



THE politicians are showing open perplexity these days over what they should do about "patronage." Some are taking the easy course and ostentatiously kicking the thing out of the front door—though, I suspect, with a wink to certain interested bystanders intended to intimate that there is a rear entrance. Others are discussing the problem honestly, and insisting that there is an honest sort of "patronage." Moreover, they are of the opinion that it will be exercised so long as we have the party system worked by human beings. You can destroy "the letter"—in the form of a "patronage list"—but you cannot uproot "the spirit." When men join together in a political party, and bear all the wear and tear of a political campaign, and dip down in their pockets for the wherewithal, and succeed in electing men of their own choosing to Parliament or the Legislature, they will not—we are told—be content to see the men who fought against them treated just like themselves when the Government they have put in power is spending its money and filling its offices.

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THERE is this much to be said in their favour at once—no Government known to man ever has acted in this way. We talk a lot about the non-partisan administration given the people of the United Kingdom by the British Government; but no one will pretend that even that sublime organisation does not know the difference between a political friend and a political foe when it comes to making appointments, let us say, or lifting gentlemen to the House of Lords. At times, they cross party lines—probably oftener than we do in this country—but they know that the lines are there, and they habitually keep inside of them. Down in the United States, they have a civil service law, forced on the politicians by the public after more than one hard-fought campaign; but the "patronage" system applies relentlessly to every office not under the cover of this blanket, and it is seen in the spending of money all along the line.

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I VENTURED to say to a friend the other day that I did not think that any political party which honestly abandoned the practice of rewarding political services, could stay in power in this country. I think I even went so far as to say, in the heat of discussion, that "the people of Canada do not want honest government." That possibly was hyperbole. But I doubt whether they could be depended upon to vote for it. Let us suppose an election campaign between a party which frankly exercised "patronage"—which favoured the contractors who helped it, which gave offices to friends, which cut the tariff to suit its supporters—and a party which the people sincerely believed would do nothing of the sort. Where, to begin with, would be all the men who understand political organisations? Why, with the party which proposed to reward its workers. Where would the big industries cluster? Behind the party which would know a friend and

likewise know a foe when it came to revise the tariff. There would be nothing to be gained by supporting the other party, and nothing to be lost by opposing it. It would deal out justice in either case. Every interest which has anything at stake in politics would support the men who recognised the value of that support, knowing that if the other party won they would be in precisely the same position as if they had fought and "bled" for it.

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NOTHING but unorganised public opinion would be with the honest party. And how far does that go? How many men do you know who are neither after an office for themselves nor have any wife's uncle's third cousin who is after one? Or, if they do not fall into this class, have neither themselves nor their friends any hope of getting a Government contract or a look-in on some deal in which it is well to have "a friend at court"? How many people are absolutely unconcerned, personally, in the party struggle? Now round up those whom you know who are free from this feeling even in the remotest way; and tell me how much genuine hard work will these disinterested persons do in a political campaign to which they are not drawn by some issue which touches the feelings—such as a religious or racial cry? Yet your honest government would have to depend on these amorphous forces to fight and conquer every organised political influence in the country, marching for once all under one flag—the proud flag of "patronage."

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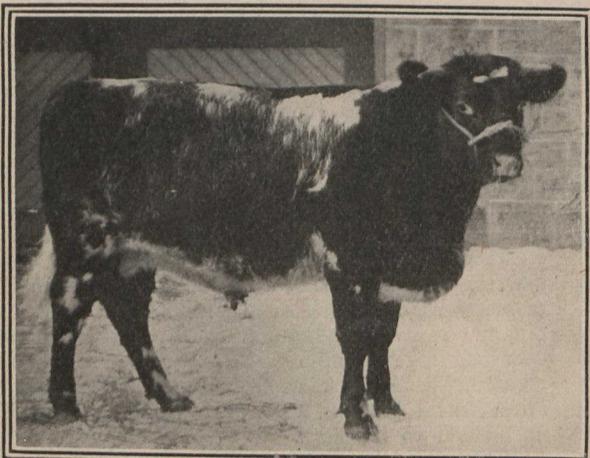
I MAY be too pessimistic in fearing for the fate of the honest party; but I cannot forget the pure white honesty of the Government of Alexander Mackenzie, and the unquestioned honesty of the little band of Oppositionists who fought the Government of Sir John Macdonald from 1878 to—let us say—1891, and the unfailing manner in which they went down to defeat every time they met the "Manufacturers' Government" which opposed them. But I am getting dangerously near to party politics. You will say that there were a lot of other reasons for the recurring defeats of the "honest party"; and I will not deny it. Their alliance with the folly of Commercial Union with the United States sufficiently accounted for their overthrow in 1891, for instance; and their opposition to the new trans-continental railway damaged them heavily in 1882. But the fact remains that Canada once had an "honest party," and she wore it down by a steady drizzle of discouragement. The result was shown in 1896 when there came from every corner of the Liberal camp the fervent hope that, now that their party had got into power, it would not be foolish enough to act as Alexander Mackenzie did and make its retention of power problematical. An awful lot of "honest" Liberals had come to believe that "honesty is not the best policy"—in politics.

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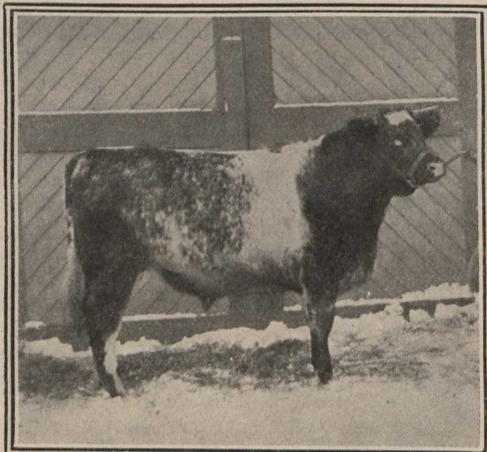
THE inference from all this is that the politicians are by no means the only persons to blame for the "patronage" system. The people are accomplices. And as long as the people are eager to pay for their own subjection to a policy of plunder, they will probably be accommodated by complaisant politicians who profit much by pursuing this Robin Hood programme.

W. M. P. O. T. E.

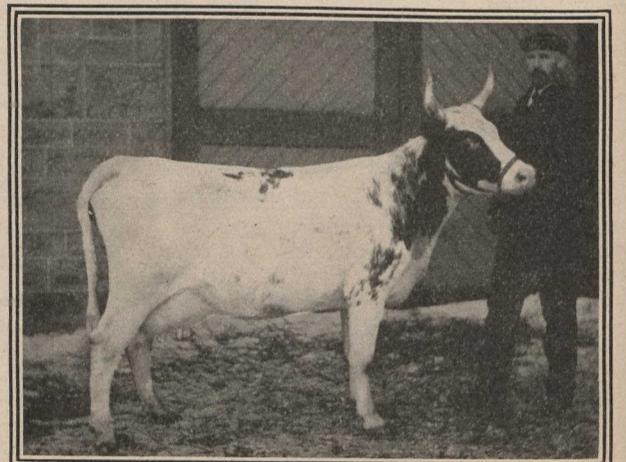
PRIZE WINNERS AT PROVINCIAL WINTER FAIR, GUELPH.



First Prize Shorthorn Calf.



Champion Shorthorn Steer.



One of the Winners in the Dairy Test.