

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF POLITICAL PARTY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *North American Review*.

SIR: My assertion in your last number that political party, through which representative government has hitherto been worked, is apparently in a state of final disintegration, has appeared to some a hard saying. With regard to party in the United States I defer to American authorities, and I shall look forward with interest to the process by which the Democratic party is to re-organize itself and reconcile the element of Jeffersonian individualism with the socialistic element impersonated in Mr. Altgeld.

But let my critics turn their eyes to the other side of the water. In France, in Italy, in Germany, political party seems to be extinct. In its place you have a multiplicity of sections or groups, the number of which appears to be always on the increase. The consequence in France and Italy is a dangerous instability of government. In the case of France the succession of ephemeral ministries has been almost ludicrous. In Italy it has been found necessary, in order to obtain a basis for a government, to have recourse to the most unnatural coalition. If in Germany there has been comparative stability, it has been due to the personal ascendancy of Bismarck, or to the authority of the Emperor, who still retains a portion of the power derived from a dictatorship of national defence. Nor do the groups differ from each other only on particular measures. If they did, their re-organization into parties might be expected. Each, as has been remarked, has its own ideal of government, and is struggling for the ascendancy of that ideal.

In the Austrian Empire, and in Hungary as a state in itself, the divisions are national and racial rather than political. In Belgium there is a strong clerical party, to which the other elements are opposed. In Spain, government can hardly be said to have been representative, so greatly has its course been disturbed by civil war, by the violence of army chiefs, and by personal intrigue.

In Great Britain, its native seat, political party seems still to live. Yet even here its term of life appears precarious. The Unionist party, now in power, is held together, not so much by a general identity of political sentiment, as by a common fear of the dismemberment with which the country is threatened by Home Rule. Mr. Chamberlain must have turned himself inside out if, in general politics, he is at one with Lord Salisbury. On the other side of the House of Commons you have three sections, the Liberals, the Socialistic Radicals, and the Irish Home Rulers, which can hardly be said to form a party, and certainly could not maintain a united government.

Between the Liberals, whose chief was Lord Rosebery, and the Socialistic Radicals, of whom Mr. Labouchere is the most prominent, there is a visible chasm. Both these sections voted the other day against the Irish Home Rulers on the vital question of national education. On that occasion the Irish Home Rulers showed that, connected as they are with the priesthood, they can hardly be called Liberals; while of the Liberals, three-fourths, probably, in their hearts wish Home Rule at the bottom of the sea. There is nothing like the sharp bisection of political opinion which there was in the old Whig and Tory days under the early Georges, or at the period of the French Revolution.

To supply a sound and moral basis for party government you must have a clear and permanent bisection of political opinion. Without this the existence of the parties can be sustained only by a Shibboleth or by corruption.

Switzerland seems to get on with representative government and without party organization. Her method deserves study. But her politics are more cantonal than federal, and as a whole they are on too small a scale to furnish a precedent or assurance for the great nations. It can hardly be said, therefore, that by her the problem has been solved.

Let it not be supposed that when a political problem is recognized as likely to call for solution a despondent view is taken of the political situation. The intelligence requisite to furnish the solution has probably been sharpened by exercise under the party system, as well as instructed by a vast and varied experience, garnered and methodized for us by political observers. Of public spirit and aptitude for self-government there is now far more in the world than ever there was before. If we do not at present see the way, the way will surely be found. The course of history is something like the path in the Gemmi Pass, which always seems to be blocked, but still, as we approach the obstacle, opens out again. Party government had its source in the issue between the Hanoverians and the partisans of the House of Stuart, an issue momentous, indeed, yet not inexhaustible. One can hardly imagine any thoughtful man being devotedly attached to it, or despairing of our political destinies because it seems to be near its end. Yours faithfully,

GOLDWIN SMITH.

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THE SENATE AND THE TARIFF BILL.

THE Senate of the United States, proceeding with traditional and wholesome care to the perfecting of the Dingley Tariff bill, has once more aroused the impatient protest of a restless people. We hear much of "the mire of debate"; we listen to low rumblings of discontent because of slow and aggravating deliberation. These complaints have been uttered before, and their recurrence at this time is neither novel nor surprising. The swiftly moving world looks with scorn upon methods that have the misfortune to possess the flavor of the last century. It demands speed, even though thoroughness be sacrificed and though justice and right be crushed beneath the Juggernaut of unreasoning and senseless haste.

In this especial instance, however, there are other factors at work beside the impetuosity of the times. A country depressed, a nation suffering from a prolonged period of commercial inactivity, a vast army of idle workmen waiting eagerly for the resumption of industrial pursuits, a political party