

The Limits of Party Obligation.

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In all free nations government by party seems to be indispensable. It is natural that such should be the case, for government by party has its root in the very nature of man, and its growth is fostered by his progress in the line of political thought, wherever that thought and its natural result, action, are not suppressed by arbitrary power. Man is gregarious; ideas can be transformed into action on an extended scale only by union; co-operation is necessary for achievement.

In an unenlightened state of society, people form themselves into groupes, or rather followings, about the strong man, and personal leadership divides the community into bodies which uphold the rule of this or that individual; personal devotion is then at its height; the followers of each leader cling to him with personal fidelity; he is a hero. Once attracted to him by the force of his personal character, or otherwise, an unreasoning spirit of loyalty takes possession of his adherents; his enemy is their enemy, his friend their friend, his will their will; all is referred to the chief. As man progresses, as his mind becomes more enlightened, when he learns to criticise and to search out the motives, the reasons, of the actions of his chief, he gradually comes to follow him as representing some particular policy or line of action, some idea, or, perhaps, merely some sentiment. This is the first step away from merely personal fealty; he follows the chief but as the embodiment of an idea, although as yet he does not regard the person of the chief and the idea embodied as capable of divorce. Later, man recognizes the fact that not only can there be a separation, in thought, of the leader from the idea, but also that the leader may be a bad exponent of ideas, or an insufficient instrument in the carrying out of a policy. This leads him to consider to which his allegiance is, of right, due—to the man who assumes to represent the truth, or to truth itself. As in his thought he distinguishes between the abstract and the concrete, and finds in the one the truth, in the other the mere accidental representative or symbol of it, he rises above the mere devotion to person and fixes his loyalty upon principle, and upon that foundation are, or profess to be, erected modern parties and the system of government by party, which has come to its highest development in the two freest countries in the world, England and the United States of America.

Now, as we review the history and the present condition of those two great countries, we may unhesitatingly say that whatever evils have sprung from party government, whatever injustice has been caused by the excess of party feeling, the results of the existence of parties have been, on the whole, vastly beneficial. It is hard to imagine how popular liberty and free government could be maintained

without them, and it is the duty of the citizen, in regard to all great political matters, to belong to one party or another. There is little sympathy due to the "non-partizan" citizen at large, whose non-partizanship, boast he never so loudly of it, is too often but a cloak for indolence, which prevents him examining into and making up his mind upon the great questions which arise; or for indifference, or sometimes even for cowardice and self seeking. There is much to be said in favor of the old Athenian law, which punished severely the man who, in times of public tumult and threatened overturn of the government, took neither one side nor the other; punished not the man who espoused the unsuccessful side, as an enemy of the people, after the fashion of a Roman proscription; not the man who joined the insurrection, as a rebel; not the man who attempted to uphold a falling power, as an instrument of tyranny and oppression; but the man who stood aside, ready to submit to either party, but who raised no hand to exalt either, or to put down either.

Party, properly conducted, is a great educator; it is more—from its organization it gives to men, capable of serving the public in high station, opportunity to demonstrate their ability. The opposition of parties insures the presentation of both sides of any question of public moment; it insures the existence of an organized body of men, active and united in the maintenance of those rights, belief in which enters into the party creed, and interested in making their fellow-citizens take an interest in what interests themselves; and, in various ways, compels persons who otherwise would be listless and careless in public matters, to at least hear about them, and probably to judge and to act with reference to them. A republic in which party feeling is dead is on the verge of decay and destruction itself; and furthermore, where questions upon which parties may be properly formed are involved (and from this category should be excluded everything which has not its foundation in a belief that the enforcement of a principle or the carrying out of a policy is for the public good), the dogma, "Principles, not men," should be unhesitatingly accepted. In parties, and for the sake of party, it often becomes the duty of the good citizen to lay aside personal predilections, to suppress personal preferences, to stifle personal resentment, and while, under no circumstances, is he justified in doing or conniving at what is wrong, or dishonest, or dishonorable, he may often be required to accept a compromise which is distasteful to himself and, if he cannot, through his party, accomplish all he would in what he considers the right direction, to accept what he can obtain, and patiently bide the time, waiting and working within party lines until the day when his hopes may be gratified, and his objects fully accomplished, and for the present to solace himself

with the reflection: *Quadam est prodire tenus, si non ultra debeat.*

The difference between being willing to take what can be obtained and to wait, and insistence upon an immediate fulfillment of a political end, is often what, in great part, constitutes the difference between a statesman and a mere enthusiast. Cavour was none the less the patriot and the father of Italian unity, because in 1859 at the treaty of Villafranca, when Italy failed to obtain the enfranchisement of both the northern states from the Austrian rule, he assented to a peace which freed Lombardy while it left Venetia still in the possession of the stranger.

But party government has its limits. A battlefield wide as the empyrean is reserved for the contests of party, but such a field befits only giants, and giants should contend only about things great, high, majestic in themselves. The Titans might well, consistently with the law of their being, strive with Jove for the possession of Olympus, and Jove might well use his thunderbolts to defend such a possession, but what would have been thought of the Titans had they interfered in the contest of the frogs and mice, or what would we have thought had Jove used his bolts to knock down shellbarks from a hickory tree?

Parties must be formed upon great principles, and, in support of those principles, the good citizens may even follow the lead of one whose private character he cannot respect, so long as he is assured that such person will be loyal to the principles or carry out the policy of the party to which the citizens belongs, and it must be an extreme case, although perhaps such a case may arise, which will justify him in voting even for a good man, whose very excellency will be used the more effectually to subvert the principles which the voter believes to be true.

We may well agree with Burke when he defines party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest upon some particular principle upon which they are all agreed," and further endorse with these limits his words: "Every honorable connection will avow it as their first purpose to pursue every just method to put the men who hold their opinions into such a condition as may enable them to carry their common plans into execution with all the power and authority of the state. As this power is attached to certain situations, it is their duty to contend for these situations. Without a proscription of others they are bound to give to their own party preference in all things, and by no means for private considerations to accept any offer of power in which the whole body is not included; nor to suffer themselves to be lead, or to be controlled, or to be overbalanced in office or in council, by those who contradict the very fundamental principles on which their party is formed and even those upon which every fair connection must stand."

(TO BE CONTINUED)