

tribution of spoils. A party is supposed to be based upon some principle or some system of policy, which its members believe in and which their organization is designed to carry into effect; and so long as the party is working for the success of its principles, no question of spoils can dissolve or divide it. But our national parties at the present time are not based upon principle, nor is there a single measure of living interest to the people, on which the members of either party are agreed. Under such circumstances, it would seem natural and eminently desirable that the old parties should be dissolved, or else re-organized on a new basis so as to represent some positive principles, and there is already in the country a strong sentiment in favor of such a change. But hitherto the traditions of the past, the power of organization, and the desire for the spoils of office have held the old parties firmly together and effectually prevented the re-arrangement which so many desire.

But the force of tradition is now virtually spent, as last autumn's elections abundantly prove, and hence the existing parties have no motive to action except the desire for office, and no bond of union except the power of organization, which is wielded by the office-holders and office-seekers themselves. If, then, the offices are removed from partisan control, this last remaining bond will be snapped asunder; and it is hard to see how, in that case, the existing organizations can be longer maintained.

We look, therefore, for a re-arrangement of parties before many years, as a consequence of reforming the civil service; and if this should happen, it will not be the least of the benefits which the reform will bring us, for a more unsatisfactory division of parties than that now existing it would be hard to conceive, and almost any change would be an improvement. For some years past the case has been that a man, in casting a vote, had not the least idea what principles or what policy his vote would promote,—whether one that he approved or one that he disapproved; and so long as this state of affairs continues, it is impossible for any man of convictions to attach himself cordially to either party. A man of principle can only belong to a party of principle; and as existing parties have no principles at all, such men have nowhere to go to. Young men in particular, and educated young men most of all, find nothing in the old parties to attract or rouse enthusiasm, and they will welcome civil service reform with additional pleasure if it shall have the effect of dissolving these bodies and thereby preparing the way for new parties based upon principles and animated by ideas.

#### The Appointment of Postmasters.

THE new measure of civil service reform seems to be all that is needed for the offices to which it relates, and, if properly executed, it will effectually remove the clerkships and many other minor offices from partisan control, besides improving the quality and self-respect of the officers themselves. At first, indeed, the operation of the law is restricted to the larger offices having fifty or more persons employed; but provision is made for extending the system to the smaller offices also, after it has been established and tested in the larger ones. In this way the appoint-

ment of all the minor officers will be provided for, with the exception of the postmasters; but for these no provision has yet been made. It is obvious, however, that the reform will not be complete until some method is adopted for appointing these officers which will remove them also from partisan control and make them the servants of the people and not the servants of a party.

At the present time all postmasters whose yearly salary is less than one thousand dollars—and there are more than forty-four thousand of them—are appointed by the Postmaster-General; and according to the pernicious custom now in vogue, he is expected to make both appointments and removals at the instigation of members of Congress. The postmasters thus appointed are commissioned for an indefinite period, and, if the service were conducted on business principles, would hold their offices as long as they filled them well. But, under the present system, they are liable to removal at any time when the member of Congress from their district so demands; while, on the advent of the opposite party to power, there may be a wholesale removal of all the postmasters in the country. The effect of this partisan management is to make the postmasters the agents of the party that controls the administration; and so long as this system is retained in the post-offices, the reform of the civil service will be but half accomplished.

It seems clear, however, that in the case of postmasters the method of selection by competitive examination will not serve, for no such examination can test those qualities which in a postmaster are most imperatively required. The clerical duties in the smaller post-offices are of trifling amount and fully within the competence of any person who can transact business of a simple kind; but certain moral and other qualities are required in a postmaster, which no examination can reveal, and which can only be ascertained by personal acquaintance. Both the Government and the people have to trust the postmaster, the one with its money, the other with its letters; and he to whom such matters are confided ought, above all things, to be a man of known integrity and responsibility and of good business habits, and it is obvious that such qualities as these cannot be determined by competitive examination.

Moreover, the public convenience must be consulted; and hence in a thinly settled district it is often necessary to appoint the most available man, whether he is ideally fitted for the place or not. In many post-offices the salary is not sufficient for a man to live on, and they must therefore be held by persons engaged in other business; and in such cases it may be necessary to appoint a man whose place of business is so situated as to accommodate the people, though his scholarship may be slight and his other qualifications not all that could be desired.

These considerations, we say, show that the system of competitive examination cannot be applied in the case of postmasters, but that their fitness must be ascertained by other means and, in particular, by the testimony of those who are personally acquainted with them. It is obvious, however, that the Postmaster-General cannot himself make the investigation necessary to determine the fitness of candidates for such a mass of offices, scattered as they are over three million square

miles of territory, and he must, therefore, depend in each case on the advice of persons living in the neighborhood in which the officer is to serve. Hence the custom has arisen of taking the advice of Congressmen, the effect of which is, as above remarked, to make the postal service an agency of the party in power; and what we want is some method of appointment that will free the service from this partisan influence.

Some have suggested that the choice of postmasters should be given to the people; but this cannot be done without a change in the constitution, and besides, there is nothing in such a method of selection to recommend it to the friends of reform. We have too many elective offices now,—so many that it is impossible for the people to ascertain the qualifications of all the candidates,—and it is very undesirable to increase the number. Nor is it by any means certain that choice by the people would always put the fittest man into a purely business position like a post-office, while it would not improbably perpetuate the partisan character of the service, which it is the special object of civil service reform to abolish. It seems far better to retain the method of appointment by the Postmaster-General, only adopting some means for determining the fitness of candidates without resorting to the advice of members of Congress.

Now, it would seem that persons already employed in the postal service and living in the vicinity of the office to be filled would be the best judges of the qualifications of the candidates, and it would seem to be easy to make the services of such persons available for this purpose. Suppose that there be appointed in each State one or more boards of examiners, composed of persons employed in the postal service, and charged with the duty of examining all applicants for

post-offices and ascertaining their qualifications. In the performance of this duty they should not be restricted to the methods employed in the case of clerks, but should use whatever means should be necessary to determine the character and business capacity of the applicants. The natural place for such a board to meet would be at one of the large distributing offices, where they would have ready means of communication with the neighboring towns, and where information about the candidates could be readily obtained. Each board would have a definite territory assigned to it, and its members should be so selected that they could easily assemble for the performance of their duties. Then, when a post-office was to be filled, the board of examiners within whose district it was situated would inquire into the fitness of the applicants and report to the Postmaster-General the names of those best qualified, with the comparative merits of each, and he would appoint the officer from among this number.

Such a method of selection could be easily established, as the appointment of the examining boards and the general supervision of the system would be intrusted to the Civil Service Commission; and the work of examination and inquiry could be easily performed. No objection can be made to the plan on constitutional grounds; for the Postmaster-General owes his power of appointment to an act of Congress, and Congress, in conferring the power, may undoubtedly impose rules and regulations for its exercise.

That some such method of appointment, if successfully put into practice, would result in the improvement of the postal service, seems hardly doubtful; for it would free it from the dictation of members of Congress and divest it entirely of its partisan character.

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## OPEN LETTERS.

### On the Late Dr. Leonard Bacon and the Abolitionists.

It is to be regretted that Dr. Leonard Woolsey Bacon, in paying a tribute to the character and memory of his eminent father, in *THE CENTURY* for March, did not confine himself to themes which he is qualified, by adequate information and a judicial temper, to discuss, instead of reviving and seeking to justify his father's old controversy with the abolitionists and setting up in his behalf the preposterous claim that his name is above every name on the roll of anti-slavery worthies.

This claim, as "a matter of interest to public morals," I am constrained to challenge, and if in doing so I speak of matters concerning which, in charity to the dead, I would gladly be silent, the responsibility must rest upon him who has forced upon me the unwelcome discussion.

That Dr. Bacon, senior, opposed the abolitionists with might and main his filial eulogist frankly admits; but he insists that this opposition originated in a discriminating estimate of the character and surroundings of slavery and of the duties of slave-masters, and in repugnance to the "false positions, bad logic, and

in some cases malignant passions" of Mr. Garrison and "the little ring of his personal adherents," whose great fault, it seems, was that they did not, like Dr. Bacon, confine their denunciations of slavery to the "system," and fill their mouths at the same time with excuses for the poor unfortunate slave-holders,—who were assumed to be in an agony of desire to rid themselves of slavery, while unable to do so, being in the condition of the boy who locked himself into a closet with the key in his own pocket, and so was unable to get out when his father called him to turn the grindstone.

The vocabulary of the abolitionists, too, it appears, was very objectionable, including, as it did, such words as "man-stealer" and "pirate," which they applied, Dr. Bacon says, to "the legal guardian of a decrepit negro," or to "one holding a family of slaves in transit for a free State with intent to emancipate them." Dr. Bacon, no doubt, believes this to be true; but he is mistaken—it is only caricature. The abolitionists neither uttered any such nonsense, nor made any such application of their principles. Their definition of slavery was elastic enough to cover every genuine case of conscience. They always sympathized