

The Two Parties after the Election

EACH of the two major political parties should feel chastened and subdued rather than elated and complacent at the results of the election. The Democratic candidate has won, but his triumph is expressive of confidence in Mr. Wilson rather than in the Democratic party. He ran ahead of his associates on the ticket, just as Mr. Hughes ran behind his associates. Republicanism as a tradition is proved to be a little stronger than Democracy as a tradition, but not strong enough to overcome the advantages of the abler and more progressive Democratic leadership. Manifestly neither party can assume the existence of any popular presumption in its favor. Both of them must during the next few years build less upon the past and more for the future.

The Republicans need particularly to prepare for the future rather than bank on the past. Their tactics during the campaign were dictated by a superseded and false view of the relation of the two parties to the task of governing the country. They have considered themselves to be the national party, ordained to rule by their superiority in ability and by the existence of a favorable popular presumption. They had been beaten in 1912 because they had allowed themselves to be divided in the face of the enemy. They could reestablish their supremacy in 1916 merely by ignoring the quarrel of the previous campaign and by formally reuniting the two wings of the party under the magic name of Republicanism. That Republicanism under such conditions ceased to have any assured meaning, that it degenerated into an incongruous medley of progressive and tory tendencies but with toryism in the saddle, that it became the cover under which a group of malign anti-national interests could attack the very substance of our national life—all these drawbacks were not allowed to count. The Republicans did not in their own opinion need to earn a victory by spending on their party program and organization any of the supposititious political ability and leadership, any of the genius for efficiency, or any of the higher constructive nationalism which they claimed for themselves and denied to their opponents. All they had to do was to nominate a candidate who was not involved in the quarrel of 1912, accuse Mr. Wilson of cowardice, inefficiency, and a lack of conviction in the conduct of the government, ignore their own inefficiency, cowardice and lack of conviction in the conduct of their party business, and leave the rest confidently to the resentments and prejudices of the American electorate.

By the use of these tactics they came near to success, but they paid for it by blunting the moral edge of Republicanism. It requires only a single instance to prove how deeply the integrity of the party was compromised by the attempt to capitalize the Republican tradition without regard to the internal controversies of recent years or the new needs and spirit of the country. Although progressive Republicanism first broke with the party organization because of its domination by special interests in the form of crass protectionism, the last few weeks of the campaign witnessed a revival of this unabashed protectionism by the national committee without a word of protest from those who are still claiming to be progressive Republicans. The policy of resting on the past rather than building for the future brought with it a reversion to type, which justifies us in characterizing the conscience of Republicanism as decidedly the worse for wear.

After a campaign of this kind success would have been the worst disaster which could have befallen the Republicans. They had done nothing to prepare themselves for its exercise. Its responsibility would have brought to the surface the profound divergence of interest and conviction, the irreconcilability of outlook and temper, the utter lack of intellectual honesty and moral integrity which lay concealed behind the hard surface of the contemporary official Republicanism. Before it is capable of governing the country it must first recover its own self-possession; and that is a work which can be performed with more benefit to the nation and with less damage to itself during a period of adversity than during a period of success. Its first and most essential task is to discover or to invent some specific meaning for Republicanism and associate with that meaning a definite program of domestic and foreign policy.

During the campaign the Republican leaders allowed President Wilson to attach in the popular mind Democracy with progressivism and Republicanism with conservatism. Are they willing to allow this line-up to stand? If so they will do well to scrutinize the intellectual and moral foundation of current American conservatism and consider what kind of an appeal such a party can make to the American electorate, and what kind of a solution it has to offer for the critical problems of the day. If not, how far are they prepared to carry progressivism and how can they reestablish themselves in the popular mind as a progressive party? Can they do it by accepting Mr. Roosevelt's leadership and by permitting him to frame their program for them? Such are the more obvious questions which will have to be asked

and answered by the Republicans in the near future. In its immediate practical aspect the problem becomes one of seeking or rejecting Mr. Roosevelt's continued coöperation. If they reject it, they are for the time being thrown back on the repudiated Republican tradition, which has corrupted their recent campaign. If they accept it, the Old Guard will have to swallow the bitter pill of publicly admitting their own political bankruptcy. They went wrong in June, 1912. They went no less wrong in June, 1916. Can they blame public opinion for asking whether they are capable of going right?

Just as the best chance of Republican recovery depends upon the ability of Republicans to make good use of the discipline of defeat, so the Democrats need and are entitled to a renewed lease of power in which to nourish the young plant of Democratic competence in government. Success will not encourage a reversion to type, a relapse to a dead partisan tradition, as it would have done in the case of the Republicans. It will oblige them to resume a work of reorganization and preparation which has been well started but which still remains a plant of tender growth. Every circumstance connected with the election combines to give to the work of reorganization increasing authority and momentum. Mr. Wilson's skilful and imaginative leadership has really been creating a new party, composed not altogether of progressive ingredients, but still deriving its chief strength from those native American communities which are most interested in the problems of domestic reconstruction. He is emancipated from any obligation to the most dubious elements in the old Democracy because the baleful Democratic machines of Indiana, Illinois and New York failed to carry their own states. His prestige with his party and the nation is enormously enhanced by the scope and nature of his victory. In every respect his hands are freer than they were four years ago, and capable of seizing and wielding more powerful weapons. He has the opportunity of moulding the Wilson Democracy, unlike the Democracy of Jefferson and Jackson, into a better reflection of the nation as a whole—into an agency of those formative social aspirations whose progressive realization helps to pull the American nation together.

Imposing, however, as is the opportunity which Mr. Wilson has made for himself, the difficulties in his path are still more imposing. An American party which wants to provide a structure for the Democracy of to-day, analogous to the structure which the Federalists provided for the semi-democracy of their day, must be prepared to deal honestly if not adequately with three critical

problems, all of which have been either ignored or shirked by the national parties of the past.

It must be prepared to emancipate the administrative departments of the government from petty distracting political interference and give to expert administration the place to which it is entitled among the indispensable agencies of a democratic social policy. It must be prepared to shed the newer-worldly provincialism of American foreign policy and to promote the participation of the United States in the burdens and risks of a working international organization. Finally it must recognize the existence of a class of wage-earners which under the prevailing economic and legal system suffers from more or less exploitation, and for whom special provision must be made in the reorganization of American society. These are the ultimate problems of a modern industrial community, and we doubt whether any party, subject to the drawbacks of the two-party system, is capable of dealing with them as drastically and as courageously as the nature of the problems demands. But there they are, omnipresent and implacable. Any party which undertakes to govern the American nation must attempt to deal with them. Possibly the Wilson Democracy will be broken by the attempt, but it will certainly be broken if the attempt is avoided. It is peculiarly Mr. Wilson's business, after the astonishing endorsement which the American people have conferred upon his leadership, to take care that the attempt is made sincerely and intelligently—to take care above all that in so far as partisan Democracy fails in the attempt the penalty of the failure is paid by the party rather than by the nation.

Deflation

LOOKING back on the great welter of words without meaning, there is one consolation in the campaign debates. Political speeches are not nearly so hard to read as they used to be, even a comparatively short time ago. Of course reading a political speech afterwards is always like visiting the wings of the theatre in the daylight, but the contrast is not quite so painful as it used to be. After all it was not so very long ago that Mr. Bryan could wind up a speech regarded as fiery at the time with a peroration, beginning, "Behold a republic resting securely upon the foundation stones quarried from the mountain of eternal truth. . . Behold a republic proclaiming to the world, etc.," and so on with eight or ten more "Behold-a-republic's," each introducing a similar phrase. And people will recall without any strain on their memories vast areas of oratory, rich, heavy, gorgeous as pur-