A THESIS
ON
AMERICAN POLITICS
FOR
THE DEGREE B.L.
by
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'81.
Dedication

To him who shall be so unfortunate as to read it, this thesis is most sympathetically dedicated.
Apology

The causes that have led me to write a work on this subject will be found amongst the rulings of the Board of Trustees or of the Faculty.

I have not attempted a philosophical discussion of the various points in American Politics, nor of the various institutions of our Government, for such an undertaking would require the genius of a Hume, a Macaulay or a Bancroft. I have merely aimed to bring into prominence some of the leading features of our political history during the first century of the republic. If I have succeeded in this, I shall feel that my work was not been for naught.

The Author.
American Politics

Prior to the Revolution American politics had taken no definite form. Of course there were local questions on which the people were divided, but no division of the people into great political parties had yet been effected. Our politics resembled very much the politics of England. The Whigs and Tories had their supporters in America. It was not, however, until the sturdy arm of American planters cast off the English manacles, that American politics struck out on an independent line and the American system took an independent form. A republic is especially the home of political parties. When the people have the management of affairs, and are often called on to decide important questions, they must be posted on the great questions of the day, and as they give their decision in favor of the one or the other side, as do they, so to that extent, take sides with one or the other political party.

For many years there had existed between the colonies and the parent country, a feeling of ill will; but the outcry of the various conventions that met prior to the outbreak of the Revolution was not for independence, but for justice. When the Continental Congress met in 1774 it was not expected nor desired that our connection with Great Britain should
be severe. But the stubbornness of England together with the urgency of the case drove them into war—a war with one of the most powerful nations of Europe. Thirteen small colonies, poor and inexperienced in the arts of war were over-run by the well trained troops of England.

Then the war was ended, and the independence of the colonies was acknowledged, it fell upon them to form themselves into a closer relationship with each other. The ill-paid soldiers and the bankrupt planters of the South were ripe for mutiny, and threatened the infant nation with open rebellion. Opposed to these was another class, composed largely of educated men who understood the institutions of Great Britain, and knew too well how much we had lost by falling out of the great family of nations—a position which we had held as a part of the United Kingdom. This position must now be gained on an independent footing. In order to accomplish this a closer union was necessary. That union was formed "not by a free and spontaneous effort, but it was extorted from the grinding necessities of a reluctant people. Many forms of government were proposed, varying from a monarchy on the one side to a pure democracy on the other, but neither of these was adapted to the needs of the American people. They dreaded democracy, for they had seen some of the practical
markings of the democratic spirit in the Massachusetts Rebellion.
As a result of these various opinions, a republic was formed—such as the world had never known.
At the close of the war America was divided between two opposing opinions; the one tending to limit, the other to indefinitely extend the liberties of the people. These two opinions soon took form in two political parties; the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists.
The extreme Federalists were in favor of a strong centralized government resembling that of England. They despised the Confederacy as an institution competent only in times of perfect tranquility and harmony between the states. They saw that the bread of union between the states was so lax that any state might withdraw from the confederation at its discretion. The Anti-Federalists desired no federal government, but a continuation of the confederacy between the independent republican states. These are the two great opposing principles that have ever since formed the basis of divided political parties in the United States. Under whatever names they have appeared, the two great parties have represented the loose and the strict construction elements. The Anti-Federalists were strict constructionists. They gave little power to the general government and much to the states. They granted nothing to the federal government that was not explicitly conceded to it by the constitution.
On this ground they denied the right of Congress to impose a tariff upon imports, or to levy taxes for the purpose of Internal Improvements. These powers were to be reserved to the states. We may follow these same principles down through the Jeffersonian Republican, and the Democratic party that has been in existence under that name since the days of Andrew Jackson. Changes here and there in some of the lesser principles have given rise to changes in the names of parties, but the grand underlying principles have remained essentially the same.

The Federalists were more constructionists, and gave more latitude to the powers of Congress, and were more liberal in their construction of the Constitution. Their principles were upheld by the Whigs, and by the new Republican party that has ruled affairs for the past twenty years.

During the administrations of Washington and Adams, including the first twelve years of the Republic, the Federalist principles prevailed, owing partly, perhaps to the personal influence of Washington, but by the end of Adams' term of office public opinion had changed and the next election resulted in the choice of Thomas Jefferson, a strict constructionist, and the fall of the Republican party. Under years of Federal administration had sufficed to firmly establish the government.
The election of Jefferson was a triumph for strict construction, and was the beginning of a long Republican rule. In his first message to Congress Mr. Jefferson repeated his aim to foster State governments and to restrict the powers of the federal government to the lowest possible limits; to pay the debt as soon as possible, and to reduce the army and navy. This was essentially the policy of the two preceding administrations. During Jefferson's administration England was at war with France. East country soon found friends in the United States. The two parties then existing were the Republicans and the Federalists. The latter favored England while the former took the side of France. England had declared the coast from Brit to the Elbe in a state of blockade. Napoleon then issued his famous Milan Decree, and America, under Republican rule, followed with the Embargo Act. This act found much opposition, especially in New England, for New England was a manufacturing and commercial district, and the Embargo was a hard blow at her fundamental industry. The threat of trade if the act was not repealed. "The Union is lost since dissolved," said the rector of Trinity Church, Boston "and it is full time that this part of the United States should take care of itself." We find the first hint at secession coming from New England, which boasts so loudly of her loyalty.
In 1812 war was declared between the United States and England. The Federalists were opposed to the war. Before the end of the war the Republican ranks began to increase from recruits who had left the old Federal party on account of its peace policy. The war party had triumphed, and step by step the Federalists were losing ground. This was the final struggle for the Federalists. When peace was declared, the death blow was given to the party that had flourished so grandly during the first twelve years. The party of Adams and Hamilton was no more. Then the election of 1816 came. Mr. Monroe, the Republican candidate was elected by an overwhelming majority. But the Republican party had changed greatly since the days of Jefferson. They now adopted some of the very things that had as frightened them a quarter of a century before.

Two questions now began to agitate the public mind: Slavery and the Tariff; and these two questions have brought forth more discussion in and out of Congress than any other questions that we have been called upon to settle. The one was not settled until the pen and the sword interposed in behalf of domestic virtue and humanity. The other will continue to be discussed until centuries of experience shall have proved to America as it has already done for England, that a people is not free until it is permitted to trade with whom it chooses.

The question of slavery has been a sectional rather than a party
question, and while the state was confined to the east of the Mississippi, the Ohio formed a natural dividing line between free and slave territory, but while the tide of emigration pressed to the westward, and leaped the "father of Waters," the natural dividing line was lost, and each section was jealous of its rights. It was a leading question in American politics from that time to the final culmination in 1862. The Missouri Compromise, the Omnibus Bill, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Cuban filibustering and the Lecompton Constitution, are all landmarks in the great struggle for a lawful settlement of the slavery troubles.

The election of John Quincy Adams in 1824 was a temporary victory for the National Republican Party which soon became the Whig Party. But the victory was only momentary. The strict constructionist element was too strong to be broken up so suddenly. At the next election, Andrew Jackson, the father of the Democratic Party, was chosen president. He represented about the same views as the Republicans, who had ruled nearly all the time for the past quarter of a century. The history of these times is of especial interest on account of Jackson's war upon the United States Bank. It was during this administration that the system of 'rotation in office' was introduced, and the doctrine "To the victor belong the spoils" was announced. These were innovations introduced by the Democratic Party.

As an outgrowth of the tariff agitation came the nullification
Act of South Carolina which created a great excitement for a while, but on the passage of Clay's Compromise bill in 1853, the disturbance ceased, and the nation soon assumed its usual quiet.

As early as 1836 we find a party in the field devoted especially to the abolition of slavery. It was first called the Liberty party. The Whigs did not dare to come out boldly against slavery. In the ensuing campaigns we see the same element arrayed under the name of Free Soilers and finally under the name of Republicans, also called Abolitionists.

The Texas question came up for solution during a Democratic administration. The result was a war with Mexico. Many of the Whigs were bitterly opposed to the war. We see the spirit of opposition in the north represented in Mr. Soules Biglow Poole's, in which the writer is assumed to be speaking to a sergeant who is trying to raise volunteers for the war. Here is a verse of it:

"Throat away, you'll hear to rattle
On three kettle drums o' yonner,--
Faint a keening kind o' battle
That is sketched with melody warm.
But in still, you fifer calls
Get folks know how early you be
Kills you'll best till you are yeller
'Fone you git a hold o' me.'"
During Taylor's administration the slavery question called forth new discussion. It was caused by an attempt to bring California into the Union as a free state. Excitement ran high. Clay came forward as he had done before, with a compromise bill commonly known as the Omnibus Bill. The immediate struggle, and final settlement of the question was thus stayed off for a while, but it was sure to come. When the fall elections were over it was certain that Lincoln would be president. This meant no concession to slavery. The time for the first blow had come. A State Convention in South Carolina passed an ordinance with the following title: "An ordinance to dissolve the union between the State of South Carolina and the other States united with her in the compact entitled The Constitution of The United States of America."

President Buchanan's message to the Thirty-sixth Congress was little else than a concession to the secession of South Carolina. He said he knew not what to do, (which no one will deny) for he did not believe that Congress could constitutionally make war on a state. Attempts at a conciliatory peace were made, but none, the crisis was upon us and we must now try to cure the disease which we could no longer prevent. The mania for secession spread. The Southern confederacy was formed. The seceders turned to good account a few lines in the Biglow Papers referred to above.
If I'd my way I had rather we should go to work and part. They take one way, we take another. Guess it wouldn't break my heart. Man had ought to put ander than that God has no ways joined but I shouldn't greatly wonder of there's thousands of my mind.

These words coming from a New-Englander were used in defense of secession and doubtless had great influence in the result. Lincoln was inaugurated March 4, and on the 12th of April 1861 the first gun of the war was fired. The touch was applied to the mass of combustible material which was ready to leap into a blaze of domestic war. It was war upon American soil, between American citizens. It was a sedition against a solid north. It was the slave power against the laws of human liberty. Northern Democrats and Republicans were to side by side to the defense of the flag of the free. On the refusal of the rebellious states to return to submission, Lincoln issued his famous Emancipation Proclamation January 1, 1862. It is useless to describe the long and bloody conflict that followed. You know the result. Four years of bloody war was followed by a glorious victory.
for the Federal Army, peace to the nation, many with the sorrows and suf-
f ering of a distracted and freedom to four million human slaves.

As a means of carrying on the war, Secretary Chase found it
necessary to issue a national currency based on the credit of the
government. Gold and silver, in the hour of danger had slunk away into
places of safety. Then it was that the Greenback was born.

Lincoln was re-elected and on the 4th of March 1865 was inaugurated
for a second term. The war was soon ended. On the 14th of April, just four
years after the attack upon Fort Sumter, Lincoln was cruelly murdered by one who
falsely supposed he was rid of his country of a cruel tyrant. Johnson now
became President and began the work of reconstruction. It was a difficult
task. The President and Congress took opposite views. The bill passed by
congress he vetoed. He removed Secretary Stanton from the head of the
war department, and insisted on his right to do so in spite of the protests
of Congress. The House finally drew up articles of impeachment. The President
of the United States was put on trial. He was acquitted for lack of a two-thirds
majority in the Senate. Johnson represented more nearly the views of the
Democrats than of the party that voted him. The Democrats demanded that
the Southern States be immediately received back into the position in the uni-

ion which they had occupied previous to the war. The Republicans claimed
that the Southern States by their secession had lost their place in the union
and could only regain their old position as a new state is admitted into the
Union. Such in brief was the position of the two parties on the question of
reconstruction. All of Johnson's and a part of the following administration was
consumed in the settlement of this question.

The war record of the Republican party gave it such prestige that
it was an easy thing for it to elect a Federal general president to the
presidency. By the close of Grant's first term all the states had been re-admitted
and the effects of the war were fast vanishing. But there were many Repub-
licans who opposed the re-election of Grant. These were called Liberal Repub-
licans. They met in convention at Cincinnati and nominated Horace Greeley.
The Democrats, despairing of a single-handed victory, also nominated Greeley, hop-
ing by a fusion of the two elements to defeat their political enemies. But their
combined strength was not sufficient. Grant was re-elected and his old policy was
continued. The Southern States were kept under martial law. The Democrats, in
supporting Greeley, had virtually abandoned their Free Trade principles, for he
was a strong advocate of protection. Here we see what parties will do to accomplish
party ends.

The issues of politics now changed. The questions of Currency and Bank-
ing formed the leading issues. An attempt (for a time successful) to demonetize
silver created a great sensation. So bitter was the opposition, especially in the
West, that Congress found it necessary to repeal it. Another proof of the corrupt-
ion in high places was shown in the Credit-Mobilier Bill, which increased
the salaries of Senators and Representatives. This also met with disfavor and was repealed.
During the last few campaigns the two old parties have been gradually converging. On the questions of currency and banking, little real difference can be seen. Both claim to favor a reform in the Civil Service. On the question of internal improvements the difference is decreasing. The question of State rights is essentially dead, and cannot be taken into consideration. Their days of usefulness are about ended. Parties should always be divided on living questions, otherwise they should be dissolved, and new ones formed, representing the different sides of the questions of today. The great statesman of our time has long since seen that the currency question would be the great question of the future. President Isaac, a few years since, asked to be transferred from his important position on the Military Committee to the Finance Committee, because he said he "that is the committee of the future."

The question of Finance is a living one, and together with the many other live questions, is quite sufficient to form a basis for the division of parties. During the past few years a new party has sprung up, making this one of the cardinal questions. Its growth has been surprising, and it is destined soon to compel the coalition of the opposing element in the two old parties.

The anti-slavery party did not have such growth. In 1840 the Liberty party polled 2,500 votes; in 1848 the Free-Soil party polled 290,000. The Greenback party in '76 polled 40,000; in '80 it polled over 450,000. At this rate of increase, a few years will suffice to make it one of the great parties.
Another proof of the decay of the old parties is that they are obliged to raise dead issues in order to conduct a campaign. During the last campaign the dead corpse of secession and "solid South" was brought forth from its sepulcher to play its part as an issue in the great struggle. It was claimed that a Democratic victory meant the payment of Rebel war claims, and thousands of ignorant voters of the North voted on that principle, believing that if Hancock were elected the country would immediately go to the destruction. This was the tactics of the Republican party during the campaign of 1880. The Democrats adopted the plan of attacking the personal character of the opposing candidate. They cried out "Credit Mobilier," "7 & 7," "Bele Heather pavements," and "329," and such other appellation as they could discover or invent.

Young men are disgusted with the scene. They hesitate, not knowing which way to turn. Neither side offers any inducements that can satisfy a realist. Only a new division of parties on new issues will satisfy the young voters of today, for the two old parties bear but lightly upon them. May the day soon come.

J.B. Sturman.