

At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

By "Silas Wegg."

PARTISANSHIP.

Please note the distinction between a partisan and an offensive partisan. This is the Seventeenth of March. The man who wears a green necktie today is a partisan, providing he is not an advertiser. The man who wears a yellow necktie is an offensive partisan. And *vice versa*, which saving clause carries us forward to the Twelfth of July.

That is to say—there are times when an expression of one's opinion or of one's preference cannot be assumed as offensive, while at other times the same formal expression becomes an offense. Or in other words, no citizen, not even a civil servant, should be asked to pretend to be dead while he breathes, but — note this point, please—no citizen should show too many signs of life when he ought to be asleep.

The civil servant, for it may be well to stick to him, has his views of society and politics, partly as a legacy from his forefathers and partly as the accumulation of ideas from contact with men and events. He has these views and, as far as they agree with the views of one party or another, he is a partisan. It is no more the civil servant's fault than the party's that there is a coincidence of opinion. In fact the said civil servant may vote in accordance with his said views and may communicate the existence of them to his wife and family. But the question naturally arises—how far may he go in the expression of his views, or, to paraphrase the words of the Sphinx, when is a partisan not a partisan?

The next step in this discussion should be, as you are all aware, an appeal to British precedents. If I were on my job I should have the decision of the Home Office in the case of Mugglewump and the memorandum of the Lords of the Treasury *in re* Stickleworth at my finers' ends. But I am not on my job, and all I have at my fingers' ends is a fairly blunt pencil obtained from the Clerk of Supplies for use at my desk in the Department.

So we will waive the question of British usage—and thereby imperil a hundred or more subscriptions to this journal—and proceed to examine the question as it appeals to the office pencil.

The Pencil, it appears, has its own views of life. "Here am I," it says, a being of wood and graphite, who might have been the medium of a poet's fancies or of an artist's dream,—here am I in the hand of a middle class clerk who, by chance, appeals to me on a question of state. Appeals to me by chance! for, from the moment I became a part of the Government stationery stock I gave up all hopes of any occupation but that of checker of figures or a scrawler of semi-prepared memoranda.

"Ah," it continues, "I remember the day when we left the factory. We knew not where we were going and we talked one with another of the adventures to be ours. One was to be a lover's advocate, another the confidant of statesmen, and another the first to know the burning thoughts of some great editor. And here am I—a part of the civil service of Canada!