

Principles of Political Parties.

In a popular government, parties are a necessity. To demonstrate this fact we need only imagine an election where there were no parties to place in nomination tickets representing certain ideas and principles. Imagine each citizen going to the polls and casting his ballot for his individual choice for the office of president. Imagine, if you can, the endless confusion that would result from such an election, if indeed you can think that an election would be possible in such a manner in this vast republic. Only in a few exceptional cases would a man thus chosen represent the choice or the principles of the majority. Indeed, he could hardly be said to represent any principles. But in governments, principles should rule and not men. So long as a man is trustworthy and performs the duties of his office faithfully, he is and should be a secondary consideration.

Compare with this the party system in its purity—not as men have corrupted it—

by which a few candidates representing definite formulated principles are placed before the people for their rejection or approval. A man so chosen may reasonably be expected to do his best to put into practice the principles upon which he was elected.

Parties are founded on principles. They represent ideas and plans of government. In all nature we recognize two great forces, one tending to produce change, the other resisting this tendency. In inanimate things, in brute creation, in human society these forces are always present and always active. They give us the division of men into the two great parties, radicals and conservatives. Look at the history of men since the beginning of the world. Is it not simply the record of the struggle between these two ideas?

"The conflict has ever been between the ideas of strong central government and local self-government." We find through all history, one class of men advocating the giving of more power to the

ruler and the other striving to limit
 his power. When one is dominant, it
 tends toward despotism, when the other,
 toward anarchy. So there has been and
 is now a struggle to maintain an
 equilibrium between these ideas. All
 ancient history tells of the struggle of
 the one class to free themselves from the
 tyranny of their rulers. The democracy of
 Greece will ever stand as a monument
 to the first success of the principle of local self-
 government. But the radical spirit of man
 was not satisfied with this meager triumph,
 and Rome was called into existence. Again
 the strife is waged. Now, the one principle
 is dominant, now the other. Rome falls,
 but still the struggle goes on. Yes, even now
 the sounds of battle are heard in Austria,
 in Germany, in Russia. In our own land
 it began with the colonization of America,
 and the two resulting parties have "divided up-
 on the interpretation of the constitution, and passed
 down the century in unbroken parallel
 lines." Different names have been given
 them but they have never lost their funda-
 mental ideas. Always one has been the

advocate of a strong central government and the liberal constructionist of the constitution, the other has asked for states' rights and has been the strict constructionist of our fundamental law. It was thus at the adoption of the constitution; thus at Gettysburg and Appomattox; thus in the halls of congress in the debates upon states' rights, upon nullification, upon internal improvements, upon tariff legislation, upon the subject of national control of elections. There has ever been first a tendency toward centralization, and then the reaction with a movement toward strong state governments.

While these two ideas have been in mighty conflict dogmas, yet hundreds of minor parties have come into existence, sometimes springing up like the mushroom in a single night, and how many of them at the evening have "folded their tents like the Arabs," and as silently stolen away!" They fail because they are founded on narrow interests and narrow principles. Narrow a principle and the number of adherents to that principle is correspondingly decreased;

broaden the principle and it is correspondingly increased. Almost without exception, third parties have been built up on one idea, and their leaders have pushed that one idea to the front to the exclusion of all others. They forget its relations to the other great problems of human society and thus get a distorted view of all. So, their ideas, in a majority of cases, presuppose an ideal state of human society as a necessary pedestal on which to raise their supporters to lofty eminence.

Point me to one great act accomplished through the medium of a third party. How often, instead of accomplishing their purpose, they have, by diverting the strength of their supporters, been the means of defeating their own aims. The Abolitionist party did not abolish slavery. The Liberals, the Free Soilers, the Green-backers all sleep the sleep of the just, and not one of them has accomplished its object. Has the Prohibition party given us any of the temperance measures of our land? On the contrary, has it not acted to retard the cause of temperance wherever it has been

in existence? All reforms have come through the medium of one or the other of the two great parties, and, judging from the lessons of man's great teacher, history, and the dictates of reason, I say that all reforms must come through them. Until a question becomes of interest enough to arouse the public opinion, it can be of little importance. Because public opinion is back of every reform, actuating every movement of society, and placing every law on the statute books. It is a sentiment that rests, not upon party or creed, but upon one's own perception of right and wrong. A law is useless without it. A government cannot long exist without a living public sentiment sustaining it.

Behind all the confusion and turmoil of an American election, behind the numerous party organizations, there is a fixed law governing their action. Two great parties there will always be, while the third parties will only be like the ripples on the surface of the placid ocean. Underneath, the current of history will ever move on

in might and majesty, directed by one of the two great forces — conservatism or radicalism. Then let us unite ourselves with a party, and by the union of our interests and the united efforts of our combined strength strive to turn the course of government into the direction which we believe to be right. Then shall our government move on toward the ideal government under the guidance of one of the greatest of American institutions — the party system.

— D. L. McDowell.