

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE.**PART II.**

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

As illustrative of this class, I remind you of the banquet which was given in Denver by eminent Colorado republicans a few days ago. It was a gathering of worthy gentlemen, gifted with ability and brains, and possessed of standing and influence. They were citizens who are linked to the state with ties of interest and of loyalty. It might fairly be supposed that such a body of citizens would employ the opportunity of their gathering to discuss some of the many public questions which have an immediate bearing on the welfare of this state. Nothing was apparently further from their thoughts. After the chairman had toasted "the greatest statesman of the age—William McKinley," the toastmaster took the floor, and, in the course of his address, he struck the keynote of the banquet in saying: "We are against the democratic party. We are for the republican party." This noble sentiment is certainly clear-cut and very illuminating.

Night before last several hundred republicans gathered in this city to commemorate the birth of Abraham Lincoln. A telegram was read, signed by three distinguished republican senators. One might suppose that the memory of a great man would inspire great thoughts. I read to you the thrilling sentiments expressed by these eminent American statesmen:

"Washington, D. C., Feb. 12, 1901.

Hon. C. D. Ford:

We regret extremely that we cannot attend the banquet of your club on Lincoln's birthday, as public duties require our presence here. We congratulate you on the splendid contest for republican principles which was carried on in Colorado last fall, and we feel certain that you will continue the struggle until your state again returns to the republican fold.

J. B. FORAKER.

WILLIAM P. FRYE,
M. A. HANNA."

The tone and purpose of these political banquets lead me to speak of a very great defect in our national system, namely, the absorption of state issues by national issues. Ever since the formation of our government there has been the most jealous defense of state rights against Federal encroachment, and yet, under the influence of party machinery, every state in the union has been robbed of its highest political right, the right to devote its uninfluenced political energies to the solution of its own state and municipal problems. Why should our differing opinions on the tariff or on the Philippine question control our votes when we select men to

legislate for this state? Why should such opinions on national issues influence us in the slightest degree when, for example, we vote for a district judge, or a county treasurer, or an alderman, or a road overseer? If it were not for the federal patronage which is to be bestowed, and if the professional politicians did not seek to keep the state organizations constantly drilled and exercised for use in the national campaign, would such a foolish and unjustifiable perversion of the highest interests of the state and of the municipality ever be tolerated? Every state should seek to regain its political independence by bringing about the widest possible disassociation of state and national political parties. No state, county, or city official should ever be voted for at a presidential or congressional election. We have, in this state, banished the party emblems from our ballots. We should also remove the national party names from every ballot for state, county, or city officers. In other words, we should adopt every possible expedient to prevent the unnecessary sacrifice of the state's welfare which is now made for the purpose of building up the national party machine.

Returning from our slight digression, let us consider the other influences which hold our citizens firmly fixed in the traces of one or the other party. First, as to our foreign-born voters. The German immigrant is likely to drift to the German farming communities of the Western and Middle states. If so, he will in all likelihood become a republican. The son of Ireland is almost sure to settle down in one of the large cities. Influenced by the overwhelming majority of his countrymen, he will doubtless become a democrat. The Swede or Norwegian will probably find his way to states like Minnesota, in which his countrymen have gathered, and the republican party will very likely win his allegiance. Once started with a party, the newcomer will soon become the reader of a partisan newspaper which will naturally present only one side of public questions. In this way he becomes firmly wedded to his party, the tendency to allegiance steadily growing under the force of habit, until he becomes the component part, however insignificant, of a political machine.

Another element of party-fixity is geographical location. In the last forty years the southern states have been solidly democratic. Opposed to this solid south there is a very solid fraction of the northern states. In these same forty years the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota have invariably supported the republican presidential nominee, and Wisconsin, with but a single exception, has stood in line with

them. In other words, based on the experience of nearly half a century, it would seem unnecessary, for any practical reason, to hold a presidential election in twenty-three of our states, representing over fifty-nine per cent. of our entire electoral vote. When a state is once recognized as being invariably on one or the other political side, its tendency, under present influences, is to become more and more bound by its political harness. Young men, aside from the pleasant experience of being in harmony with their neighbors and fellow-citizens, realize that the avenue to political preferment lies in agreement with the political majority. In this way, unless some great wave of sectional feeling should happen to intervene, there will, in such one-sided states, be a constant tendency for the predominating majority to grow larger and larger. Let me illustrate by an example which has come under my observation in this state. About twelve years ago, when Colorado seemed to be firmly harnessed to the republican chariot, an eminent jurist, who had been the recipient of great party honors, spoke in substance as follows to a young man who was just beginning his legal career:

"If you want to win success you had better ally yourself with the republican party. Your county and state are normally republican. The party may not always be right, but the only way to achieve anything is inside the ranks of a party. Try to reform from the inside. All other efforts are unpractical. Stay with your party and try to make it better. That will keep you in line for political honors if you want them, and at the same time, your public efforts have a chance of gaining practical results."

This advice was repeated to me by the recipient soon after it was given, and consequently I have watched his career with unusual interest. He is a superior citizen, a man of character, and gifted with high intellectual power. Nevertheless, I have realized that the advice above-mentioned has weakened his moral fibre, has brought conscience into conflict with policy, and has again and again stood in the way of his voicing his honest and deep-felt convictions on questions of great public concern. This is a type of what would have occurred with increasing frequency if the state had remained fixed in the republican column. The sectional demand for "free silver," however much I opposed and still oppose it, and despite, as I think, its great injury to Colorado, nevertheless brought this benefit: that it induced many men for the first time to forsake party-traces and to vote against the republican party, thus contributing greatly to the growth of the spirit of political independence in this commonwealth.

There is undoubtedly in these United States, so far as the expression of honest