

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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A brief history of political parties in the United States by J. L. Pickard

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INTRODUCTION.

WITHIN the past decade, there has been a wonderful development of interest in the science of government. Especially is it noticeable in the schools of the United States. In many of our leading universities, "Political Science" finds recognition in the establishment of a "School," or, at least, in the assignment of a chair to a professor of this important study. Colleges and seminaries for men and women give a prominent place in their *curricula* to "Civics." Associations of learned men have established periodicals for the presentation of views touching the science and the art of government.

Policies are advocated which serve as rallying centers for their supporters. These policies are sometimes antagonistic, and the forces supporting them are arrayed in opposition to each other. Political parties are thus organized. The weapons they use in the United States are ballots. It is important that those who are to wield these weapons have an intelligent comprehension of their use. How may this knowledge be better secured than by a study of their handling by statesmen of the past? From our earliest history, statesmen have used the ballot upon opposite sides of the great questions which have confronted them. To

the fact of these opposing forces, nearly equal in numbers and in intelligence, do we owe our existence as a prosperous people. The majority presents its line of policy so modified by the minority's strength as to be rather a resultant of two opposing forces than the line planned for by either. For teachers who are training the forces so soon to enroll themselves in the great parties of the country, I have endeavored to bring together from history a few facts which will present a sketch of political parties of the United States.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF PARTIES.

IN colonial times, *Whigs* and *Tories* existed as in the mother country. The names were given about two centuries ago, rather in derision than from any fitness of the name to the party bearing it. Tories were the adherents of the ancient Constitution of England and supporters of authority, whether of the crown, of the church, or of social life. They were firm believers in the court doctrine of "*stare decisis*;" they were aristocratic in feeling and in social conduct. Whigs were believers in the possibility of improvements in the English Constitution, and were tending toward democracy. The great triumph of the Whigs in the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, led them to rest for the time in matters of constitutional changes, and the parties seemed to approach nearer each other, and were rather divided as to men than as to measures. Sometimes they changed sides completely upon certain matters: In 1841 to 1846, upon repeal of Corn Laws, the Whigs favored as the Tories opposed, when, upon the question raised by Pitt at an earlier period of free trade with Ireland, they took exactly opposite ground. Within the past thirty years, Whigs have been designated as Liberals, and Tories as Conservatives.

Returning from this brief digression, we shall find Tories of our colonial times, *royalists*: Whigs, either

moderate adherents of the English form of government or absolute *rebels* against English rule.

Whigs were far more numerous, but they were not at first harmonious, at least not sympathetic. The merchants and lawyers of the Colonies formed a conservative element in the Whig party, which stayed the radical element full of rebellion. Certain acts of the Crown, which seriously affected commerce and the tenure of the judicial office, so alienated the merchants and the lawyers, as to bring the two parts of the Whig party into close union and to a stout resistance to English rule. The Tories disappeared from active participation in colonial affairs during the Revolution. They withdrew from public affairs or left the Colonies after the peace of 1783.

But after the Revolution, the bond of union between the different elements of the only party then existing gradually dissolved, and by the time of framing the Constitution for the government of the Colonies which had secured their independence, two strong parties appeared.

Before tracing their progress, it is well to note the presuppositions warranted by what is known of the wide diversities in social rank, in religious faith, and in motives for immigration, which characterized the early colonists. According to Bancroft, there were among them "some of the high men of Normandie, but most were of the low men of Saxon origin." The Virginia House of Burgesses was largely made up of men who had never seen a town. Spotswood says: "The inclinations of the country are rendered myster-

ious by excluding gentlemen from the House of Burgesses and selecting only men of mean and low character."

Massachusetts gave the ballot only to members of the church. Maryland, with a large minority of Roman Catholics, was far more tolerant, and hence would not affiliate with Puritans.

All New England recognized the value of popular education, while Sir William Berkely, of Virginia, could "thank God there are no free schools."

The Carolinas "guaranteed religious freedom, but denied citizenship to those who did not acknowledge a God, and who did not publicly worship Him."

The settlers east of the Hudson were equal in rank and maintained none of the old notions of primogeniture and entail, while southwest of the Hudson there were large estates, lordly manors, and family caste. Locke's Constitution for South Carolina, which was maintained for many years, contained provisions for a titled nobility.

Lord Kames, an intimate friend of Franklin, as he looked upon such heterogeneous elements, declared the political union of the Colonies impossible. Otis, of Massachusetts, and Livingstone, of New York, shared in this view.

In the convention, Washington says: "It is too probable no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterward defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hands of God."

The wisdom of God appeared, first, in the one-absorbing question which stayed for the time all personal differences upon minor matters until a new government should be created; second, in the character of the men to whom the work of creation was entrusted; and third, in the fear which prevailed lest all sacrifices thus far made should prove unavailing. The field before them was an unexplored field. No light did history shed upon their pathway. The men were too intelligent to be governed by prejudice; too earnest to falter; too proud to retrace their steps. Hand in hand they move forward, each man alternately drawing, or drawn by, his neighbor into a path differing from that which his prejudgment would have chosen. The majority of the fifty-five men in the Convention were men of a liberal education. Nine graduates of Princeton, four of Yale, three of Harvard, two of Columbia, one of the University of Pennsylvania, at least five had been students at William and Mary, two were educated in Scottish Universities, one at Oxford, and three had been students of law in the Temple, at London.

Earnest as the men were in their purpose, intelligent as they were in its prosecution, and sincere as was their desire for a happy issue, the relation of the central government to the individual states divided their councils.

It was natural that the more aristocratic tendencies of the men of wealth and family should lead them to desire a form of government like the one under which they had gained position. It was not less natural that those who had known only the strong hand of the