

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## Lincoln on the Spoils System.

CIVIL-SERVICE reform had not made its appearance in American politics when Mr. Lincoln was President, but there is evidence that he was at heart a disciple of it, and would have been one of its most vigorous champions, had he lived. The descent of the office-seekers upon him was stupendous. Colonel John Hay, in his "Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln," published in *THE CENTURY* for November, 1890, says that "in the first days after the inauguration there was the unprecedented rush of office-seekers, inspired by a strange mixture of enthusiasm and greed, pushed by motives which were perhaps at bottom selfish, but which had nevertheless a curious touch of that deep emotion which had stirred the heart of the nation in the late election. . . . The numbers were so great, the competition was so keen, that they ceased for the moment to be regarded as individuals, drowned as they were in the general sea of solicitation." Colonel A. K. McClure gives a similar picture in his personal recollections, saying in reference to the condition of affairs in Washington at the beginning of Lincoln's administration :

The place-seekers swarmed in numbers almost equal to the locusts of Egypt, and the President was pestered day and night by the leading statesmen of the country, who clamored for offices for their henchmen. I well remember the sad picture of despair his face presented when I happened to meet him alone for a few moments in the Executive Chamber as he spoke of the heartless spoilsmen, who seemed to be utterly indifferent to the grave dangers which threatened the government. He said: "I seem like one sitting in a palace assigning apartments to importunate applicants while the structure is on fire, and likely soon to perish in ashes."

The reform is moving on surely. It would be expedited if those who believe in it would live up to it. As we have said before, one trouble is that people are good-natured, and when their friends want places under a new administration,—that is, places not vacant, and only to be made vacant by the demands of the office-seekers,—these good-natured people allow themselves to become part of the pressure for the places, by their recommendations and solicitations. It must sometimes look to the appointing powers as if the whole country rose up and demanded not civil-service reform, but positions in the civil service.

There is such a thing as rushing a reform ahead of public opinion, and thus injuring the reform; and there are many positions which are political in the true sense, and should be taken possession of by the party of the majority after every election. But it is the duty of every citizen to do his share in eliminating not only the spoils system, but the spoils idea, from politics; to press upon the authorities the necessity of continually extending the merit system, and of acting according to its spirit outside of the classified service. For it is no exaggeration to say that the evils of the spoils system are illustrated in every sinister career in the history of modern American politics; every disgraceful "success" is to

be laid at its doors; every corrupt ring has here its origin. It is the menace and enemy of honest administration in every community in the country; it degrades our legislatures, State and national; and the cause of good government triumphs only when this pernicious system is thwarted or overcome.

## Two Values of the Silver Dollar.

THE following letter of inquiry comes to us from a reader in Lincolnville, Kansas :

Your answer to a letter from Arkansas in the January number encourages me to ask a question in the hope of having it accorded similar courteous and instructive treatment. And it is with no hostile critical object that I ask it, for I am inclined to think your position on the money subject the right one. It is this: Why, if a 66-cent dollar will buy only 66 cents' worth of goods, can we go into any store in the land and, laying down five silver dollars, as readily get five dollars' worth of goods as if we had offered a five-dollar gold piece?

The reason why this can be done is because the country is on the gold standard, and the credit of the United States government is behind every silver dollar. Our inquiring friend in Lincolnville can take his five silver dollars to his local bank and ask to have them exchanged for five gold dollars, and the bank will grant him his request. The bank will do this because its officers know that they can send the silver dollars to their correspondent bank in the East and get gold dollars in exchange. The Eastern bank will oblige the Western one in this transaction because it in turn can effect a similar exchange with the United States Treasury. It is knowledge of the ability of the United States Treasury to do this which induces the local banks, and, through them, all tradespeople, to receive silver on equal terms with gold.

The United States government is able to do this only so long as the coinage of silver is limited, or only so long as the supply of gold in the Treasury is sufficient to meet all demands upon it. Unlimited coinage of silver, or very large currency inflation brought about by the issue of legal-tender notes by the Treasury in payment for silver bullion, tends to drive gold out of the country, and thus to diminish the Treasury supply. When this gold supply becomes so reduced that the Government can meet its obligations only by paying out its hoarded silver, and cannot exchange that silver on demand for gold, then the five silver dollars of our inquiring friend will drop instantly to their real value,—of about 64 cents each at this writing,—and he will be able to buy only \$3.20 worth of goods with them.

The drop from the gold to the silver standard would come with astounding suddenness at the very first whisper that the Government could no longer exchange silver dollars for gold dollars. The bank in Lincolnville, like the banks in every other part of the land, would get the news instantly, and from the banks it would spread to the tradesmen, who would instantly mark their prices up to the requirements of the silver standard—that is, more than a third above their former