

## The Spirit of Party

*Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co. 2 vols. \$5.00.*

"IT is of the essence of our representative institutions that we should have party government; and the lines of party, if they are not defined by politics, would be fixed for something less honorable and less definite." These words, from a speech delivered by the late Joseph Chamberlain at Birmingham in 1880, may stand as the apologium, by perhaps the most outstanding example of the "good party man" of recent times, for the curious phenomenon of "party" which dominates political life on both sides of the Atlantic to-day. It has been said of Chamberlain that if he could but agree with two-thirds of his party's common policy, he was ready to shut his eyes and bolt the remaining third as a sacrifice to loyalty. And despite feeble efforts towards individual freedom of thought, the party system shows few signs towards disintegration, almost the first proceeding of those who combine to break away from the accepted parties being to start a new one on their own account, as hidebound as its predecessors. It is more than mere coincidence that in both the great English-speaking democracies the complaint is heard that the best men, and especially the most intellectual men, tend always to interest themselves less and less in "politics," leaving them to be exploited by the mediocre or the self-seeking professional. For the moment that it becomes an unwritten law that a man in order to testify to two-thirds of his faith must betray what remains, you have begun to close the gate against the honest few who prefer to think for themselves. It is true that these form a very small minority.

To be a "good party man," then, and still deserve the repute of one who is both honest and able, requires a curious mentality seldom to be found. Mr. Chamberlain, extracts from whose speeches have just been published by the Houghton, Mifflin Co., was one such, and as such one of the most striking figures in Anglo-Saxon politics of the late nineteenth century. Incidentally his figure marks, more than perhaps any other, the parting of the ways between the old and the new theories of government in England. Many Americans believe, as their fathers did, that the "ruling classes" in England are invariably members of a select oligarchy who govern by a carefully elaborated system of throwing dust into the eyes of a gullible electorate. That this is no longer true, or is true only to a small degree, that even in England the journey "from log cabin to White House" is possible enough to the man who resolutely sets out to conquer it, is shown by the career of such a man as Chamberlain, and since his rise it has become always easier. The Chamberlains were not a poor family; had they been so his course might have been smoother. For he came of the class against which the "ruling caste" has definitely set its face since the days of Cromwell—the "middle classes," sturdily Puritan in essentials—except where tinged with snobbery—radical, even revolutionary, and growing always more dangerous in the eyes of their "betters" since the coming of the industrial age has brought them wealth. Queen Victoria to the last regarded Chamberlain as "that horrible man," and with so much reason that in his earlier days, as the Radical mayor of Birmingham, he was frankly iconoclast if not openly republican. Yet from such a slippery leaning-off ground he made his way into the innermost councils of

do not from any overmastering ability, but chiefly by his skillful use of the party system.

From the days when King and Commonwealth in their warring originated the system of government by watertight compartment, the sacred shibboleth consistency has been the bane and terror of the smaller politician. To change your mind were a confession of weakness, if not of treachery. Thus in every representative assembly the majority openly abandon any power of independent thought, scout the possibility of changing development, and are content to advocate as greybeards the opinions they mouthed as schoolboys. Chamberlain, his opinions already come by before he entered national politics, saw the possibility of using party as a means towards these ends, rather than sacrificing them towards the ends of party. And towards this he devoted all the energies of his keen, concentrated, businesslike, practical mind. He built up first of all a small party of his own, formed of local henchmen and admirers, carefully chosen for their mediocrity of mind, upon whose unthinking support he could rely under all circumstances. This secured, he lent support to whichever party would meet him furthest towards the ends for which he was working; remained with it, as docile as any "party hack" so long as it suited him, and at the psychological moment used his phalanx either to swing the dominant party in the desired direction, or, by lending its weight to the opposition, to defeat his former friends. He could do this without any consciousness of treachery, even of insincerity, because, outside the end he had aimed for from the beginning, nothing else was to him of real importance. Thus at first a supporter of Home Rule for Ireland, he actually cared little or nothing for the rights or wrongs of it, save in so far as it affected his ideal standardization of the empire. So long as it seemed to him unlikely to imperil that ideal he was content to support it, whatever its merits or demerits. When he came to believe that to grant it might imperil those aims, he swung his weight and his phalanx against it for as little or as much reason. So it was with his "raging, whirling propaganda" for tariff reform. He was at different times a confirmed free trader and the protagonist of protection; yet he was perfectly consistent throughout. When free trade might serve to weld his ideal empire, he was perfectly willing to accept it; when it seemed that protection promised quicker results, he threw over his former faith and all that it implied.

He differed from the lesser "party man" in that when he changed his mind he was perfectly ready to admit it. During his South African tour after the last Transvaal War, a prominent Colonial said to him concerning the government policy of 1881, "In those days I'm afraid I did not like your African views." "No," said Chamberlain, "and the worst of it is that you were right." His political opponents loved to interrupt his speeches with cries of "Judas," as ignorantly as his own supporters who contended that he had risen superior to party ties and sacrificed everything to the truth. In his eyes and his hands party was simply and purely a weapon towards the consolidation of the empire, quite irrespective of the party ends of those with whom he might for the time untie himself. In this Chamberlain not only showed himself a "party man" in the truest sense of the word, he also showed the dangers that lurk in the system for men of lesser power of will.

To read his speeches without realizing this would be confusing indeed. We find him at one time condemning

are at another the saviours of the future; tariff reform becomes as essential to national salvation as was formerly free trade. Either the veriest weathercock or the completest time-server, might well exclaim the empty-headed politician whose one ideal is fidelity to "what his leaders tell him to do," and whose thoughts are concentrated on the immediate moment, leaving the future to look after itself.

OLIVER MADOX HUEFFER.

## "North of Boston"

*North of Boston, by Robert Frost. New York: Henry Holt & Company. \$1.25 net.*

SOME six months ago there appeared in London a modest little green-covered book, entitled "North of Boston." It was by an American living in England, so its publication on the other side of the Atlantic came about quite naturally, and was no reflection on the perspicacity of our publishers at home. To those of us who admire Mr. Frost's book it is no small pleasure to take up this new edition, bearing an American imprint, and feel that the stigma of non-comprehension so often put upon us by expatriated Americans can never be justified in this case.

Indeed, Mr. Frost is only expatriated in a physical sense. Living in England he is, nevertheless, saturated with New England. For not only is his work New England in subject, it is so in technique. No hint of European forms has crept into it. It is certainly the most American volume of poetry which has appeared for some time. I use the word American in the way it is constantly employed by contemporary reviewers, to mean work of a color so local as to be almost photographic. Mr. Frost's book is American in the sense that Whittier is American, and not at all in that subtler sense in which Poe ranks as the greatest American poet.

The thing which makes Mr. Frost's work remarkable is the fact that he has chosen to write it as verse. We have been flooded for twenty years with New England stories in prose. The finest and most discerning are the little masterpieces of Alice Brown. She too is a poet in her descriptions, she too has caught the desolation and "dourness" of lonely New England farms, but unlike Mr. Frost she has a rare sense of humor, and that, too, is of New England, although no hint of it appears in "North of Boston." And just because of the lack of it, just because its place is taken by an irony, sardonic and grim, Mr. Frost's book reveals a disease which is eating into the vitals of our New England life, at least in its rural communities.

What is there in the hard, vigorous climate of these states which plants the seeds of degeneration? Is the violence and ugliness of their religious belief the cause of these twisted and tortured lives? Have the sane, full-blooded men all been drafted away to the cities, or the West, leaving behind only feeble remainders of a once fine stock? The question again demands an answer after the reading of Mr. Frost's book.

Other countries can rear a sturdy peasantry on the soil, a peasantry which maintains itself for generations, heavy and slow perhaps, but strong and self-replenishing; and this for a length of time beside which our New England civilization is as nothing. We are often told that the telephone has done much to decrease insanity in the farming districts, and doubtless it is true. New England winters are long and isolating. But what about Russian winters

rearing a sturdy peasantry for hundreds of years. It is said that the country people of these nations are less highly organized, less well educated, than are New Englanders, and so better able to stand the loneliness of long winters. But this does not explain the great numbers of people, sprung from old New England stock, but not themselves living in remote country places, who go insane.

It is a question for the psychiatrist to answer, and it would be interesting to ask it with "North of Boston" as a text-book to go by. Mr. Frost has reproduced both people and scenery with a vividness which is extraordinary. Here are the huge hills, undraped by any sympathetic legend, felt as things hard and unyielding, almost sinister, not exactly feared, but regarded as in some sort influences nevertheless. Here are great stretches of blueberry pasture lying in the sun; and again, autumn orchards cracking with fruit which it is almost too much trouble to gather. Heavy thunderstorms drench the lonely roads and spatter on the walls of farm-houses rotting in abandonment; and the modern New England town, with narrow frame houses, visited by drummers alone, is painted in all its ugliness. For Mr. Frost's is not the kindly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and sensible one of Lowell; it is a latter-day New England, where a civilization is decaying to give place to another and very different one.

Mr. Frost does not deal with the changed population, with the Canadians and Finns who are taking up the deserted farms. His people are left-overs of the old stock, morbid, pursued by phantoms, slowly sinking to insanity. In "The Black Cottage" we have the pathos of the abandoned house, after the death of the stern, narrow woman who had lived in it. In "A Servant to Servants" we have a woman already insane once and drifting there again, with the consciousness that her drab, monotonous life is bringing it upon her. "Home Burial" gives the morbidity of death in these remote places; a woman unable to take up her life again when her only child had died. The charming idyll, "After Apple-picking," is dusted over with something uncanny, and "The Fear" is a horrible revelation of those undercurrents which go on as much in the country as in the city, and with remorse eating away whatever satisfaction the following of desire might have brought. That is also the theme of "The Housekeeper," while "The Generations of Men" shows that foolish pride in a useless race which is so strange a characteristic of these people. It is all here—the book is the epitome of a decaying New England.

And how deftly it is done! Take this picture:

We chanced in passing by that afternoon  
To catch it in a sort of mental picture  
Among tar-banded ancient cherry trees,  
Set well back from the road in rank lodged grass,  
The little cottage we were speaking of.  
A front with just a door between two windows,  
Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black.

Or this, of blueberries:

It must be on charcoal they fatten their fruit.  
I taste in them sometimes the flavor of soot.  
And after all really they're ebony skinned:  
The blue's but a mist from the breath of the wind,  
A tarnish that goes at a touch of the hand,  
And less than the tan with which pickers are tanned.

"The Fear" begins with these lines, and we get not only the picture, but the accompanying noises;