

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE.

PART I.

[A paper read before "The Philosophical Society," of Denver, Feb. 14, 1901, by Louis R. Ehrlich, of Colorado Springs, Colo.]

Representative government must, of necessity, give birth to political parties. The very differences of human temperament will produce different phases of public opinion. So soon, therefore, as a people are free to think and to act, political parties spring into existence.

The overwhelming debt of loyalty and of gratitude which the American people owed to Washington for his noble and self-sacrificing leadership in our struggle for independence resulted in making his election and re-election to the presidency wholly free from opposition and from any manifestation of party spirit. Before the expiration of his second term, however, opposition began to manifest itself, which would undoubtedly have crystalized into the clash of party spirit if Washington had followed the wishes of his friends who urged him to stand for a third term. It is this, no doubt, which explains Washington's allusion to party-spirit in his "farewell address." The subsequent rapid development of party is clearly shown by the fact that at the third presidential election, John Adams, representing the federalists, received seventy-one, and Jefferson, as the candidate of the republicans or anti-federalists, received sixty-nine electoral votes.

The fourth election, which resulted in the triumph of Jefferson, was characterized by intense acrimony and personal abuse. To this Mr. Jefferson alludes in his inaugural address, saying:

"During the contest of opinion through which we have passed, the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and write what they think."

After the year 1800, however, and continuing for a quarter of a century, the conflict of parties grew weaker and weaker. The natural and mutual resentment caused by our forcible separation from the mother country, the attraction to France from motives of gratitude for help in our hour of distress alternating with the repulsion caused in many American minds by the excesses of the French revolution, our armed collision with England in 1812, the gigantic Napoleonic wars, — all these potent foreign influences formed greater subjects of political difference and debate than any questions of internal administration. Consequently, the downfall of Napoleon affected American as well as European politics in introducing an era of peace. The year after Waterloo, Monroe was elected by 183 out of 217 electoral votes.

The subsidence of political party feeling can best be illustrated by the follow-

ing interesting advice given to Monroe by Andrew Jackson:

"Now is the time to exterminate that monster called party spirit. By selecting (for cabinet officers) characters most conspicuous for their probity, virtue, capacity and firmness, without regard to party, you will go far to, if not entirely, eradicate those feelings which, on former occasions, threw so many obstacles in the way of government. The chief magistrate of a great and powerful nation should never indulge in party feelings. His condition should be liberal and disinterested; always bearing in mind that he acts for the whole and not a part of the community."

Four years later all party spirit seemed indeed to have departed. Monroe was not opposed by any presidential candidate, receiving every electoral vote but one. Although the "so-called era of good feeling" vanished with the close of Monroe's second administration, nevertheless, the following extract from the inaugural address of his successor, John Quincy Adams, shows a continuing moderation of political temper. He says:

"Ten years of peace, at home and abroad, have assuaged the animosities of political contention, and blended into harmony the most discordant elements of public opinion. There still remains one effort of magnanimity, one sacrifice of prejudice and passion, to be made by individuals throughout the nation who have heretofore followed the standards of political party. It is that of discarding every remnant of rancor against each other, of embracing as countrymen and friends, and of yielding to talents and virtue alone that confidence which in time of contention for principle was bestowed only upon those who wore the badge of party communion."

The election of Andrew Jackson as president was a great turning point in the organization of our political parties and in the character of our political contests. Eight years before, thirty-two years after the inauguration of our presidential form of government, party-opposition, as we have noted, had entirely disappeared. Ever since the election of President Jackson such a condition of political harmony has not only been non-existent, but it has become utterly inconceivable. Whence has arisen this remarkable and unfortunate change? The explanation is simple. During the first forty years of our national life, covering ten presidential elections, the total number of removals from political office was only seventy-four. Of these, the removals under Jefferson were thirty-nine. Consequently, the total number of changes in office under Washington, Adams, Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams were only thirty-five, and of these thirteen were for defalcation or for reasons non-political. This honorable method of political procedure had in fact become so fixed that, under the administration

of John Quincy Adams, there had been only two removals, and these had been for reasons wholly independent of political differences. Until 1828 the only standards which had prevailed with reference to an office-holder or a candidate were, as expressed by Jefferson: "Is he honest? Is he capable? Is he faithful to the constitution?" In the first year of his administration, Jackson, who had given such admirable advice on the subject to Monroe only twelve years before, made about two thousand changes in the political offices. In other words, in one year he made nearly thirty times as many removals as all his predecessors in office combined had made in forty years. It was during Jackson's first administration that Mr. Marcy made the memorable declaration in the senate:

"The New York politicians, when contending for victory, avow the intention of enjoying the fruits of it. They see nothing wrong in the rule that to the victors belong the spoils of the enemy."

Another circumstance which is significant as showing the close relation between "the spoils system" of politics and tense party-organization, is the fact that the close of Jackson's first term witnessed the introduction of national conventions for nominating purposes. In those days travelling was slow expensive and inconvenient. Up to 1832, so long as the election of a candidate signified the supremacy of a principle, the nominations for the presidency had been made either by congressional caucus or by the state legislatures. As soon as it was realized that the election of a president meant for many people the possibility of the obtainment of political office, party organization at once became more fully perfected, party spirit more intense, and the rather loose and flexible party relations more highly developed into a carefully oiled party-machine.

Another interesting and pertinent fact as bearing on the same conclusion, and also as indicating that for many years the presidential choice of our nation lay rather between men than between clearly defined party principles, is that from 1788 to 1832 there were only three expressions of political principles which could in any degree be regarded as national platforms. It is evident, therefore, that the political zeal and frenzy with which we are so disagreeably acquainted, took their birth simultaneously with the introduction of the theory and the practice of making a presidential campaign a huge battle for thousands of political jobs. That the party machine first began to be organized during the administration of the president who introduced "the spoils system" cannot but suggest the intimate relation of cause and effect. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that in countries in which the civil service is permanent,