

CHAPTER LV

COMPOSITION OF THE PARTIES

THE less there is in the tenets of the Republicans and Democrats to make their character intelligible to a European reader, so much the more desirable is it to convey some idea of what may be called their social and local, their racial and ecclesiastical complexions.

The Republican party was formed between 1854 and 1856 chiefly out of the wrecks of the Whig party, with the addition of the Abolitionists and Free Soilers, who, disgusted at the apparent subservience to the South of the leading northern Whigs, had for some time previously acted as a group by themselves, though some of them had been apt to vote for Whig candidates. They had also recruits from the Free Soil Democrats, who had severed themselves from the bulk of the Democratic party, and some of whom claimed to be true Jeffersonians in joining the party which stood up against the spread of slavery.¹ The Republicans were therefore from the first a Northern party, more distinctly so than the Federalists had been at the close of the preceding century, and much more distinctly so than the Whigs, in whom there had been a pretty strong Southern element.

The Whig element brought to the new party solidity, political experience, and a large number of wealthy and influential adherents. The Abolitionist element gave it force and enthusiasm, qualities invaluable for the crisis which came in 1861 with the secession of all save four of the slave-holding States. During the war, it drew to itself nearly all the earnestness, patriotism, religious and moral fervour, which the North and

¹ The name Republican was given to the new party, not without the hope of thereby making it easier for these old school Democrats to join it, for in Jefferson's day his party had been called Republican.

West contained. It is still, in those regions, the party in whose ranks respectable, steady, pious, well-conducted men are to be looked for. If you find yourself dining with one of "the best people" in any New England city, or in Philadelphia, or in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, or Minneapolis, you assume that the guest sitting next you is a Republican, almost as confidently as in English county society you would assume your neighbour to be a Tory; that is to say, you may sometimes be wrong, but in four cases out of five you will be right. In New York the presumption is weaker, though even there you will be right three times out of five. One may say that all over the North, the merchants, manufacturers, and professional men of the smaller perhaps even more than of the larger towns, tend to be Republicans. So too are the farmers, particularly in the North-west.¹ The working class in the cities is divided, but the more solid part of it, the church-goers and total abstainers, are generally Republicans. A number, still large, though of course daily diminishing, are soldiers of the Civil War; and these naturally rally to the old flag. When turning southwards one reaches the borders of the old slave States, everything is changed. In Baltimore the best people are so generally Democrats that when you meet a Republican in society you ask whether he is not an immigrant from New England. This is less marked by the case in Kentucky and Missouri, but in Virginia, or the Carolinas, or the Gulf States, very few men of good standing belong to the Republican party, which consists of the lately enfranchised negroes, of a certain number of native whites, seldom well regarded, who organize and use the negro vote, and who twenty-five years ago were making a good thing for themselves out of it; of a number of Federal officials (a number very small when the Democrats are in power), who have been put into Federal places by their friends at Washington, on the understanding that they are to work for the party, and of a few stray people, perhaps settlers from the North who have not yet renounced their old affiliations. It is not easy for an educated man to remain a Republican in the South, not only because the people he meets in

¹ This statement, written in 1888, is now less true, for both the Democrats and the so-called 'People's Party' have gained strength in the North-western States since that date.

society are Democrats, but because the Republican party managers are apt to be black sheep.

In the Middle States, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, to which one may for this purpose add Ohio and Indiana, and on the Pacific slope, the parties are nearly balanced, and the majority of votes sways now this way now that, as the circumstances of the hour, or local causes, or the merits of individual candidates, may affect the popular mind. Pennsylvania, for instance, is now, as she has been since 1860, a Republican State, owing to her interest in a protective tariff. New York, whose legislature is frequently Republican, in presidential elections generally goes Democratic. In these doubtful States, the better sort of people have been mostly Republicans. It is in that party you look to find the greater number of the philanthropists, the men of culture, the men of substance who desire to see things go on quietly, with no shocks given to business confidence by rash legislation. These are great elements of strength. They were gained for the Republican party by its earlier history, which drew into it thirty years ago those patriotic and earnest young men who are now the leading elderly men in their respective neighbourhoods. But against them must be set the tendency of a section of the Republican party, a section small in numbers but including some men of character and intelligence, to break away, or, as it is called, "bolt" from the party platform and "ticket." This section explains its conduct by declaring that the great claims which the party gained on the confidence of the country by its resistance to slavery and its vigorous prosecution of the war have been forfeited by mal-administration since the war ended, and by the scandals which have gathered round some of its conspicuous figures. If intelligence and cultivation dispose their possessors to desert at a critical moment, the party might be stronger without this element, for, as everybody knows, a good party man is he who stands by his friends when they are wrong.

The Democratic party suffers in the North and West from exactly the opposite causes to the Republican. It was long discredited by its sympathy with the South, and by the opposition of a considerable section within it (the so-called Copperheads) to the prosecution of the war. This shadow hung heavy over it till the complete pacification of the South and growing

prominence of new questions began to call men's minds away from the war years. From 1869 to 1885 it profited from being in opposition. Saved from the opportunity of abusing patronage, or becoming complicated in administration jobs, it was able to criticize freely the blunders or vices of its opponents. It may however be doubted whether its party managers have been, take them all in all, either wiser or purer than those whom they criticized, nor do they seem to have inspired any deeper trust in the minds of impartial citizens. When, as has several times happened, the Democrats have obtained a majority in the House of Representatives, their legislation has not been higher in aim or more judicious in the choice of means than that which Republican congresses have produced. Hence the tendency to desert from the Republican ranks has enured to the benefit of the Democrats less than might have been expected. However, the Democratic party includes not only nearly all the talent, education, and wealth of the South, together with the great bulk of the Southern farmers and poor whites, but also a respectable and apparently increasing minority of good men in the Middle States, and a somewhat smaller minority in New England and the North-west.¹

In these last-mentioned districts its strength lies chiefly in the cities, a curious contrast to those earlier days when Jefferson was supported by the farmers and Hamilton by the town-folk.² But the large cities have now a population unlike anything that existed eighty years ago, a vast ignorant fluctuating mass of people, many of them recently admitted to citizenship, who have little reason for belonging to one party rather than another, but are attracted some by the name of the Democratic party, some by the fact that it is not the party of the well-to-do, some by leaders belonging to their own races who have risen to influence in its ranks. The adhesion of this mob gives the party a slight flavour of rowdyism, as its old associations give it, to a Puritan palate, a slight flavour of

¹ In 1892, however, several North-western States were carried by the Democrats.

² Jefferson regarded agriculture as so much the best occupation for citizens that he was alarmed by the rumour that the codfish of the North-eastern coasts were coming down to the shores of Virginia and Carolina, lest the people of those States should "be tempted to catch them, and commerce, of which we have already too much, receive an accession."

irreligion. Twenty years ago, a New England deacon—the deacon is in America the type of solid respectability—would have found it as hard to vote for a Democratic candidate as an English archdeacon to vote for a Birmingham Radical. But these old feelings are wearing away. A new generation of voters has arisen which never saw slavery, and cares little about Jefferson for good or for evil. This generation takes parties as it finds them. Even among the older voters there has been a change within the last ten years. Many of the best Republicans, who remembered the Democrats as the party of which a strong section sympathized with the slaveholders before the war, and disapproved of the war while it was being waged, looked with horror on the advent to power in 1885 of a Democratic president. The country, however, was not ruined by Mr. Cleveland, but went on much as before, its elements of good and evil mixed and contending, just as under Republican administrations. However, the Republican leaders still point to the fact that the Democratic party commands the solid vote of the States where slavery formerly existed as a reason why it should excite the distrust of good citizens who fought for the Union.

Now that differences of political doctrine are not accentuated, race differences play a considerable part in the composition of the parties. Besides the native Americans, there are men of five nationalities in the United States—British, Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, French Canadians.¹ Of these, however, the English and Scotch lose their identity almost immediately, being absorbed into the general mass of native citizens. Though very numerous, they have hitherto counted for nothing politically, because they have either been indifferent to political struggles or have voted from the same motives as an average American. They have to a large extent remained British subjects, not caring for the suffrage. Recently, however, an effort has been made (apparently chiefly for the sake of counterworking the Irish) to induce them to apply for citizenship and exert their voting power as a united body. It may be doubted

¹ There are also Poles, Czechs, Italians, Russian Jews, and Slavs from Hungary (as well as a few Roumans and Armenians): but their number, though it has increased rapidly of late years, is relatively small, except in two or three of the Atlantic cities, in Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, St. Paul, Minneapolis, New Orleans, and in the mining regions of Pennsylvania.

whether they will become citizens to any great extent, or whether, if they do, they will cast a solid vote.

Far otherwise with the Irish. They retain their national spirit and disposition to act together into the second, rarely however into the third, generation; they are a factor potent in Federal and still more potent in city politics. Now the Irish have hitherto been nearly all Democrats. The exodus from Ireland which had been considerable as far back as 1842, swelled in 1847 (the year after the famine) to vast proportions; and was from the first a source of help to the Democratic party, probably because it was less Protestant in sentiment than the Whig party, and was already dominant in the city of New York, where the Irish first became a power in politics. The aversion to the negro which they soon developed, made them, when the Republican party arose, its natural enemies, for the Republicans were, both during and after the war, the negro's patrons. Before the war ended the Irish vote had come to form a large part of the Democratic strength, and Irishmen were prominent among the politicians of that party: hence newcomers from Ireland have generally enlisted under its banner. To-day, however, there are plenty of Irishmen, and indeed of Irish leaders and bosses, among the Republicans of the great cities; and statesmen of that party often seek to "placate" and attract the Irish vote in ways too familiar to need description.

The German immigration, excluding of course the early German settlements in Pennsylvania, began rather later than the Irish; and as there is some jealousy between the two races, the fact that the Irish were already Democrats when the Germans arrived, was one reason why the latter have been more inclined to enrol themselves as Republicans, while another is to be found in the fact that German exiles of 1849 were naturally hostile to slavery. The Germans usually become farmers in the Middle and Western States, where, finding the native farmers mainly Republicans, they imitate the politics of their neighbours. That there are many German Democrats in the great cities may be ascribed to the less friendly attitude of the Republicans to the liquor traffic, for the German colonist is faithful to the beer of his fatherland, and, in the case of the Roman Catholic Germans, to the tacit alliance which has subsisted in many districts between the

Catholic Church and the Democrats. The Germans are a cohesive race, keeping up national sentiment by festivals, gymnastic societies, processions, and national songs, but as they take much less keenly to politics, and are not kept together by priests, their cohesion is more short-lived than that of the Irish. The American-born son of a German is already completely an American in feeling as well as in practical aptitude. The German vote over the whole Union may be roughly estimated as five-ninths Republican, four-ninths Democratic.

The Scandinavians — Swedes and Norwegians, with a few Danes and a handful of Icelanders — now form a respectable element among the farmers of the Upper Mississippi States, particularly Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. So far as can be judged from the short experience the country has of them, for it is scarce thirty years since their immigration began, they Americanize even more readily than their Teutonic cousins from the southern side of the Baltic. However, both Swedes and Norwegians are still so far clannish that in these States both parties find it worth while to run for office now and then a candidate of one or other, or candidates of both, of these nationalities, in order to catch the votes of his or their compatriots.¹ Nine-tenths of them were Republicans, until the rise of the so-called "People's Party," which has for the moment detached a good many. Like the Germans, they come knowing nothing of American politics, but the watchful energy of the native party-workers enlists them under a party banner as soon as they are admitted to civic rights. They make perhaps the best material for sober and industrious agriculturists that America receives, being even readier than the Germans to face hardship, and more content to dispense with alcoholic drinks.

The French Canadians are numerous in New England, and in one or two other Northern States, yet scarcely numerous enough to tell upon politics, especially as they frequently remain British subjects. Their religion disposes those who become citizens to side with the Democratic party, but they

¹ There is some slight jealousy between Swedes and Norwegians, so that where they are equally strong it is not safe to put forward a candidate of either race without placing on the same ticket a candidate of the other also. But where the population of either race is too small to support a church or a social institution of its own, they fraternize for this purpose, feeling themselves much nearer to one another than they are to any other element.

are only beginning to constitute what is called "a vote," and occasionally "go Republican."

The negroes in the Northern, Middle, and Pacific States are an unimportant element. Gratitude for the favour shown to their race has kept them mostly Republicans. They are seldom admitted to a leading place in party organizations, but it is found expedient in presidential contests to organize a "coloured club" to work for the candidate among the coloured population of a town. In States like Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, where there are plenty of white Republicans, they vote steadily Republican, unless paid to abstain. In the further South, their mere numbers would enable them, were they equal to the whites in intelligence, wealth, and organization, not merely to carry congressional seats, but even in some States to determine a presidential election. But in these three respects they are unspeakably inferior. At first, under the leadership of some white adventurers, mostly of the "carpet-bagger" class, they went almost solid for the Republican party; and occasionally, even since the withdrawal of Federal troops, they have turned the balance in its favour. Now, however, the Democrats have completely gained the upper hand; and the negroes, perhaps losing faith in their former bosses, perhaps discouraged by seeing themselves unfit to cope with a superior race, perhaps less interested than at first in their new privileges, have begun to lose their solidarity. A few now vote with the Democrats.

Religion comes very little into American party except when, as sometimes happens, the advance of the Roman Catholic Church and the idea that she exerts her influence to secure benefits for herself, causes an outburst of Protestant feeling.¹ Roman Catholics are usually Democrats, because, except in Maryland, which is Democratic anyhow, they are mainly Irish. Congregationalists and Unitarians, being presumably sprung from New England, are apt to be Republicans. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, have no special party affinities. They are mostly Republicans in the North, Democrats in the South. The Mormons fight for their own hand, and in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona have been wont to cast their votes, under the direction of their hierarchy, for the local party which

¹ As recently in the formation of the American Protective Association, which has become a political factor in parts of the North-west.

promised to interfere least with them. Lately in Idaho a party found it worth while to run a Mormon candidate.

The distribution of parties is to some extent geographical. While the South casts a solid Democratic vote, and the strength of the Republicans has lain in the North-east and North-west, the intermediate position of the Middle States corresponds to their divided political tendencies. The reason is that in America colonization has gone on along parallels of latitude. The tendencies of New England reappear in Northern Ohio, Northern Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, giving the Republicans a general predominance in this vast and swiftly-growing Western population, which it takes the whole weight of the solid South to balance. This geographical opposition does not, however, betoken a danger of political severance. The material interests of the agriculturists of the North-west are not different from those of the South: free trade, for instance, will make as much and no more difference to the wheat-grower of Illinois as to the cotton-grower of Texas, to the iron-workers of Tennessee as to the iron-workers of Pennsylvania. And the existence of an active Democratic party in the North prevents the victory of either geographical section from being felt as a defeat by the other.

This is an important security against disruption. And a similar security against the risk of civil strife or revolution is to be found in the fact that the parties are not based on or sensibly affected by differences either of wealth or of social position. Their cleavage is not horizontal according to social strata, but vertical. This would be less true if it were stated either of the Northern States separately, or of the Southern States separately: it is true of the Union taken as a whole. It might cease to be true if the new labour party were to grow till it absorbed or superseded either of the existing parties. The same feature has characterized English politics as compared with those of most European countries, and has been a main cause of the stability of the English government and of the good feeling between different classes in the community.¹

¹ At the present moment the vast majority of the rich, a proportion probably larger than at any previous time, belong in England to one of the two historic parties. But this phenomenon may possibly pass away.

CHAPTER LVI

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARTIES

BESIDES the two great parties which have divided America for thirty years, there are two or three lesser organizations or factions needing a word of mention. Between sixty and seventy years ago there was a period when one of the two great parties having melted away, the other had become split up into minor sections.¹ Parties were numerous and unstable, new ones forming, and after a short career uniting with some other, or vanishing altogether from the scene. This was a phenomenon peculiar to that time, and ceased with the building up about 1832 of the Whig party, which lasted till shortly before the Civil War. But Tocqueville, who visited America in 1831-32, took it for the normal state of a democratic community, and founded upon it some bold generalizations. A stranger who sees how few principles now exist to hold each of the two great modern parties together will be rather surprised that they have not shown more tendency to split up into minor groups and factions.

What constitutes a party? In America there is a simple test. Any section of men who nominate candidates of their own for the presidency and vice-presidency of the United States are deemed a national party. Adopting this test we shall find that there have lately been two or three national parties in addition to the Republicans and Democrats.

The first is (or rather was) that of the Greenbackers, who arose soon after the end of the Civil War. They demanded a large issue of greenbacks (*i.e.* paper money, so called from the colour of the notes issued during the war), alleging that this must benefit the poorer classes, who will obviously be

¹ The same phenomenon reappeared at the break-up of the Whigs between 1852 and 1857, and from much the same cause.