DEPARTMENT OF PUBLICATIONS

I. BOOK REVIEWS

FIGHTING THE SPOILSMEN. REMINISCENCES OF THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM MOVEMENT. By William Dudley Foulke, LL.D. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919, pp. VI, 348.

Mr. Foulke has given us a most interesting book. It is a story of his part in a reform, the importance of which in our national life is insufficiently appreciated. It would occur to comparatively few to give to the National Civil Service Reform League an equal place in our history with the Anti-Slavery Society, as does Mr. Foulke in the opening sentence of his book. Yet both these organizations fought a kind of disease in the body politic which, unchecked, would assuredly have brought us to a point of weakness unable to withstand attack. No democracy, any more than an autocracy, which rests on privilege, on the distribution of patronage, can finally survive. It must establish its right to live by being an efficient government; it cannot be efficient when its work is done—or not done—through intrigue and corruption. Mr. Foulke, in describing conditions as they existed before the enactment of the Pendleton civil service law in 1883, quotes Mr. Lincoln as saying to Mr. Schurz: "I am afraid this thing is going to ruin republican government." Mr. Lincoln's prescience is not to-day ordinarily gainsaid. One reason why the great work done by the league has not been fully realized by the body of the people is that there has been nothing dramatic about it. The reform, so far as it is such—for a complete result is still some distance off—has been brought about by the persistent, intensive efforts of a small group of patriotic, broad-minded, earnest men. When they began, the doctrine they preached was the subject of derision by the politicians; to-day every one of the latter, having any regard for his political life, pretends, at least, to be its fervent supporter. How it has been done people do not really know and this is what, in part, Mr. Foulke tells us.

The story which he tells is frankly personal. No one now living has a more intimate connection than he with the development of the reform in the national service from its very beginning.

The shortcomings of each administration, but one, in making the law effective, from the first of President Cleveland to this of President Wilson, are impartially set forth with a considerable wealth of detail and one cannot read the account without a realizing sense of the significance of his title. It has been a continuous fight with the spoilsmen. This does not mean that proper credit is not given. It is given in a very high degree to President Roosevelt and to a limited extent to Presidents Taft and Cleveland. Indeed, every president, he says, "since the Pendleton act has been personally favorable to the system and if left to himself would not only have enforced the law but would have extended its application more rapidly and consistently than was actually done." In the case of President Roosevelt credit is bestowed where it seems not to be due, in the case of the special exceptions to the rules made by President Roosevelt for favored individuals. Prior to his administration, special exceptions had been made but they were few in number and were always of the position. President McKinley who does not, in Mr. Foulke's opinion, stand very high in the list of presidents for his sympathies with the reform, had made three. President Roosevelt, his immediate successor, in his first administration, made about 60, most of them in favor of named individuals. The department of commerce and labor, as one example, had no places exempt from competition but was nevertheless by this method supplied even with messengers, and telephone operators. Of this practice Mr. Schurz in his annual address to the league in 1904 said: "The whole proceeding bears in some respects a striking resemblance to the distribution of places under the spoils system." Perhaps Mr. Foulke should be pardoned for his attitude in upholding this practice, for he was then civil service commissioner. He was not, however, even an accessory after the fact in many cases, inasmuch as the record shows that many of these exceptions were made by the president against the advice of the civil service commission.

It is from Mr. Foulke's personal contact with the events which he relates that the book derives

an adequate part of its interest. Reminiscences, if well told, have an appeal apart from the history which they go to make up. Their authors are something like the players whom Hamlet describes as being the "abstract and brief chronicles of the time; after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live." Because of the immediate contact with human nature which the administration of the civil service must have to do, humorous incidents in connection with it are as plentiful as blackberries and as various as human nature itself. No account like this can fail to produce some of them and Mr. Foulke has not neglected his opportunities in this respect. The book is full of anecdote. And a great deal that is not anecdote is told with a delightful humor. He gives a lively relation of the Maryland census scandal of 1900, which must be read in full to be appreciated, where, because the first enumeration proved unsatisfactory to a Republican congressman, supplementary schedules were sent out with directions to the enumerators to get additional names. When an enumerator objected that he did not know where to get them, he was asked "are there no graveyards in the district?" The names were produced, among which was not only a dead woman, but the Washington undertaker who had come down to bury her. One boy, six years old, appeared as a school teacher; another boy, two years of age, was a carpenter and still another of the same age, a farm laborer employed during the entire year, who could read, write and speak English. There is the inimitable, naïve letter of the constituent of a congressman "in sight" as he says, "of the clover patch," who wants a place which pays well, such as a cabinet place or "if Governor Wilson won't come across with that appointment, touch him a little more lightly" for a job as post office inspector or (in a postscript) he would be content with a nice ambassadorship in a nearby country. And there is the delicious piece of journalistic writing in the *New York Sun* concerning Mr. Foulke's retirement from office as civil service commissioner, far too long to quote, which Mr. Foulke says expressed fairly well the idea of the opponents of the reform concerning the progress made. Its theme is the so-called "Anthem of the Civil Service Commission," of which an idea may be had from its concluding stanza which is:

"When we rule every job on the classified
Earth
We'll turn our attention to Mars,

And when there's a dearth of classified worth
We'll examine the classified stars.
We're here with our lists, and we're here with
our jobs,
And we trust you will understand
That we're getting them all, the great and the
small,
And are right up behind the band."

The reminiscent quality of Mr. Foulke's account is excuse enough for the omission of many things which we shall find in the history of the civil service reform league and the movement which it led, when such a history comes to be written. No such history, for instance, would be at all adequate which did not contain a relation of the exceedingly able and loyal work of its secretaries, especially Mr. McAneny, Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Keyes. On this Mr. Foulke does not touch. It is beyond controversy that without their work the movement could not have attained the success which has been so far achieved. The league has been extraordinarily fortunate in their possession. Nor does the book have any concern with the work done by the league in the various states—an extensive work of like consequence and value with that done in connection with the federal service. But as Mr. Foulke himself points out, the time for such a history has not yet come. The purposes of the league are so far from being accomplished that the organization may almost be said to be just launched upon a career. With its growth, the league recognizes that it has a much more difficult and enduring task than was involved in its purposes when it was organized. What it stands for is the promotion of real efficiency in a democracy. The new and unforeseen problems which are the outcome of the war have simply enlarged the field of its activities and made its service more essential than ever before. This is Mr. Foulke's own opinion, for he says in conclusion that "there never was a time when the efforts of the reform league were so essential to our national welfare."

Not in the function of a history but of a document lies the value of Mr. Foulke's retrospect. It will be a source of information and of inspiration to the future historian. And in this connection it would be much less than gracious to omit to call attention to the unselfish devotion, persistent energy and ability which Mr. Foulke has himself contributed for 35 years to the cause which he has so much at heart. It is not possible to read his account without being impressed by the fact.

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