparably less desirable. The man who contributes materially to the political success of his party must have ability and the attributes of industry and integrity are by no means excluded. Such a man in

public office would be the representative of a party and not of a personal faction. The practical operation of the spoils system however gives the latter preference over the former. The henchman or the parasite is chosen, the partisan excluded. But this is not all. The right of making appointments to public office being regarded as the prerogative of successful politicians the latter are naturally called upon to distribute the favors at their command in acknowledgment of claims of every conceivable kind. Particularly in behalf of their worthless or incompetent relatives politicians temporarily or permanently out of office invoke the courtesies of their successful rivals and many useless individuals whose seem to be secure throughout all political changes in the incumbency of positions in which they are incapable of rendering valuable services owe their continuance in office to the recognition by appointing officers of such claims of friendship or the belief of the latter that in the mutations of politics their complacency may be reciprocated. It has been abundantly and frequently demonstrated that the distribution of patronage is detrimental rather than helpful to partisan organizations and chances of success. The same result would probably have been observed had only the veterans of political contests been regarded as eligible for appointment to office but no such application of the spoils system is possible. Appointing officials will not, in any considerable number, treat the places within their control as held in trust for the benefit of their parties because there can be no effective supervision of their acts in this particular and the temptation to treat them as personal hereditaments is too great to be resisted. This being true a favorite argument of spoilsmen and an accepted tenet of their dupes is destroyed. In its default those who would insist upon the destruction of the merit system must be prepared to contend that the honors and emoluments of high public station are not only inadequate but that they may suitably be supplemented by permission to billet upon the tax-paying public the burden of maintaining their personal favorites, political retainers, and disreputable kinsfolk.

H. T. NEWCOMB.
Washington, D. C.

A new publication at hand is THE CONSERVATIVE, published at Nebraska City by the Morton Printing Company, ex-Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton, editor. The subscription price is \$1.50 per year, and it is well worth the money. Devoted as it is to the discussion of political, economic and sociological questions by so eminent and versatile a writer as Mr. Morton the new publication will take rank among the first of its kind in the country. It will pay any man to read it. Address, THE CONSERVATIVE, Nebraska City, Neb.—Hayes County Republican.