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FITNESS THE ONLY STANDARD

Dr. Richard Dewey Argues that the Helpless Charges of the State Demand It.

Perhaps the most noted and capable man who ever served the state of Illinois in its charitable institutions is Dr. Richard Dewey, who for fourteen years was at the head of the great Kankakee asylum. He is now at the head of the Wauwatosa asylum, a private institution of high character. He replies to a letter asking for his views on the merit system in the state institutions of Illinois as follows: To the Illinois Civil Service Association.

Gentlemen: In response to the request of your association for an expression of opinion on the need of the merit system and of civil service reform in Illinois, I have the honor to submit the following considerations: In the years during which a policy of personal and political self-seeking has had sway over the public institutions of Illinois and the supposed servants of the people have been serving their own ends rather than the public good, an influence has been gathering force which makes for righteousness. The unfaithful stewards have been placed in power by the people and it is the people who are primarily responsible for unworthy men or measures and who must correct the evil, but before they can do so they must see what the evil is and the object lessons which are brought to their attention by abuses in the civil administration will open their eyes to the mischief of partisan control in institutions which are established to render service to the entire community rather than to any individual or party.

The alleged servants of the people have been "doing evil that good may come." The good to come was not the good dreamed of in their philosophy, and the evil they feared (the loss of power and pelf) will doubtless overtake them, but in the end will prove a blessing in disguise.

When any of the various boards of state commissioners and trustees, and the superintendents created by them, prostitute their positions to personal ends or partisan advantage, instead of with a single eye seeking the good of the commonwealth and that of their charges (helpless unfortunates for the most part) they do not knowingly say, like Lucifer, "Evil, be thou my good." They are in a state of evil enchantment like the pagan Ephesians of old, who, shouting "Great is Diana," really believed their false goddess upheld the order of the universe. They fancied "their craft was in danger" and that the cry for "reform" was only a madness and folly which, having turned the world upside down, was "come hither also," but the power they were seeking to crush to earth—this offensive notion of "reform"—proved to be invincible truth which, as we know, it won, though temporarily vanquished, to rise up again and again, greater and greater in might, and which, we surely trust, will eventually triumph in the state of Illinois and expel from the precincts of power the traffic in votes and overturn the tables of those who handle assessments. The good that has come from flagrant excesses of extortion and political greed has been the working out before our eyes of the evil consequences of such a policy. Every case of drunkenness and debauchery, of abuse and neglect, of extortion from the earnings of the servants of the state, shows to the people the havoc resulting from ignoring the prime object of each institution of the state—honest and efficient service—and shows that where place is given for any consideration whatever except merit, evil will result, no matter how good the motives of those responsible or how blind they are to the mischief they are doing.

The wards of the state, the deaf, the blind, the insane, the feeble-minded and the orphan, can of themselves do nothing to repel injustice and neglect. Their only hope is in the efficiency and humanity of their caretakers. They are on the "under" side, but the sympathy of the whole people is with them—a wrong done them touches the people in a tender spot. The people are prone to "make the case their own," and they need only to see where the wrong is to correct it. Hence our misguided political bosses, in illustrating to the minds and hearts of the public the evils of incompetence and vice in charge of weakness and innocence, are doing an unwitting service. If a state commissioner or trustee is selected by the governor not because he is a high-minded, able and public-spirited man, but because he is a good political manipulator or the creature of a "boss," as surely as night follows day disgrace to all concerned must sooner or later result from such malfeasance. If a superintendent is chosen because of political achievement instead of charac-

ter, ability and merit, an atmosphere of working at the polls instead of honesty and faithfulness; a woman for her wiles instead of merit and ability; if an advisory officer assumes executive functions and dictates appointments or seeks to pronounce upon qualifications of men and women of whose duties he knows nothing, or to place unworthy ones in power, there is no escape from the consequences, legitimate or illegitimate, of such misconduct—they come to the surface in scandal and shame.

If an oath of office were prescribed for the administrative officers in the service of the state, and if the oath included a declaration something as follows: "I solemnly swear that in filling all positions in my jurisdiction I will consider solely the fitness for the position of each and every appointee, and neither personal nor political motives shall influence my action; furthermore, I promise to make

no changes or dismissals except for the good of the service and proved unfitness;" If every officer should take and live up to such an oath, then an ideal state of efficiency might be attained. The above may seem to embrace a series of large "ifs," but the people need, only to see the working of good and evil conditions to choose the better part. Human nature is weak and selfish; it is also good and generous and strong for the right when enlightened by the truth. It may not be practicable to exact such an oath of office, but a law establishing the merit system and opening the service of the state to all on equal terms of fitness is greatly to be desired in Illinois, if its institutions are to be placed on a plane of efficiency commensurate with the intelligence and worth of the people.

Illinois, instead of leading the procession of states, is scarcely abreast of the times; in the administration of its state institutions, comparison with New York, with Massachusetts, with Michigan, would be odious to ourselves. This is not the fault of any individual.

In the warfare of parties the institutions of the state, (and particularly the charitable institutions,) should be protected by a flag of truce. The red cross of the non-combatant should shield those who have chosen unselfish labor for humanity as their calling and leave them undisturbed in their work—a work demanding seal and benevolence and all good qualities of head and heart—qualities rarely, indeed, to be found among political "heelers and henchmen" or any who make "practical politics" as at present understood their vocation. Respectfully yours,
RICHARD DEWEY.

HOW MERIT SYSTEM WORKS

Examination of Applicants for Positions—Higher Places Filled Only by Promotion.

The merit system, or as it is more commonly called, a civil service law, is a law providing that applicants for positions in a municipal or state position, shall be examined by persons, competent to conduct a proper inquiry, and that such applicants before given employment shall be found to possess the ordinary qualifications that a good business man would require were he seeking to fill a similar position. It is not presumed that an inexperienced person can fill a position requiring experience, and hence, a well considered merit law always provides for promotions from the lower to the higher grades and requires that the higher places be filled only by promotion.

Thus the result is that only persons of good average intelligence can be admitted to the service, and when they have become experienced and have shown that they are entitled to it, they are promoted. Exactly the same principle that any well conducted business has in vogue.

No one can imagine who has given the matter any thought that a man will do better work if he feels that he is secure in his position so long as he gives satisfaction to his employers. And it is well known what stability there is to any political employment when there is a change in power from one party to another. It is likewise well known that when the tenure of office is precarious that a man must be paid more than if his position is to be a steady one. And much must be added to salaries in order to pay living expenses if campaign funds are raised by an assessment on incomes.

Hence, a merit law very properly provides that a person shall not be discharged except for cause, and then only after an opportunity to be heard in his own defense. Likewise, strong provisions are inserted against political assessments.

Carefully consider whether the state institutions will not get a better class of employees under such conditions than if the old adage of "to the victor belongs the spoils"

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