

## AN ETHICAL VIEW OF AMERICAN POLITICS.

Localism and Nationalism.

## NO. II.

The federal constitution is a grant of power to the federal government, and it is generally conceded that powers not expressly granted or implied therein are reserved to the states, as independent sovereignties, so far as such powers are concerned; consequently the party contending for local power or state rights has, necessarily, fought for the strictest possible construction of the constitution, while the opposing or nationalist party has generally favored a loose or at least more liberal construction of the constitutional grants.

A clear alignment of the parties upon these, or any other lines, is not at all times possible, for the reason that political parties are notoriously inconsistent; various measures are often favored or opposed purely as a question of political expediency; hence we frequently find the localist party contending for nationalist measures while the nationalist party, at the same time, may be fighting for localist ideas.

Notable instances of party inconsistency abound in all political history; among them might be mentioned the Louisiana purchase accomplished during the Jefferson administration. Jefferson was the foremost champion of state's rights; he believed "that the states are independent as to everything within themselves, and united as to everything respecting foreign nations." He did not believe that the federal government had power to acquire foreign territory by purchase or otherwise, and when the purchase had been consummated he wrote "Whatever Congress shall think it necessary to do, should be done with as little debate as possible, and particularly so far as respects the constitutional difficulty."

The necessities of the war of 1812 compelled the localist party, in power at the time, to adopt many loose construction or nationalist measures, and the nationalist or as it was known, federalist party, having no other issues distinct from the localist, opposed the war, and it was the unpopularity of this opposition that disrupted the party. The cardinal principle of the nationalists—the preservation of the federal government, had finally been adopted by the localists, while they had agreed to a proper limitation of the federal power. In 1815 localist newspapers even went so far as to publish Hamilton's argument in favor of a national bank with approval.

There can be no mistaking the fact that in the evolution of our political customs and institutions, certain principles are sure to triumph over any and all parties. Contrary to the ideas entertained by some politicians, it is not the party that makes an issue and wins a contest; but the principles of which the party is merely the exponent; temporary successes may be due to other causes, but the law of the "survival of the fittest" in the long run dominates all battles waged for political principles.

A new party coming into power can never hope for a long lease of life by opposing, for party reasons, all that the opposition has accomplished, pernicious, or not; nor can it secure the confidence of the people by exploiting measures at variance with the political development of the constitution, or the constitutional development of sound politics. Such measures may sound well on the stump but they have always acted as a boomerang upon the party and the leaders proposing them.

The localist idea has found expression in efforts of surprising frequency to limit the federal power. The first conspicuous instance resulted in the location of the nation's capital on the Potomac as a sop to secure the necessary votes to authorize the government to assume and pay the debts incurred by the colonies in carrying on the revolution.

Guaranties of the states, under the articles of confederation, had proven to be worthless, and no one will now dispute the wisdom of the assumption of those debts; but so great was the localist feeling that the measure could only secure the necessary votes as a return for the location of the capital.

The Kentucky resolutions drafted by Thomas Jefferson during Adams' administration were almost revolutionary in character, and served as authority for the secession doctrines of the eastern states,

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and for nullification proceedings in South Carolina; and yet when Jefferson's political opponents were talking secession he wrote in June 1798: "If on a temporary superiority of one of the parties, the other is to resort to a secession of the union, no federal government can ever exist."

In 1832 John C. Calhoun, the great champion of state sovereignty, claimed that the states in their sovereign capacity had the right to pass upon the constitutionality of an act of the federal government, "as far as its citizens are concerned, to declare the extent of the obligation," or to declare it "void and of no effect." (See letter to Gov. Hamilton Aug. 28, 1832.)

In the early days of steamboat travel New York state granted the exclusive right to navigate the Hudson river between New York city and Troy with steamboats to Livingston and Fulton. Nevada has attempted to tax every passenger traveling across the state; California imposed a stamp tax upon all steamship passage tickets sold at San Francisco; Maryland required all dealers in foreign merchandise to take out a license and many of the Mississippi river states have imposed burdensome regulations upon the river steamers, which by their variety tended to restrict commerce between the states.

It is, of course, needless to state that all of these attempted regulations have been declared unconstitutional by the federal courts, and the commerce and trade of the states have reached an unprecedented development under the protection of the general government.

It is the innate selfishness of human nature that has prompted most of the unsuccessful attempts of the localists to make the interests of particular communities paramount to those of the nation, to get some selfish advantage over a neighboring community, or to refuse to surrender some imagined right when for the national good.

The nationalists have at times undoubtedly exceeded the proper limits of their usefulness; the alien and sedition laws, the threatened secession of New England in 1808, the odious bank of the United States, some of the measures incidental to the reconstruction period and the "force bill," are instances; and it is probable that party greed would have led to even greater excesses were it not for the restraining influence of the localists.

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