

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

No. DCXXXVI.

NOVEMBER, 1908.

PARTY GOVERNMENT.

BY GOLDWIN SMITH, D.C.L.

THE general elections are coming on at once in the United States and in Canada—in both cases under pretty normal conditions, without any engrossing issue. In Canada, there is a struggle against political corruption, “graft,” as the people call it, but this is a subject on which all the world is, or professes to be, of one mind. In some quarters in Canada there is a desire to put a limit to French and Catholic headship of the State, which shows itself, as it signally did in enforcing the system of separate schools on the Northwest, an instrument of Papal domination. This also, however, may be almost regarded as a normal issue. Nor, in the case of the United States, is any division on a vital question discernible by an onlooker. Nothing of the kind certainly is deducible from the party names, one of which is Greek and the other Latin for the same thing. In Canada, the party names are “Conservative” and “Liberal”; but no one could easily tell what is now the political meaning of either. The original line of division was a survival, fast fading, of that between the United Empire Loyalists and the authors of the Revolution of 1837. The present Premier, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, went into power a decided free-trader; but it soon became pretty apparent that, to use his own phrase of the other day, he was

VOL. CLXXXVIII.—NO. 636. 41

Copyright, 1908, by THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY All Rights Reserved

holding "a heart-to-heart conference with his friends the manufacturers," one of whom expressed his wish, not long ago, to build between Canada and the United States a tariff wall as high as Haman's gallows. I once at a farmers' picnic took aside one of the company, who was evidently an intelligent man, and asked him what was the real difference between his party and the other party. After a long pause came the answer: "We say the other fellows are corrupt."

Parties, of course, there will be in all free communities as often as differences of opinion on vital questions arise, and the engrossing importance of the vital issue of the day will constrain men on both sides to suppress for the time their differences of opinion on questions of less importance. Parties in this sense there were at Athens, at Rome, in Mediæval Italy, in France, in Holland; in all countries, in fact, where political sentiment has been free. But hardly any nation except England and her political offshoots can be said to have recognized as the normal system of government the party system based on a formal and permanent division of the people into two political sections, with standing party names, in one of which every active citizen is expected to enroll himself and remain, on penalty, if he deserts, of being deemed a political apostate. Not that party is recognized in the constitutions. Washington deprecated it, and tried to nip it in the bud by putting Hamilton and Jefferson together in his Cabinet. In England, parties of the most pronounced and militant kind were formed by the struggle for political freedom against the Stuarts; though they presently broke into sections, moderate and extreme. The struggle against the Stuarts ended only with the defeat of the last Pretender at Culloden, up to which time it had continued, forming not so much an application of the party system of government as the sequel to a civil war. After that date, the parties broke up, leaving only the nicknames "Tory" and "Whig" as vague designations of tendencies, monarchical or popular, and really very much lost in the struggle of the aristocratic leaders of "Connections" who wrestled and intrigued against each other for place and pelf, while the Crown strove, with the help of some parasitic adherents, to liberate its power from the encroachments of them all; Chatham alone trying to make government national with himself as dictator.

In this political era it was that Burke wrote the well-known

paragraph which has been taken as a definition of party and a vindication of the party system:

"Party is a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed. For my part, I find it impossible to conceive that any one believes in his own politics, or thinks them to be of any weight, who refuses to adopt the means of having them reduced into practice. It is the business of the speculative philosopher to mark the proper ends of government. It is the business of the politician, who is the philosopher in action, to find out proper means toward those ends, and to employ them with effect. Therefore, every honorable connection will avow it is their first purpose, to pursue every just method to put the men who hold their opinions into such a condition as may enable them to carry their common plans into execution, with all the power and authority of the state. As this power is attached to certain situations, it is their duty to contend for these situations. Without a proscription of others, they are bound to give to their own party the preference in all things; and by no means, for private considerations, to accept any offers of power in which the whole body is not included; nor to suffer themselves to be led, or to be controlled, or to be overbalanced, in office or in council, by those who contradict the very fundamental principles on which their party is formed, and even those upon which every fair connection must stand. Such a generous contention for power, on such manly and honorable maxims, will easily be distinguished from the mean and interested struggle for place and emolument. The very style of such persons will serve to discriminate them from those numberless impostors, who have deluded the ignorant with professions incompatible with human practice, and have afterwards incensed them by practices below the level of vulgar rectitude."*

Burke, as the attentive student of his writings, much more of his course as a statesman, will presently find, while he was a consummate master of language and perhaps of political philosophy in general, was not a practical politician or trustworthy as a political teacher. Few things, indeed, more untrustworthy or more mischievous in their effect have ever been written than his essay, eloquent as it is, on the French Revolution, which took the country by storm and defeated the salutary efforts of Pitt and his colleagues to keep England clear of the raging conflagration. However, that which Burke has before his mind, called "party," is not the system of party government, as we understand and work it, but a "Connection" such as that of which his own patron, the Marquis of Rockingham, was the head,

* Burke, "Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents."

and which struggled, on one hand, against the Monarchy and the courtiers, who were striving to make the power of the Crown supreme and put all the Connections, which they stigmatized as "Party," under its feet. He looked with jealous eyes also on Chatham's national dictatorship, which would have crushed and superseded the Connections. What does he mean by a "particular principle"? He can hardly mean a general principle of political morality or expediency. A perpetual division on one of these there can hardly be. He must mean some definite question of politics, which being settled, the necessity and the justification for party must apparently end.

Pitt's sweeping victory over Fox and North was largely personal, and for the time almost annulled party. Then came the reaction against the French Revolution and a number of secessions, including that of Burke himself, from the ranks called "Whig" to the ranks called "Tory." In fact, there was a complete ascendancy of Pitt and his anti-revolutionary following, with an Opposition oratorically strong but numerically insignificant, so much so that at one time it took to the hopeless course of protesting by secession. This is hardly an illustration of party government.

The French Revolution over, the tide in England set the other way, till it reached the flood in the passing of the Reform Bill, with a train of other progressive measures. Then followed a real division into parties under the qualified names of "Conservative" and "Liberal," with a pretty equal division of forces. The idea of government by party as a system may be said perhaps now to have clearly presented itself for the first time. It presently betrayed its spirit in the intrigue which ejected from the headship of the Government Peel, incomparably our best administrator, and this at the time of the Irish Famine, when there was most need of his administrative skill. By the Protectionists, from whom he had conscientiously parted, he was everywhere fiercely branded as a traitor. The conspiracy against him was got up by a political adventurer who denied in the debate that he had ever asked Peel for office, but is now by the publication of Peel's correspondence proved to have asked for office in the most adulatory terms.

Since that time, amidst all the shufflings of the cards, temporary coalitions, and the personal rivalries connected with the

names of Palmerston, Russell, Aberdeen, Gladstone, the idea of government by party has certainly continued to prevail, and public men have felt themselves bound to respect the party tie and to apologize if they broke it. Graham suffered unjustly for his disregard of it, which was falsely ascribed to his personal ambition, though it now appears clearly to have been the dictate of his conscience. Perhaps of all those men he was worthiest to rule. The career of Gladstone, however, with its extraordinary transformations, shows that in moving times, where either ambition or conscience is strong, allegiance to party is not easily preserved. The mechanical arrangement of the House of Commons, divided into two down the middle, has probably not been without its effect in shaping the form and determining the course of English politics. It takes a moral effort to cross the House.

The system, of course, demands great repression of individual opinion, a thing evidently undesirable in any deliberative assembly. It exacts not only repression of opinion, but often active support, and sometimes even advocacy, of measures to which the voter is personally not inclined. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill gave Ireland, not only a Parliament of her own, but a delegated representation in the British Parliament, to play upon the balance of parties in it and keep it in subserviency to the game of the Irish politicians. It was hardly possible that the bulk of the Gladstone party in the House of Commons should have voted conscientiously for that Bill. Gladstone had been at first and for long the most vehement opponent of Home Rule, had thrown its leaders into prison, had denounced it as leading to the disruption of the Kingdom, had proclaimed the arrest of Parnell amidst the greatest enthusiasm to a shouting multitude at Guildhall. But the Irish members, playing their own game, had at the general election voted for his opponents; he must have seen that the Conservatives were coquetting with them, and that the party situation and his continuance in power could be saved only at the expense of the integrity of the United Kingdom. He may have reckoned on the Lords to throw out the Bill, and felt sure that they would be supported by the country. So, unquestionably, did not a few of his supporters. But Home Rule, though thrown out by an overwhelming majority in the Lords, was not killed and the integrity of the United Kingdom is in jeopardy at this hour.

In British Canada, the first political parties were formed in the struggle for political power and pelf between the Family Compact—that is, the group of families representing the exiles of the American Revolution, who were naturally strong Tories, and the later comers. In French Canada, now Quebec, the parties were formed by the struggle for power and pelf between the oligarchy of British invaders and the French-Canadian population. The connection between the two risings, that in British and that in French Canada, was only sympathetic at the time and soon gave place to the antagonism of race. Both risings failed in the field, but the political objects of both were practically secured to them by the ascendancy of the Liberal Party in England consequent on the carrying of the Reform Bill. The expectation of Lord Durham that the French Province would be Anglicized was totally belied. The French Province remains largely a separate element in Canadian politics, the more so because it is under the temporal power of the Papacy, displayed the other day in forcing, by the hand of a Roman Catholic Premier, the system of Separate Schools in the Papal interest on the Northwest. The result was a series of shifting combinations and intrigues. In the end, there was a deadlock, neither party being able to secure a majority. Out of the deadlock an escape was sought in a confederation of the British North American colonies; with success so far as putting an end to the paralyzing balance between Upper and Lower Canada was concerned, though another difficulty was raised by geographical position, the line of Provinces stretching across the continent with wide intervals between them being unpropitious to perfect union. We in Canada have just had going on a party struggle for place, angry enough. What the parties to it were it would not have been easy to say. The party in power styled itself Liberal, while its rival styled itself Conservative. The party which styled itself Liberal before it got power was for free trade and reform of the Senate; both in the most pronounced and fervent way. But it had wriggled out of both those professions; while it was difficult to say what constituted the other party conservative, and its protectionism, though no doubt sincere, had for the time been rather hid under a bushel. Special interests and personalities really played the chief part. There was a strong popular feeling against corruption, but this is not a party

cry nor is its organ the local association or the caucus. The battle will be decided by the time this paper appears. The caucus, Parliamentary and local, morally rules. When an honest and independent member of Parliament rebels, the two local bosses combine to throw him out of his seat, and the head of the party approves what they have done.

In the United States, a foundation, only too natural and sure, for party was found in slavery, which from the outset, in fact, made the States styled "united" morally two nationalities in uneasy union. The rupture was sure to come. By some friends of the North in England it was felt to be so inevitable that they at first hung back; though, when the war was actually on foot, they could not hesitate in taking their side and doing all in their power to counteract the efforts of the aristocratic or ultramercantile sections which sympathized with the South. It is curious to trace the sequences of events in history, such as that which was brought to our notice the other day by the celebration of the British conquest of Quebec. Quebec was taken by the British to relieve New England of the fear of France. It did relieve New England of the fear of France; and, at the same time, as shrewd observers foresaw, of the fear of the British Government. The colonial war ensued. Into that war France rushed for revenge. Her financial difficulty, which before, though great, had not been past remedy by a Colbert or a Turgot, was thereby brought to a crisis, and the Government was thereby compelled to call the States General, thereby bringing on the Revolution. Nor does the chain of traceable causation end here. In England, the movement in favor of the abolition of slavery had been set on foot, with the young Pitt and Wilberforce among its coming champions, and with a moral certainty of success, which would have been earlier achieved but for the recoil from the French Revolution. The colonies, apparently, had they stayed a little longer with the Mother Country, would have shared emancipation. Blessed are the peace-makers, more blessed sometimes even than they may think.

The anti-slavery and negrophilist leaders in the United States, Charles Sumner especially, were impetuous, and their passions had been kindled by the war. They might otherwise have refrained from investing the negro at once with political power, to the use of which he was absolutely a stranger, and thus bringing

on Carpet-bagging, the Ku Klux, and in some measure this unhappy and ominous state of things. I conversed some time ago in the South with a very intelligent negro, the keeper of a lighthouse. He avowed his belief that his race would have been contented with a grant of personal freedom and equal justice, and would have at all events waited patiently for political power.

The issue is difficult to foresee. It is difficult to believe that these periodical affrays, in the midst of one of which this is written, with all their trickery, mutual abuse and corruption, are destined forever to be the mode of framing the Government and securing loyalty to it when it is framed. The incongruity will be the more manifest and noxious if the Church should lose its hold and the importance and sacredness of the State should thereby increase.

The United States are being filled with aliens to whom American institutions and ideas are strange, while the native race is not prolific. Public schools may improve the intelligence, but they cannot at once change the character. In the womb of the future there may be forming forces which by sheer necessity will compel you to put government above party.

A force, in fact, in England at least, is visibly forming which must apparently be fatal to the system. When it was a question between the Stuarts and Hanoverians—that is, between despotism and a free constitution—to preserve party unanimity and discipline was not so difficult. But those days are not ours. In England, the House of Commons is still divided down the middle in conformity with the party hypothesis; but on both sets of benches there is diversity of opinion; on the Liberal side not only diversity, but positive contradiction. The party called “Liberal,” on which the present Government rests, is made up, in fact, of five sections with wide differences of opinion and object; Liberals, Radicals, Labor men, Socialists and Home-Rulers. The Labor men and Socialists have to be kept on terms with a very moderate Liberal such as Sir Edward Grey. The Opposition meanwhile plays its appointed part by doing all that it can to embarrass the Government. The consequence is that an extreme section of the other side can, by playing on the balance of party, control the action of the Government and thereby force its own policy. England is now in danger from this source. I learn on the best authority that the Home Rule question is on the eve of settle-

ment. Pressed by the Home Rule party on the weakness of the Government it can hardly fail to be a settlement dangerous to the unity of the nation.

Opinion, political and social, is increasingly active. New sects, female suffragism among them, are being formed and presenting themselves in the political arena. With these the two regular parties will have to reckon. A curious tessellation of objects and creeds is likely to result. The difficulty will hardly be met by dividing the House into two sets of benches with a gangway between them.

Not only in England but in the United States this process of disintegration of party by the formation of sectional combinations appears to be going on. The Temperance party, the Labor party, and the Female Suffrage party, seem to be forming in force outside the regular parties of Republicans and Democrats; they will probably soon learn the trick of playing on the balance. When they do, and thus acquire a power of passing minority measures as the Irish party, and, it may probably be said also, the Old-age Pensions party, has been doing in England, it will apparently become time for American statesmen to set their wits to work on the creation of something to come in the place of party government.

GOLDWIN SMITH.

THE WOMAN MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND.

BY THE REV. CHARLES F. AKED, D.D.

THREE years ago, Great Britain was startled by the appearance on the political horizon of a new army of men bent on shifting the ground of battle. Thirty Members were returned to Parliament independently of the old political parties, breathing out threatenings and slaughter indeed against them both. Up to the hour of their appearance, Liberals and Tories had held undisputed possession of the field; undisputed, that is, save for the terrible Irish with their hands against every hand that grasps power in the realm. In the presence of this new force, men and editors stood aghast. The country breathed heavily as it looked upon so strange an evidence of the awakening of democracy, grew first alarmed, then fretful, and finally settled down to face the inevitable—the task of satisfying the demands of an aroused people whose banner-bearers these thirty were. Timorous souls the world over, asking what these things might portend, whispered the fateful word “Revolution!” And timorous souls were so far right that the legislative enactments of the last three years, not to speak of proposals which are still in the air, do unquestionably indicate that a revolution is in progress in Great Britain, a change radical and complete in the national point of view.

Side by side with this remarkable emergence of the dumb, inarticulate masses of the people into independent and aggressive political action has proceeded another movement, in some respects more remarkable still. It is the movement for the political emancipation of women. The juxtaposition of the two and their contemporary progress must not be regarded as a mere coincidence. Historically the workman and the woman have been alike the objects of exploitation. But the case of the woman has been worse than that of the man. The charge which Professor Thorold