

ARTICLE II.

THE RENAISSANCE OF DEMOCRACY.

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WE are living in an era of great political instability; our political pyramid is standing on its apex. Old traditional party alignments and affiliations are no longer looked upon as something sacred; the party fetich is losing its authority. Old watchwords and rallying cries have lost their potency and charm for the mass of the common people. The crack of the party whip no longer inspires terror among the rank and file of the great parties. A man is no longer a Republican or a Democrat merely because his father cast a ballot for Lincoln, or his grandfather one for Jackson. Many of us no longer vote as we did four years ago. It is even not in good form for the *good* citizen to vote a straight ticket. The "insurgent" and the independent are becoming conspicuous because of their numbers. The two old parties are in a condition of unstable equilibrium; two natures are struggling within each of them. Behind the scenes, more or less hidden from the public gaze, two factions may be found fighting desperately for control: one is a progressive wing with a positive program, the other is labeled "Stand pat" and "Let well enough alone." What is the true significance of this political phenomenon? Much has been surmised and put into print; but no one has pointed out the lesson of an earlier period in our own national history.

The maxim that history repeats itself is at least partially true. Parties and principles when young and ardent stand

for change and for destructive forces and tendencies; they loudly proclaim that it is their purpose to tear down the existing political edifice, to modify existing conditions, and to rectify injustice. High ideals are found in every plank in their political platform. After the new aggressive and progressive party with its new and inspiring watchwords seizes the reins of government firmly in its hands, it stands firmly and manfully for constructive statesmanship; but, sooner or later, the voice of history tells us, the exercise of power and authority and the tempting taste of the spoils of office transform gradually and subtly this bold party of progress and political radicalism into one of inaction and of content with past achievements; in short, it becomes the "Let-well-enough-alone" party. The function of protest, which should never be allowed to atrophy, now devolves upon others. Power—the control of men and of wealth—leads inevitably and invariably to conservatism, and finally to stagnation. The warm, attractive glow of lofty ideals and noble ambitions is dissipated; and in its stead creeps in the dull and deadening fear of the party lash or the enervating longing for political spoils and privileges. This picture is true to life whether we look at ancient Greece and Rome, or to modern England, France, and America. It is in faithful obedience to a law of human nature. History monotonously repeats the story, over and over, with various minor and inconsequential variations. Destructive radicalism, constructive statesmanship, obstructive conservatism, leading to final and inevitable defeat,—such is short, simple, sad, but often repeated, life history of political parties and followings.

•The United States, unfortunately, is no unique and solitary exception to this historical rule. Federalism, strongly radical in its infancy, brings to successful issue the War of the Revolution, comes to power and builds the strong edifice of a new

national government; but Federalism became conservative and fell with John Quincy Adams. It was overwhelmed and destroyed by the rising tide of a new democracy, headed by a military leader and frontiersman,—Andrew Jackson. This democracy of the Middle Period of our history was diverted into new channels, and its energy wasted, by the appearance of the slavery question; it reappeared at the time of the Civil War as the republicanism of Abraham Lincoln. The democracy of the Middle Period was at its height under Jackson; the slavery trouble and the Civil War disarranged the orderly progress of party growth, manhood, and decay. At the end of the war the Republican party was at its zenith as the party of progress and of constructive statesmanship.

For twoscore years, after Appomattox, the Democratic party was a party of negation; it had no positive program around which its faithful followers could rally. This party was content to write as its platform, "We are opposed to the policies of the Republican party." Only within the last half-dozen years, under the leadership of such men as Bryan, Folk, Hearst, and Johnson, has one element within the party held aloft a possible program. But, at the same time, a new positive progressive republicanism appeared, headed by Roosevelt. A striking parallel may be drawn between the forces and conditions which caused the political upheaval of 1828, and those which are acting to-day. The story of the downfall of Federalism and the victory of the West has its lesson for us in the present epoch of unrest and transition. The forces of that earlier day, clothed in a new and unrecognized garb, are acting constantly, but unobtrusively. We are on the threshold of a renaissance of American democracy.

The independence of the United States was formally recognized in 1783. Forty-five years later, in 1828, Jackson

was elected President. Immediately following 1783 came a period of uncertainty, which ended in the adoption of the Constitution. From 1865 to 1910 will be forty-five years; and after 1865 came the period of reconstruction—another critical period in our history. The War of 1812 is paralleled by the Spanish-American War; from 1815 to 1828 was thirteen years, and from 1898 to 1910 will be twelve years. Forty-five years after the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain, the federalism of Washington and Hamilton became a reactionary force, and was shattered by Jackson. The republicanism of Lincoln has now become the “stand-pattism” of a coterie of Republican senators. Will it be defeated by the forces of a new democracy; or, will the latter be overshadowed and thrust aside by national imperialism, as was Jacksonian democracy by the all-absorbing slavery question?

In 1824, there were four important candidates in the field,—Clay, Adams, Crawford, and Jackson. In 1904, each of the two great parties was split into two factions, conservative and progressive. Roosevelt was the candidate of the progressive wing of the Republican party, and the other element was obliged to indorse him. Bryan, as the leader of the radical wing of the Democratic party, was defeated by the negative elements within the party. Parker, the nominee, stood for nothing constructive; he upheld the traditional or obsolete dogmas of his party, such as free trade and opposition to centralization of political authority. Bryan was the real representative of the democratic element within the Democratic party.

Two or three other striking features may be chosen to point more clearly to a renaissance of democracy. It may be well to first call attention to the recent marked revival of interest in Andrew Jackson, his life, ideals, and achievements. In the

latter part of the twenties and the early portion of the thirties of the nineteenth century, such radical reformers as Robert Dale Owen, Frances Wright, George H. Evans, and Thomas Skidmore advocated the feeding and clothing of school children at public expense. These enthusiasts demanded a communistic school as opposed to the familiar day school. To-day, the public is rapidly growing accustomed to demands for feeding, at school, the children of our large cities. But two recent demands go further, and almost paraphrase the utterances of Owen and his followers. In August, 1906, the socialist party of a Kansas county put a plank in their platform demanding a uniform for all public-school children, and free meals as well. This plank is clearly and unmistakably a recrudescence of the principles of R. D. Owen; and the same may be said of a proposal made by Mr. Willard French in a recent magazine article.

The above comparisons are based on mere external characteristics. Are there more vital and essential similarities between the period immediately preceding the election of Jackson, and the present? The democracy of Andrew Jackson was political; it demanded, in no uncertain tones, political equality and universal education; that of to-day stands for the abolition of special privileges, and for social control over natural resources and public rights of way. Jacksonian democracy was a reaction against the trained leadership of New England and Virginia; that of the present against the long line of representatives of the monied interests. The former was opposed to banks and against the monopoly of political power in the hands of trained leaders; the latter is against trust and corporate interference in the affairs of government. The former was opposed to the political control by learning and wealth; the latter is fighting the servants of powerful

corporations whose strength has been nourished by political action or inaction, as the case may be. The earlier struggle was chiefly West against East, although the labor vote was no inconsiderable factor; the present fight finds the workingmen and the small farmer arrayed against the great corporations and the railroads. The first movement was distinctly individualistic, and was opposed to trained leadership: the second is unmistakably in favor of administration by the expert, and of an extension of the functions of the national and municipal governments.

The Jacksonian ideal of democracy is found in extreme decentralization of authority, and the maxim, "To the victors belong the spoils": the present movement favors civil service, government by experts, municipal ownership of public utilities, and government control of railroads and of large corporations doing interstate business. At present there is a distinct reaction against government by retained lawyers and by business men connected with large corporations. The latter-day Federalists held the Democrats of that day in very low esteem, and were utterly unable to gauge the trend and depth of public sentiment: likewise to-day the conservative leaders and financial dictators are heedlessly and proudly pressing on toward their own discomfiture. They are unable to read the signs of the time; but they must bow before the storm, or suffer the consequences, as did the Federalists. Jacksonian democracy began with the dominance of the frontier. With the disappearance of the frontier a new democracy rises above the political horizon,—the democracy of the wage-earner and of the farmer. Jackson typified one: Theodore Roosevelt and W. J. Bryan are to-day the most prominent representatives of the new democracy.

A coalescence of the Roosevelt wing of the Republican

party and the Bryan wing of the Democratic party spells victory, and a new order of things. Only the fiction of now meaningless party names, or a diversion toward imperialistic policies, can prevent this fusion. Roosevelt and Bryan are not far apart to-day,—only the traditions of the past keep them apart,—but the independent voters are a legion. To the independent belongs the future, provided home affairs are not overshadowed by foreign complications; and the real issues hidden by the cry of patriotism.

During the decade of the thirties, the early labor movement assumed considerable proportions, and became a factor in politics in New York and in other large cities. Likewise to-day the masses of laboring men are becoming aroused to the value of the political power which they might wield. In England, for the first time in her history, a labor leader, John Burns, has entered the Cabinet; and in the last election the labor vote played an important rôle. In this country, such a conservative and influential labor leader as John Mitchell is pointing approvingly to England, and is advising the American wage-workers to follow the example of their English brethren. Social and economic conditions were unfavorable for the early labor party; social conditions were too mobile, and the West was a magnet which attracted the discontented. But to-day, the situation is modified, despite the assertion of some eminent men who are, unfortunately, blinded as to the true situation. The laboring people are about to become important factors in the political arena.

In that early period of unrest and fluxion many ephemeral movements, parties, and creeds came to the surface of the political cauldron; as, for example, Anti-Masonry, transcendentalism, temperance movements, Milleritism, etc. To-day, we are familiar with Christian Science, women's clubs,

crusades against the cigarette, attacks on the lobbyist, and the like. The early communistic movement finds its more modern and scientific counterpart in the socialistic propaganda and party of to-day. The "yellow" journals of the present era are the successors of the communistic and labor papers of the earlier period. A progressive age, an epoch when the new is grappling in a death-struggle with the old, is ever prolific of peculiar and fantastic movements, creeds, and parties, which soon die out, but leave some lasting imprint upon the dominant characteristics of the time. The present era in the United States is no exception to this rule.

The apparent wide differences between the basic principles of Jacksonian democracy and the new democracy may be explained by reference to conditions which obtained during the two epochs. A frontier with a wealth of undeveloped and unappropriated resources calls for non-interference by governments. To-day the frontier is a story of the past. Unhindered by governmental interference, the man possessing economic strength is able to overpower and "hold up" the weaker men. The new democracy voices a demand for emancipation from the yoke of the monied interests. It asks, as did the earlier democracy, for a "fair field and no favorites"; it aims to do away with artificial and unnatural privileges. At bottom, both old and new democracies are protests against special privileges; but changed circumstances have modified the tenor of their demands. Then the trained politician was the object of distrust: now the business man and the lawyer in politics are feared. Then the masses called for universal suffrage: now for the referendum and the recall. The outward appearance has changed; but in reality both are phases of the same movement. The present is a recrudescence of the Jacksonian upheaval. Jacksonian democracy was the child of the

frontier and of the growing cities; the new democracy derives its strength from the conditions which have arisen because of the disappearance of the frontier, and the centralization of industry.

The recent trend toward expert authority and the civil service is based upon a recognition of the failure of extreme democracy, or rather of liberalism, of the Jacksonian type when applied to affairs not intimately related to the life and experience of the people. The electorate now desires only to initiate general movements or measures, leaving the details to specialists, but not to politicians. It is generally realized that delegation to the latter has failed hopelessly. In the future, delegation of authority will relate to details rather than to general policies which affect interests which are near to the life and experience of the people. In foreign affairs, and in regard to those matters which are remote from the experience and ken of the mass of the people, more authority will necessarily be given the law-makers and administrative authorities. But, with regard to municipal affairs and governmental control or ownership of railroads, the insurance business, large corporations, mining companies, and the like, the general outlines of the policy to be pursued will, if we may judge by the present trend of events, be determined by public opinion prior to action by the men who are supposed to represent the people. In foreign affairs, undoubtedly, sanction must continue to be subsequent to action.

Political evolution is flowing in two distinct channels at the present time: the national government is gradually acquiring greater control over interstate commerce; and the local and municipal governments are acquiring more power and greater independence of action. The new democracy will reduce the opportunity for misrepresentation by binding the men in

authority to certain definite lines of general policy. It will be only a question of a few years, if public opinion can be aroused, until a representative, a senator, or a city alderman, elected to further certain measures, will feel himself bound to vote for such measures, as does the presidential elector feel that it is his duty and privilege to register the will of the people as registered at the polls. Political action is not purely arbitrary and eccentric; the hidden sources lie in the industrial and social development of a people. The political prophet must study the trend of industrial evolution, the changing methods of business management, and the extension of markets. The telegraph, the railroad, the refrigerator car, and the modern trust company, are influential in molding our political and ethical ideals.