

**THE TAINT IN POLITICS; A
STUDY IN THE EVOLUTION
OF PARLIAMENTARY
CORRUPTION**

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The taint in politics; a study in the evolution of parliamentary corruption by Joseph McCabe

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JOSEPH MCCABE

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THE TAINT IN POLITICS

A STUDY IN THE EVOLUTION OF
PARLIAMENTARY CORRUPTION

"The Florentine secretary's orb never quite sets."

LORD MORLEY.

LONDON
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PREFACE

THE following pages attempt to give precision and usefulness to the vague feeling that there is something wrong with politics. Our conduct, in regard to grave national affairs, is neither wise nor consistent. There is no class of men amongst us whom we more generously flatter with public notice and high-sounding titles, yet, the moment the affairs we have entrusted to them reach a critical stage, we clamour for the business-man. There is, in normal times, no saying more common amongst us than that the party-system suits what we are pleased to call the genius of our race, yet we are very apt at the close of a long period of trial and peril to assure each other, with an appreciation of relief, that the party-system is now dead and ingloriously buried; and almost in the same hour we follow with admiration the attempts of politicians to distribute us afresh in new parties.

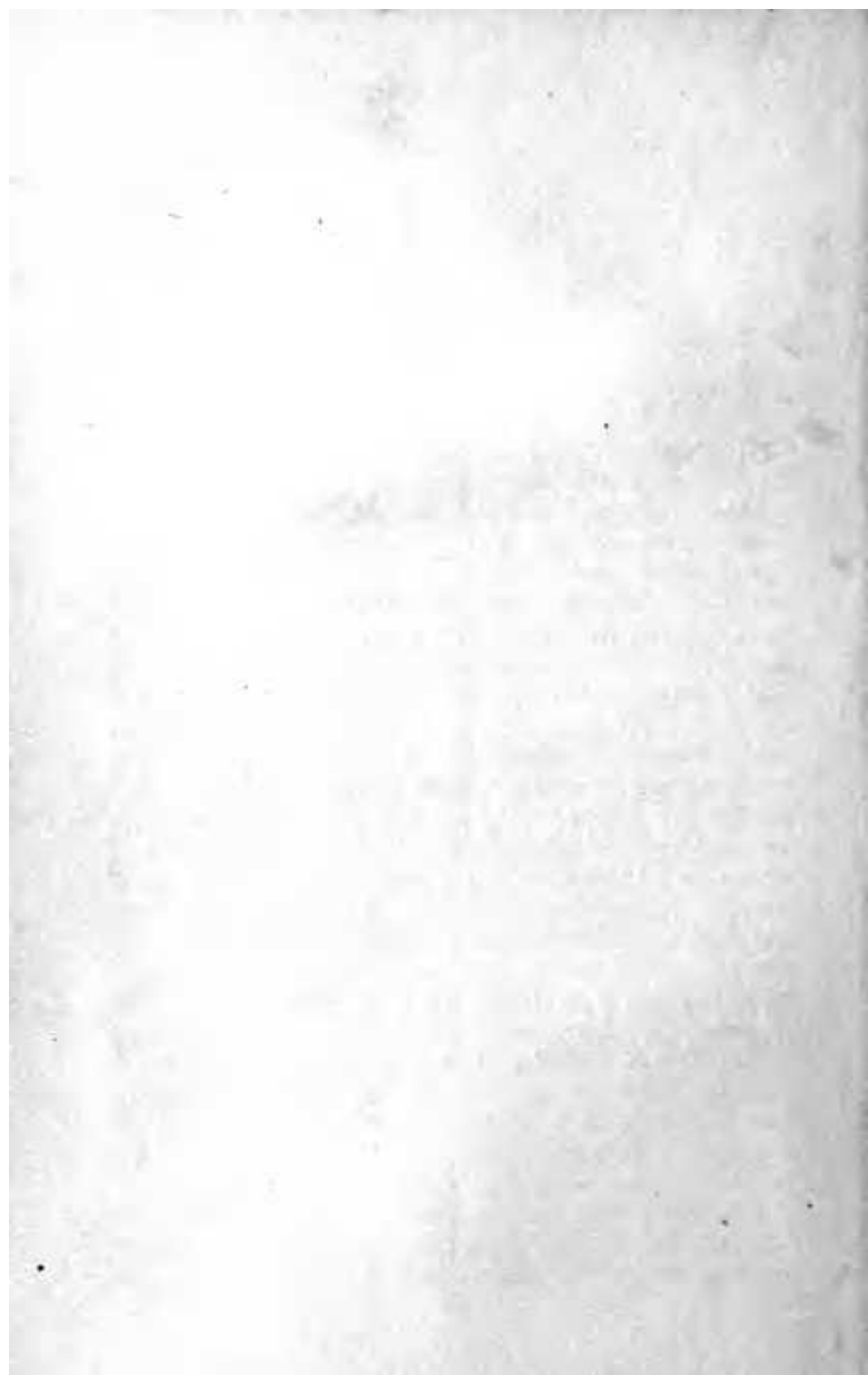
It were wiser, since the affairs entrusted to the politician now lie at the roots of our personal and common weal, to give a precise shape to this dark suspicion we constantly mutter and as constantly ignore. Is our political system corrupt? Are we merely foolish, or duped, when we hear of political scandals abroad and thank the gods that we are not as other men? Why do our politicians feverishly seek, as they did in a recent debate, to shift from their House the "opprobrium," as they called it, which the country casts on it? I seek to answer these questions, not by making a piquant collection of rumours which one is obliged to keep in anony-

mous form, not by strained conjectures and interpretations, but by a patient study of recorded facts.

If these facts belong in large part to former days, if the earlier chapters of this work are historical, they have not the less interest and pertinence. No part of our national life is so shaped and coloured by its past as our political system. The quaint proceedings of our Houses of Parliament are not more unintelligible apart from history than is the behaviour of our politicians. They are the heirs of a political system which a century and a half ago was revoltingly corrupt, a century ago still fiercely resisted every demand for the reform of its corruption, and half a century ago still cheated the country by mere pretences and the most grudging instalments of reform. The taint is still there, but we citizens have set up something in the nature of a system of sanitation which compels it to seek new forms. The story of this evolution or transformation occupies much of my space, since it gives the inquirer a special equipment for studying the subject. We then survey the existing political system in all its branches, from the constituencies to the cabinet, and easily define for ourselves its precise measure of lingering corruption, dishonesty, chicanery, sophistry, and incompetence. Beyond that it is not proposed to go. When we have reached a mood of genuine and serious resentment, when we no longer laugh to hear politicians call each other knaves and cozeners, knowing that to them we have entrusted what is far more precious than a man's single bank-balance, we shall soon find a remedy.

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CHAPTER I

THE STATE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MACHINE

ON November 21st, 1918, a remarkable appeal to the British people was issued by what were generally regarded as the two most gifted and most conscientious statesmen we then possessed. Inheriting a power which had been scandalously misused during one of the gravest crises into which the country had ever passed, Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law had nevertheless contrived to avert disaster and to restore the drooping prestige of the nation in the eyes of a wondering world. It was Carthage that fell. We, as is our wont, genially overlooked the small vanity of our politicians, and knew that only a large infusion of non-political energy had enabled our nervous administration to bring our massive resources to the point of victory. But we at least trusted that we had found statesmen sagacious enough to perceive, and disinterested enough to accept, the moral of their experience. In the fulfilment of that not less grave task which, we dimly foresaw, the era of peace would lay upon us, there was to be no dallying with "the game of politics." England had, in the stress of a mighty struggle, suddenly matured. Politics would be henceforward a scientific conception and manly discharge of the vastest enterprise in the world.

The letter which Mr Bonar Law and Mr Lloyd George issued gave that impression to the entire nation, except to the adherents of a few small