

THE IDEA OF GARFIELD

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The idea of Garfield by Timoleon

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TIMOLEON

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OF GARFIELD**

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BY

TIMOLEON, *sec. &c.*

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE writer of these pages in common, as he believes, with a large number of American citizens, was thrown by the assassination of President Garfield from a state of high anticipation for the future of the country, into a state of doubt and foreboding. The moral sense of the nation had gained in the nomination and election of Garfield a notable victory over the less worthy elements in politics. We had confidence in his uprightness, in his patriotism, in his experience and in his ability to find, in the end, the most advantageous solutions of the vexed questions of administration. We knew him patient in hearing all, diligent in learning all, conscientious in judging all, and successful in maintaining and sustaining his conclusions and convictions. We believed that an era of pure methods and noble motives had dawned with his inauguration. We saw, in expectation, the finances of the nation established on a sound and stable basis, the details of administration purged of jobbery and corruption, the civil service reformed, the political machine reduced to its proper place, and the oligarchical bosses of the machine deprived of their obnoxious power. We looked to see statesmanship in legislation encouraged, and all the influences of government given to harmonize the various material interests of the people, on the basis of the most enduring prosperity. We anticipated monopolies properly controlled, industry encouraged, commerce promoted. We felt that confidence in our own strength, which

moral confidence in our leader alone can give. It seemed as if the nation were prepared to make the grandest and surest strides ever witnessed in history, toward permanent prosperity and the right practices of popular government. All this bright confidence was shattered by the bullet which killed our chief. Since then our expressions of sorrow at the loss of our President have been mingled with the mournings of all the world, but concerning the future of our country we have been dumb. The difficulty of collecting our scattered hopes has been too great, the effort to bring them into coherent form too painful, and the success which attends such efforts too unsatisfactory. We sit like men whose fortunes have disappeared in a fire or a cataclysm, grim, silent and thoughtful. It is natural to hope, and so we hope, even against hope, that the spirit of patriotism which was exemplified in Garfield, as opposed to the oligarchical spirit which is so largely dominant to-day, may prevail with his successor.

It is mainly as a relief to his gloomy thoughts, that the writer has analyzed his reasons for despondency, and finding them taking form as in the following pages, he offers them to his fellow countrymen, to see if they are not confirmed and responded to by kindred thoughts in other minds.

THE IDEA OF GARFIELD.

PROFESSOR FRANCIS LIEBER has shown in his "Political Ethics," that one of three propositions must be true.

1. "Either the State and all the institutions and laws which have emanated from it, exist for the satisfaction of an ambitious and interested or privileged few."

2. "Or politics is the effect of mere chance."

3. "Or, the State is an institution for a distinct moral end."

[What Lieber meant by a moral end for a nation's existence, differs from a moral end for an individual life. It can be better expressed as an end of continuous and permanent well-being. Right and wrong in politics are to be determined by this test: is the continuous well-being of the nation thereby promoted? and the well-being of the State consists, as we understand it, in protecting the free action of every individual, so far as not infringing on the right to free action of all individuals.]

Every man who takes part in the affairs of government must be controlled in his decisions and actions by one of the above three theories. It is not necessary to suppose that one man will always consistently act upon one theory. The same man may vacillate from one to another. He may be, at one time, an aristocrat, seeking

to use the government for the gain or selfish advancement of himself, his family, or his clique; at another, a mere gambler, playing his suffrage or influence as a card, in a game which luck controls; and at another a patriot, with lofty aim and disinterested purpose, looking only to the general welfare of his country and his fellow men. It is not often, perhaps, that any one, even in a life-time, assumes all the phases of political motives; but all men change somewhat, and it is not beyond hope that a demagogue may become a patriot, and history affords instances of patriots who have been corrupted by the temptations of power.

In a government by popular majority, it is also possible that now one theory of government and now another, may prevail. No matter what may be the form of constitution, if the majority of the citizens believe that a privileged few should enjoy the advantages of power, the government will be an oligarchy.

(It might be called an aristocracy by the rulers themselves, but unless others are prepared to admit that the rulers are better than the ruled, it should be called merely an oligarchy.)

If the majority are venal and careless, blind chance will rule. But if the greater number are controlled by strong moral convictions, the government will move in accordance therewith.

I think that a careful observer will be able to trace in the course of our government, the influence of these three motives. There have been many periods when oligarchical tendencies dominated local and national affairs. The Southern States, and frequently the National Government, before the war, were governed in the inter-

est of the privileged few. The disposition since the war, to idolize and exalt certain men, without regard to their opinions, is also a manifestation of this motive. The chance theory is more particularly exhibited in the government of large cities, where the corruptible and vicious classes more easily get control. But the moral theory occasionally becomes paramount in seasons of great political activity, and for the time carries all before it in city and state and nation.

The words which most accurately designate those who are under the influence of these three several theories, are, I think, as follows:

1. OLIGARCHS.
2. PROLETAIRES.
3. PATRIOTS.

But one cannot classify his fellow citizens safely under these heads, according to their professions. There are few politicians, or even citizens, who are willing to confess that it is their opinion, that this government should be administered for the benefit of the few: and every villain who sells his vote to the highest bidder is loud in professing his attachment to noble principles. It is only by their doings that men can be judged and arranged in our three classes.

They are surely oligarchs in feeling, whose work is directed to the administration of the affairs of localities, of the states and of the nation for the benefit of a few, no matter what their professions may be; and they are as surely mere devotees of fortune, who sell their influence or their suffrages for money or for offices, no matter what noble principles they advocate.

The politicians who preach the benefit of caucus rule,