

THE SPIRIT OF AMERICAN POLITICS AS SHOWN IN THE LATE ELECTION.

THE object of this paper is to show that in the late election the two great parties antagonized each other along those lines which have divided the people from the foundation of our government, while, notwithstanding, the influences deciding choice of party were, for the masses, purely provincial in character, resulting in a blind partisanship.

The issue which for the hundred years of our national history has divided the Democratic party from the opposition is the proper extent and limitation of the national authority. The Democratic party has stood for restriction of this authority within narrow limits; the opposition, as Federalist, Whig, and Republican in succession, has favored its extension. For the forty years from 1820 to 1860 this issue was presented in two forms: (1) the right of each State to decide for itself the question of slavery; (2) the right of the general government to levy protective as well as revenue duties, regardless of the will of particular States. On the first question, state rights won a complete victory, but against violent opposition; on the second, government authority triumphed, and was exercised moderately and with tacit consent. It is worth noting, too, that the doctrine of state rights secured the indorsement of the Supreme Court where protection feared to face the issue. Nevertheless, the Democratic theory was supporting a burden which caused its downfall, and the war which ended slavery brought with it also a clear and universally accepted limitation to state rights. The Union is indissoluble. The cause of national authority, on the other hand, following the tremendous blow to its adversary, for the past twenty-five years has grown and extended itself as never before. In the maintenance of

protection of the war tariff laid for revenue, in the increased scale and the widened field of national expenditure, in all which its opponents stigmatize as paternalism and its advocates applaud as nationalism, this is seen. This growth is the natural expansion of an idea which finds itself without opposition.

But though the old doctrine of state rights has its bounds set, and, as a sectional issue, is dead, in its place has been gradually crystallizing a new theory of state duties and individual responsibilities, opposed to the "national" policy of the Republican party. This idea was most clearly emphasized by President Cleveland's opposition to bills giving government aid to local improvements, to soldiers as soldiers merely, or to local industries, as silver-mining and wool-growing. It is true that by no means all Democrats were squarely on their side of the line, for where money is to be obtained for his district or any one in it, the average congressman sees unusual merits in an appropriation bill. Still, whatever the inconsistency between individual action and public professions, in the last election the lines were clearly drawn by party leaders and the party press between the Democratic idea of limitation, and the Republican idea of extension, of national authority. This was the issue. What was the spirit in which the American people approached it?

This spirit was purely provincial. The question was not considered by the mass of voters from a national point of view. It was not the general welfare that was sought, but the sectional, class, or race welfare. It was not to patriotism that orators and press appealed, but to selfishness and prejudice. National feeling showed itself alone in a ridicu-

lous provincialism, the most intense sensitiveness to English opinion. "What is good for England is bad for us!" shouted our orators, and the two parties vied with each other in maintaining that England was hostile to their respective policies. But the citizen who was convinced that England's weal was his woe, transferring his thoughts to his own land, became at once so broad-minded as to believe that his personal profit was identical with the prosperity of the republic. He did not, however, study the general welfare, ready to accept that as best for him, but, in the true spirit of provincialism, determined his vote according to his own supposed interests, or those of his class or locality; perhaps more often still in unreasoning prejudice.

Is this indictment unfair? If so, what was the meaning of meetings of colored or of German voters, or of Irish-American clubs, except that those who supported them imagined that their race had more to gain from one party than from the other? It matters not that this gain was imaginary. The expectation of it determined votes, and both parties played upon it. Why did we so often read of some body of workmen, "They know on which side their bread is buttered"? They had been made to believe that the success of one party meant higher wages for them, had decided to vote for it accordingly, and the party editor was congratulating them on the intelligent patriotism of their choice. Men whose pension bills had been vetoed were assumed to be on one side, those whose claims had been expeditiously granted on the other, as a matter of course. The idea that such an assumption was an insult occurred to no one. An appropriation for a breakwater or for a new post-office was claimed to win votes about in proportion to the expenditure; and if the appropriation was vetoed, the outraged citizens were urged by that public enlightener, the local

paper, to take vengeance at the polls. That "the South wants it" was urged as a conclusive argument against a proposition in some localities, and that "it will enrich New England" in others. "The importance of the interests of this great State demands recognition," was heard from thirty-eight different points, and the party that was believed to give the recognition secured the votes. Bribery of bodies of men with the nation's funds is by no means the same thing as bribery of individuals with one's own money.

In short, it is only too evident that the appeals to the intelligence of the masses, of which we have lately heard so much, were really appeals to supposed selfish interest. But, after all, the masses are moved not so much by selfishness as by prejudice. This prejudice is of two kinds, traditional and local. Its traditional force is shown by the fact that communities side by side and identical in character and interest remain for decade after decade politically opposed. The sons are expected to follow in the footsteps of the fathers. The permanence of party names undoubtedly helps to prevent the natural division of voters on the line of principle. Principles are forgotten in devotion to the party which once represented them. Loyalty to party becomes a passion, and not so long as an excuse can be found for remaining where he is will the average partisan desert to the other side. Party distinctions that stood the shock of the civil war yield to no mere practical question. The principle at the root is not clearly seen. It is the old name, "the party of Jefferson," "the party of the Union," not the new cause, that holds. "The multitude," says Macaulay, "is more easily interested for the most unmeaning badge or the most insignificant name than for the most important principle."

Side by side with this traditional prejudice is the local prejudice; by which

I do not mean local interest, but an apparent inability in the people to see national, state, and municipal affairs in their true proportions. It is, of course, the spirit of provincialism again. The fact that parties in each State and town are the same as in the nation at large is sufficient evidence of it. This prejudice has a double action. Aided alike by the tyranny and the convenience of party organization, it causes men to divide into parties on the same lines in the local as in the national election. So the second effect follows inevitably from the first: namely, local questions are subordinated to national, or else national questions to local. Common sense occasionally ventures so far as to declare that it matters not whether the mayor of Bigville be a Republican or a Democrat, but no one yet dares maintain the rash truth that the qualifications of a candidate for the governorship are not affected by his opinions of protection and free-trade. As a rule, too, in spite of common sense, Jones is elected mayor of Bigville because he is a free-trader, just as Smith is elected governor of the State because he is a protectionist. This state of things is as mischievous as it is absurd. It is impossible to bring local questions to decision at the polls. And again, with reverse action, national questions are obscured. Men join a given national party because they approve of the position of its local representatives on some comparatively unimportant question of city or State. Green votes for protection because he agrees with the Republicans of Grand County in favoring high license, and Gray votes for free-trade because the Bigville Democrats oppose an increase of the municipal debt. Personal arguments abound. "How can you be a Democrat, when the only saloon in town is kept by a Democrat?" "How can you be a Republican, when the Republican city treasurer has just defaulted?" This is not nonsense. Facts like these influence votes, and

must be considered in studying the spirit of our politics.

If we had taken a representative group of Americans, evenly divided as to party, in the late election, we might have found something like this: A is a protectionist because he helped found the party of freedom, and B because he admires the candidate. C is a Democrat because he believes in tariff reform, and D because he always has been one. A Junior is a Republican because his father is, and B Junior is a Democrat because the political economies teach free-trade. E is a protectionist because a Democratic ring controls City Hall, and F because the campaign orator has convinced him that Democratic success means low wages. His brother G, again, is a Democrat because the campaign orator has failed to convince him, and his cousin H because most of the respectable people he knows are. Y is a protectionist because the government did not buy his land for the new post-office, and because Congress has voted to deepen the ditch that drains his cellar Z is a tariff reformer. Scattered here and there are those who have earnestly tried to solve the problems presented,—have thought, and studied, and prayed; and more numerous than any single class are those who swear by the one newspaper they read.

Partisanship follows as a natural result of provincialism. All the unlike elements range themselves on two sides, diversity of motive lost in community of aim. The masses on either side support the same leaders, use the same catchwords, read the same newspapers, and learn from them all that is good of their own party, and all that is bad of the other, and much that is not true of both. They hear the same arguments, and, as the campaign advances, they use them, and by the day of election believe, and think they understand them. Enthusiasm shows itself in speech-making, torchlight processions, and denunci-

ation of opponents, — denunciation, however, *en masse* as a rule, not as individuals, save only, of course, when the individual has the misfortune to be a candidate. The partisan marches through the mud with a torch on his shoulder, and imagines that he is supporting a principle. Ask him what it is, and he will answer something like this: "Our party comprises the intelligence and character of the nation. It is the party of progress, of humanity. It maintains the national honor, and promotes the industrial welfare. It 'stands ready to utilize all the forces of earth, and air, and sea.'¹ The future greatness and prosperity of the nation are bound up in our success. The opposition is a 'wicked sectional conspiracy;' ¹ the riff-raff of the community; a combination of the ignorance, wickedness, and cupidity of the nation." This spirit of exaggeration is the natural child of partisan heat and provincialism. The old deacon asks his pastor whether any Democrat can be saved, and the young lady, who is in politics what her father is, and knows no more, declares that no Republican can be a gentleman. A most striking instance of the folly of partisanship has been seen for four years past in Dakota. There, with no voice in national politics, the people have persisted in declaring such sympathy for the Republican party that the Democrats have kept them out of the Union, and powerless to give their true-love help. The partisanship which has denied them statehood is no more contemptible than that which provokes it is suicidal and unreasoning.

This combination of partisanship and provincialism, this worship of names and traditions, with eyes fixed on petty practical advantage rather than broad principles of national government, is the most prominent feature in American politics at the present time, but it is not the dominant force. It affects tempo-

¹ Actual quotation from campaign writer.

rarily, but does not shape permanently, the national development. In the last election, in fact, it was less prominent than before, for the lines were drawn more sharply than for years between two opposing theories. Still, the issue was presented in a purely practical form, and party ties formed on the burning moral issue of 1860 have been slow to yield to what seemed to many merely an uncertain question of dollars and cents. Again, though the question was recognized, its difficulty transcended its importance. Multitudes, who honestly attacked the question, gave up, bewildered by a few months' study and the contradictions of debate, and sought a safe retreat in the bosom of the old party. Those who felt sure on the subject generally knew nothing, and those who knew something did not feel sure. But the fact that so much serious effort was made to understand the issue shows that there is a more earnest spirit in our political life than appears on the surface of a campaign. Where there is no important question clearly grasped, selfishness may be pitted against selfishness, and prejudice against prejudice. But give a question worth the while, above all place a moral principle at stake, and selfishness will yield to patriotism, and prejudice to duty. The mere fact that petty things are prominent is in some sense a good sign, for it shows that in great things we are agreed. The spirit of provincialism reaches its greatest expression at times like the present, when the balance between the two great theories of nationalism and individualism is nearly evenly maintained. When there is no great principle to win devotion, we become for a time enthusiastic for trifles and names. When the nation does not call for our support, we limit our view to a narrower horizon. In the late election, the people divided, though almost unconsciously and in no broad spirit, on the old question of the true relation of

national power and local rights. Should the balance between these ideas, however, shift far either way, should the issue be vital and clearly understood, the

masses will rise above provincialism, old prejudices will be forgotten, and parties will become only the means of supporting principles.

Charles Worcester Clark.

THE GIFT OF FERNSEED.

I, ARTHUR SAYCE, am now thirty-seven years of age. I was born in New York State, was educated at Utica, New York, and at Columbia College. Having taken my medical degree, I spent two years in New York hospitals, after which my next five years were passed in Europe: one year studying medicine in Berlin; two walking the hospitals of London, — St. Thomas's and "Bart's;" and two in Paris, — the first in private study, and the second as an *interne des hôpitaux* of the French capital. For the last eight years I have been a practicing physician in New York city, until three months ago, when I started for the North Pacific coast on a prolonged hunting trip. I give these details to show the reader that I am not ignorant of the world, no recluse, nor one likely to be easily mystified or juggled with. In no sense can I be called visionary.

In my life I have known but little sickness, and have never been subject to fits, faintings, trances, delirium, or hallucinations of any kind. It is impossible that I can have been deceived in any of the sensations which I experienced in the events that I am about to describe. However incredible the following narrative may seem, it is the simple, sober truth.

With this introduction (in writing which, I believe the reader will, after he has read what follows, readily acquit me of all egoism), I will proceed to the narrative itself.

It was on the 10th of May, late in the afternoon, that I arrived at the Cœur

d'Alène Mission, in one of the five log cabins attached to which this story is written. I was alone, my traveling companion of the last two months, Lester Hemsley, having been recalled to New York by a message which reached him at Fort Cœur d'Alène, forwarded from Portland, Oregon. As I rode up, the sun was already low enough in the west to be shining full in the face of the Mission. The higher slopes of the mountains beyond, now all dark with the level stretch of pines, were then snow-covered (for the snow lies late on the Bitter Roots), showing in the evening sun alternations of intense black and white. On the right wound the Cœur d'Alène River, fringed with scattered pines, on which the ospreys had built their nests, and patches of undergrowth of black-thorn and hazel.

In addition to the five cabins and the Mission itself, there was a seventh building, if such it could be called, a little nearer to me, on the lower ground, an Indian *teepee*. On the slope to the left grazed a bunch of ponies, at sight of which my own little "buckskin" pricked up his ragged ears, and seemed to take an interest in the proceedings for the first time since we left the fort.

We had advanced to within one hundred and fifty paces of the *teepee* before any human life appeared. Then a party of four Indian bucks, muffled in United States military blankets, came suddenly scrambling out from behind their hut. Presumably the action of their own ponies on the hill had told