THE STORY
OF
THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

BY
HENRY MINOR

"In his campaigns for election and in his administrations of public offices Grover Cleveland, better than any other great American, exemplified common sense and common honesty in politics and in government."
TO MY LOYAL FRIEND AND WIFE,
FRANCES FULTON MINOR,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.
FOREWORD

The history of the Democratic Party is well worth the patient study of any American.

Its founders were potent in framing our government and its principles predominated in the Constitution adopted. It was a major force in Washington's administration, and more powerful as a corrective during the John Adams Presidency than the wrangling Federalist Party was as a positive force. For the following sixty years during which the nation took on size and strength and power it was in control except for four years, and for that short term it held one house of Congress.

The Republican Party with which it has since divided rule was its inception and during its early years the more truly Democratic of the two. When both these parties came to assume their present positions, the Democratic Party had returned to its original principles.

The history of a party should record its achievements and its failures, its victories and its defeats. The way and why and under what conditions. To show all these, the history of each administration must be noticed even at some expense of tediousness.

The story of the great body of the party is told in their votes—what policies and actions they adopted, what influenced them, what leaders they chose. To picture these men and times in a story of their party is the function of history.

As a battle-piece must show both contending forces, so must some of Democracy's opponents receive as much attention as some of its champions. Webster, Clay and Calhoun are half the picture of the Jacksonian era. And minor parties require notice as part of the ferment of the voters' minds. Nor should the nearness of events be allowed to dwarf the true perspective.

Times have changed and so have the American people, but not human nature—not politics essentially. Not the same things, but the same sort of things attract or repel, and analogous causes bring about similar results in 1800 or 1900. Politicians and the voters are constantly doing not the same things but similar
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CHAPTER I
EMBRYONIC PARTIES UNDER WASHINGTON


"Like two cocks in a pit"—so Jefferson pictures Hamilton and himself in Washington's cabinet. The contest between the political ideas of these two men has been continued ever since. The principles, views, mental trends—everything about them—are of great interest and value to an understanding of American political history, because Americans of their respective ways of thinking, followers of them, have been the brains and bodies of the two major political parties from their day to this.

Both were able, patriotic, high-motivated, and, though ambitious, were disinterested so far as material selfish profit was concerned. So jealous of his official honor was Hamilton that he bared the most distressing private scandal to vindicate it, while Jefferson's integrity has never been questioned. Their object was the same, the establishment of a good government, the welfare of the people. But as to the best method to attain that end, as to what was the best government, they differed as widely as the poles.

Jefferson wanted a limited federal government with all powers possible left close to the people in their state governments. Hamilton wanted a strong, centralized, splendid government; he wished to abolish the states. "They are not necessary," he said; "for any of the great purposes of commerce, revenue or agriculture." A materialistic view was characteristic of Hamilton's whole theory.
Hamilton did not hate or dislike the people; he had far too great a soul for that; but he distrusted them as a political force and was believed by them to lack respect for their wishes, their opinions and capacities. He looked on a constitution which vested much power in the people as a "trifling and worthless fabric," and on our government as an "experiment" which ultimately would fail.

"The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changeling; they seldom judge or determine right... Take mankind and what are they governed by? Their passions. There may be in every government, a few choice spirits who may act for the most worthy motives. One great error is that we suppose mankind more honest than we are." — Hamilton in speech in Constitutional Convention.

Hamilton had in fact a better opinion of mankind in general and his compatriots in particular than his rhetoric implied. He was a master publicist; his papers in the Federalist are models. Not in them nor in his other public writings, except in his invectives, are to be found appeals to the ignorance, passions, prejudices and selfish interests which he soars in control of the legislative branch of the government more dominated by him than any of its successors has been dominated by any of his successors. He named his disciple as his immediate successor and this successor's successor, who also was his disciple. He dictated or greatly influenced the policies of our government until his death in 1804.

The party Jefferson founded governed the country from 1801 to 1809 with one four-year intermission, and since then has been the great party in opposition when not in power itself. When the Whig Party was created it claimed to be the true Jeffersonian party and when the modern Republican Party was founded it took his old party name and advocated his doctrines. Jefferson has always been the political prophet either of the great majority or a powerful minority of the American people.

Jefferson's party may be well content with the judgment of
their founder pronounced by a Federalist and Whig, a New Englander representing in his principles and politics that hot-bed of Federalism, the Boston district—Daniel Webster. Harvey, his intimate biographer, says:

"Mr. Webster believed Mr. Jefferson to be a sincere man very true to his convictions. That Jefferson had more deeply impressed his opinions and theories upon the legislation and destinies of the country than any man who had ever lived. . . . Mr. Webster's comment was that he thought it fortunate that Jefferson's ideas prevailed. They were, undoubtedly, more in accordance with the spirit of our institutions. Jefferson had stamped his individuality, his peculiarities of character upon the institutions and government of the country more strongly than any other statesman of the Republic's infancy."

Just about one hundred years later another New Englander, a Republican, Calvin Coolidge, spoke of Jefferson:

"Next to Washington will come Thomas Jefferson, whose wisdom insured that the Government which Washington had formed should be intrusted to the administration of the people. He emphasized the element of self-government which had been enshrined in American institutions in such a way as to demonstrate that it was practical and would be permanent. In him was likewise embodied the spirit of expansion. Recognizing the destiny of his country, he added to its territory. By removing the possibility of any powerful opposition from a neighboring State he gave new guarantees to the rule of the people."

*Speech of President Coolidge, at Black Hills, S. D., April 11, 1927.*

Political parties are not born nor made. They evolve, by a process not dissimilar to the Nebular Hypothesis, out of human conditions—economic, occupational, environmental, educational, sentimental, historical. A brief résumé of the whole state of the nation at the time of the formation of the Democratic Party must precede its history proper. Parties now make or adopt issues; in the beginning of our government the issues developed the parties.

The pre-Revolutionary parties of Whig and Tory were mortally wounded by the Declaration of Independence and expired at Yorktown. They began to form the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties. They fought their fight in the Constitutional convention and over the adoption of the Constitution. Then under the same names, for awhile, but with different align-ments and objects, they battled in Congress and out over the character of our government under the Constitution.

When the Fathers met in 1787 to frame a government we had a public debt, a great national domain, the Northwest Territory, and we had tariff and other troubles between states. With a shipping and foreign trade, and European holdings to the north, west and south of us, we had foreign complications at our doors. The domestic portion of our public debt was now largely in the hands of the moneyed class who had purchased it or taken it in trade from the original holders. Land companies and land speculators had large holdings of our western lands. Much capital was invested in ships and in interstate and foreign commerce. It was quite natural and reasonable that these financial and commercial interests should favor a strong and stable government, and willing to provide for the payment of the public debt, protect our western lands from the Indians and our ships on the seas, adjust tariffs between states and impose duties on foreign goods.

It was equally natural that other men whose interests and views were more local, who lived and traded at home, should view with jealous eye a government which was to take the place of English rule as the superior of their state government. The misrule of England had made them suspicious. Massachusetts was as far from Virginia as England is now, and further from the Carolinas and Georgia. Wherever the seat of government was placed, to a large portion of the people it would be a foreign government and administered by men unknown to most of them. And the spirit of state loyalty was high.

It was an English constituency the convention was legislating for. The people were mostly English; the English common law ran in all the states; all governmental traditions, ideas and practices were English. This Englishism runs through our whole political history.

It was a wise and capable body of men aided by, for its day and time, an enlightened and sensible public opinion, that constructed our constitution, and the result was a series of compromises between the opposing schools of thought.

The Democratic idea prevailed in the constitution of the House, the method of selection of President and Senators and their tenure of office was a fifty-fifty compromise, but the centralization idea had its way in constituting the Judiciary. The judges were to be appointed, not elected; for good behavior, which practically meant life tenure, not for short terms. And the powers given the
federal courts were such that later on Chief Justice Marshall was to do more to fix the nature of some phases of this government than any other man except some members of the convention.

Now, one hundred and forty years later, time has worked out its compromises. We have a strong, stable, centralized government with as broad powers as Hamilton could have wished, due in part to a war between the states, but more to railroads and telegraphs and other annihilators of time and distance which have made the United States one great municipality, as it were.

But this centralized government is in the hands of the people to a greater extent than Jefferson ever advocated. Every adult citizen, male and female, regardless of property qualifications or religion, save those debarred by ignorance or crime, is entitled to vote. They elect the Senators direct and, in reality, the President. Gone are the barriers between the people and their government and officers. The ship of state has finally been remodelled to Federalist plans and specifications, but democracy runs it; and sometimes Democracy is put at the helm.

States rights survive, however, in that the great mass of government still resides in the states. Its most striking features now are that New York with ten million and Nevada with seventy-five thousand inhabitants, and Texas with an area of over two hundred and sixty thousand, and Rhode Island with less than one thousand two hundred and fifty square miles have each two Senators, no more and no less.

And it is possible for a presidential candidate carrying thirteen states—New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Texas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Kansas, Iowa, and Connecticut—by a majority of one in each state, to defeat an opposing carrying thirty-five states by unanimous votes, and having a popular majority of twenty million.

In 1787 the elective franchise in America was on the English basis, a restricted privilege, not a right. Ownership in fee of fifty acres or more or its equivalent in town lots, or the paying of taxes on personal property of equal value was requisite in practically every state. The property basis of the voting privilege was further shown in some jurisdictions by plural voting—one holding the requisite land in more than one election district could vote in each. In all but two states a voter had to be a Protestant. In some New England states there was a theocratic time; there was a "democracy in the Fall; but aristocracy in the Redemption"; to vote, one had to be a member in good standing of the congregation. When the Constitution was adopted more than half of the adult white males of the country were disfranchised.

The battle, after the Constitution carried, was continued, that document serving as a modus vivendi. Men of aggressive moral natures, loving order and regulation of human conduct, naturally favored a strong government. Sentiment drew more men into the Republican camp, for state pride, particularly in Virginia and Massachusetts, was strong, and no national feeling had been aroused by the nebulous things created by the Articles of Confederation.

Environment was a great factor. In New England there were many towns and the farmers for the most part had small holdings and therefore close neighbors. Moreover, the town-meeting system of government had familiarized them to municipal regulations. They had not the repugnance to being interfered with as had many of their Southern brethren who lived on large plantations, each in a small way an independent community where their word was law. The very democracy of New England made it Federalist while the South was largely Democratic because her leading men were not democrats.

Plato said two thousand years ago that economic factors controlled Greek politics. They were determinist in America in the 18th Century. The traders, especially those engaged in foreign trade, the capitalists, the manufacturers drifted into the Federalist camp as naturally as water flows down hill, while the agricultural interests quite as inevitably were born toward the opposite party.

Out of this welter of conflicting ideas and interests grew the two political parties, the Federalist and the Federal-Republican or Republican (Democratic) Party. Much confusion of ideas and history would have been avoided if these parties had been rightly named. John Quincy Adams justly says that after the Constitution was adopted the Federalist should have been called the Nationalist Party, since its theory and object was a national not a federated government. The Republicans, he adds, should have been called Federalists since they really believed in a federal or federated government. Certainly the appellation arbitrarily given them by their opponents—Anti-Federalists—has resulted in the careless or uninformed believing them opposed to our constitution, which is exactly contrary to the fact.

Hamilton; and his party sought to interpret the Constitution so as to make it such a document, as they believed (with some
and yet Vice-President Adams had to vote to break ties more often, it is said, than all his successors combined. It is to the House proceeding that we must look for congressional political light. The first yes and nay vote, taken May 16, 1789, was on Madison's revenue bill; it carried 41 to 8, and curiously enough the negative votes were cast by Fisher Ames and other high protectionists who thought the law should run, in terms, in perpetuity instead of for only seven years.

The bill establishing the United States bank was supported by men who opposed the administration on nearly every other measure, and the vote on the assumption of state debts was governed by whether the Congressman's state had a large or small debt, e.g., Massachusetts and South Carolina for, Georgia and New Hampshire against. The final passage of the assumption measure in exchange for locating the Capital at Washington shows how weak the party lines were.

Some of the administration measures were defeated in this Congress; some carried four to one. There does not appear, from the speeches or votes, that there was any party coherence worth speaking of. There were no concerted party policies, programs or caucuses. Ames and Madison in Congress were bellwethers of changing, shifting flocks.

The administration gained support as the government gained the confidence of the people and public men were finding themselves. Of the 21 principal measures of the First Congress, including the bank bill, assumption of states' debts bill and liquor tax, 41 Congressmen voted with the administration more often than against, 23 against more times than with, and one, Floyd, of New York, tied. Of the 41 administration supporters, only 24 gave twice as many votes for as against the administration. Smith, of South Carolina, Hamilton's mouthpiece in Congress, was the most uncompromising Southern Federalist. Yet he voted often with the Republicans. Geographical lines were stronger than party or factional ones.

In the Second Congress, 1791-93, the leaders at least became more regular. On 27 distinctly administration measures Ames voted 26 times with the administration and was absent on one vote. Smith of South Carolina and Benson of New York made the same record, and several others approximated it. Madison opposed 23 of these measures and supported two. The other fifty or more members followed Ames' lead sometimes, sometimes Madison's. Roughly speaking 32 might be classed as consistent supporters, 23 consistent opponents of the administration, and 14
embrionic parties under Washington

appropriation within the President's discretion. The admission of Tennessee brought up the slavery question and the vote was sectional. The year and says, after led by Madison forced the first ten amendments to the Constitution through the first session of Congress. The Federalists hated these restrictions on federal power, especially the tenth, which specifically reserved to the states and the people the powers not granted to the United States. They endeavored to delay and thus defeat the adoption of the amendments, but when Madison after repeated failures to obtain alson from Congress in vain, announced t that Congress would vote, a convention of the states would be called, the Federalists threw up their hands, fearing lest such a convention would take away much of the power they already claimed for the federal government. This placing of amendments in the Constitution is Democracy's first great achievement.

All leaders of both parties felt in 1792 that the new government was not firmly enough established to risk a contest for party control of it and joined in insisting on Washington standing for re-election. George Clinton, Republican (Democrat), ran against John Adams for second place, carrying New York, Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia, 50 electoral votes, against 77 for Adams. The conservative idea of letting well enough alone helped Adams, and many just men could see no reason for humiliating an old patriot by turning him out of office.

The Third Congress, 1793-95, shows some consistent voting. There were 103 members of the House now. Sixty of these voted more often with than against the administration on its 33 principal measures, including various revenue laws, non-intercourse with Great Britain, standing army, increase of navy and navy, naturalization laws and assumption of states' debts.

The administration's greatest majority was on one detail of the adjustment of state debts, $9 to 27; Ames and Macon of Georgia were together for once; and Madison in the other column. He most divided defeat was on a proposed stamp duty; here the leaders changed sides, Ames and Smith and the Philadelphia Republicans supporting commercial and shipping interests, opposed, while Madison and Macon supported the bill.

The Fourth Congress, 1795-97, covered the last two years of Washington's administrations. Jefferson and Hamilton were out of the cabinet and Pickering and Wolcott in their places, but both leaders were active through their friends and followers in influencing legislation.

By a vote of 52 to 36 the House refused to put the military.
chartering of a bank. He knew, too, that later on the power to charter an inter-state canal company was denied because it was argued that under the guise of such authority a bank might be chartered. He knew that framers of the Constitution intended that Congress should not have power to charter a bank. The fact seems to be that he signed the bill, as other Presidents have been constrained to stretch the Constitution, because he was convinced that a national bank was an absolute necessity. Madison, years later, signed the renewal of the bank charter under the same constraint. Washington signed the bill with the greatest reluctance. He held it so long that it was rumored that if it had a veto attached to it, the validity of the veto would be contested as having been exercised too late—after the bill had become a law by not having been vetoed in ten days.

On the bill apportioning representatives in Congress Washington overruled Hamilton and followed Jefferson, as he did in some other matters, especially those affecting our foreign relations. The record bears out the truth of Washington’s statement that he favored one man or party no more than another.

Some of the panegyrist of Jefferson and Hamilton, in their enthusiasm for their particular hero have nearly in manner and roughly in effect divided all of Washington’s statesmanship and political ability between these two Secretaries of his, leaving him only his military renown and his title of Father of his Country. Then with an abortive sense of justice each seeks to compensate Washington for what they have taken away from his fame by crediting him with all the merit and achievements of their particular hero’s rival.

Washington was the strongest man politically and otherwise of the three, and neither could have accomplished anything in opposition to him. It was years before Jefferson’s influence extended from New Hampshire to Georgia and Hamilton never was strong throughout the nation, while Washington’s power pervaded every state, every community. No man has ever been quite so entirely President of the United States as Washington was. He was the best politician of his day in the broad sense, else he could never have mastered the cabals of his enemies in the Continental Congress and in the army, nor have driven successfully such a double team in his cabinet as Jefferson and Hamilton.

Washington was no Federalist. Monroe was one of the most astute politicians America has ever produced. In discussing with Andrew Jackson, in 1816, the Federal leaders and principles of Washington’s time he wrote:

“I thought Washington was opposed to their schemes, and not being able to take him with them, they were forced to work in secret, and then, understanding, using the nation and standing with the nation, as far as circumstances permitted, to serve their purposes.”

John Adams said: “Washington appointed a number of Democrats and Jacobins of the deepest dye to office.”

Washington’s Federalism consisted in doing what every strong President has done, notably Jefferson in purchasing Louisiana,—stretched his authority in imperative cases for national, not partisan, purposes. When what he might have done toward stabilizing the government is contrasted with what he actually did it seems that he was more of a conservative than a radical force in that direction. If toward the last he had a Federalist cabinet, it was because Jefferson declined to reenter it and Madison, wisely knowing his own talents, preferred fighting Federalism in Congress rather than in the cabinet. In the face of these facts to assert that Washington was a Federalist is an imputation on his honor and political integrity not to be borne. Washington tried to return to a balanced administration. Van Buren goes so far as to intimate that Washington, realizing the change in the political sentiment of the nation, intended giving Jefferson or Madison the lead in his cabinet and making his latter administration Republican (Democratic). His support of Adams was support of the government threatened with internal dissension and foreign war; he would have given support to the Republicans (Democratic) had they been in power.

The newspapers of our early days were small and new with neither the dignity nor responsibility that come with age and size. Many were owned and conducted by printers who established them not because they were newspapermen, but because they were printers. The foremen of the composing room were the editors. The papers were often grossly intemperate and vituperative and our political journalism took its cue from its English brother at a most licentious age. In fact Cobbett (Peter Porcupine) and Duane were Englishmen with London newspaper experience and Callender a Scotch pamphleteer.

Jefferson, writing to Washington in 1787, said of two of the leading Federalists, Hamilton and Adams, Republican:

“They are rivals for public favor. The one courts them by flattery, the other by censure, and I believe that the one has been as servile as the other severe.”

“Take away thrones and crowns from among men,” Jefferson
read in Fenn's paper about the time he took his place in the cabinet, "and there will soon be an end of all dominion and justice. There must be some adventurist propensities infused into the government to give it energy and spirit, or the selfish turbulent passions of men can never be controlled."

John Adams had written, "the elective method wherever tried, has been found to be a failure; the system of hereditary tenure has the sanction of history—the prestige that comes from years of successful operation."

No wonder a man of Jefferson's views wanted an opposition paper and he with Madison and Henry Lee, the last furnishing the financial backing, established Freneau and his National Gazette.

An interesting phase of our political life in Washington's second administration was the formation of many clubs—"Democratic Societies" they were termed. Jefferson favored them partly because many were French in their leanings, and because they encouraged public discussion and popular interest in government. Hamilton, on the contrary, hated them and induced Washington to tumultuate against them in his 1794 message. The result was to bring many of their members into Jefferson's party.

Here then were the party leaders in the cabinet and in Congress and the party organs of propaganda, and the process of forming parties from the mass of the people were carried on. But it was years ere either party had, to use a military simile, anything more than skeleton armies. They gradually anything, and the second officers and skeleton companies and regiments. There were some, forty smaller party papers, local journals scattered over the country, most of them in New England, which drummed up recruits. By the time of the Adams-Jefferson 1796 campaign each party had a few battalions of regulars, but the great mass of each army were military at will and frequently changing sides.

In the body politic there were numerous partisans but the great majority were unfixed in opinion and party or factional allegiance. One event would throw them on one side; another draw them to the other. The government was new and untried, the times uncertain and changing. Thinking men were fairly well fixed in some general principles such as the loose or strict construction of the Constitution, but where the question was close, local or sectional considerations controlled. And they differed much on lesser questions.

There were leading men who thought we were veering to a monarchy, leading men who thought we were on the verge of a revolution as violent as the French Revolution. Even in 1798 Jefferson wrote that "the Alien and Sedition laws were but experiments on the American mind to see if it would bear an open violation of the constitution. If so, then another act making Adams President for life would surely follow; then another fixing the succession in his family, and finally the members of the Senate would hold office for life."

A little later on Fisher Ames, justly rated as one of the ablest and soundest and most representative of New England statesmen, was bitterly propesying that a democratic government could not live. He foresaw direful consequences if Jefferson defeated Adams. He heard, so he told his hearers, "the clank of chains and whispers of assassins, the barbarous dissuance of mingled rage and triumph in the yell of the infuriated mob," and even "smelled the loathsome stearn of human victims offered in sacrifice."

John Bach McMaster says in his history:

"The fact that Jefferson ever wrote such folly is enough to deprive him of every possible claim to statesmanship. He is silent on the equal or greater folly of his admired Ames. Jefferson had the history of every republic in the past except Switzerland to justify his fears; Ames had only the French Revolution to support his.

All good all-Americans are comforted to know that even the most effete and the most feeble of the Adams families were divided. While Fisher Ames, "days were heavy with dread" and his "nights restless with horror," his elder brother, Dr. Nat Ames, of the same town, his equal in education and character, if not in fame, was writing in his diary "Jefferson will be Vice-President, which I hope will introduce him finally to be President." And old Samuel Adams, "the Father of the Revolution," staunch Democrat and Republican, was smiling graciously from the windows of his mansion as Governor of Massachusetts at a mob passing by with an effigy of Jay to be carried to the docks and burned as a demonstration against the Federalist treaty with England.

Our foreign policy was a burning issue for years and had great effect in lining up our people into the two parties. There was great sympathy for the French people; they had been our allies and Frenchmen had fought side-by-side with Americans—and against the British. From us, many thought, France had imbued a love of freedom and these held us morally responsible for the
French Revolution. Early French victories were celebrated from Boston to Charleston. There was a strong demand that we join France against the Allied Powers.

But in all sympathy with France, the majority of our trade, some say seven-eighths, was with England. There were many influential men of English sympathies. Then the executions of Louis and Marie Antoinette had an effect on American sentiment analogous to that produced by the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. The atheism promulgated by the French revolutionaries alienated many; England was regarded as the defender of religion. Genet’s insulting of Washington provoked many from France. A counter-revolution set in, to undo, some believed, the accomplishment of ours. Jefferson and his Republican friends fought it off.

England seized our ships and condemned them and their cargoes, she impressed our seamen, and denied us rights of neutral trade. The French seized our ships and either confiscated their cargoes or forced the owners to pay in worthless assignats. Their minister here insulted Washington; their government in Paris insulted our minister; France treated the crew of seized American ships with injustice and cruelty. These things in a way kept the balance more even in the public mind of that day than did the British detention of our ships and the German sinking of passenger ships a century and more later. A popular demonstration against some British aggression would be followed a week later by a similar outburst against some French outrage. The populace swayed from side to side.

But in many men got into the habit of defending France, a sister republic fighting for freedom, and abusing England, the head of a royal alliance putting down a republic. Others became fixed on the opposing side. At first there were no more party lines in American pro-British and pro-French leanings than in our pro-Allied and pro-German sympathies in 1914, though there were more pro-French among the Republicans; and more pro-British among the Federalists. A few leaders in cabinet and Congress and in the states did not constitute a national party, however organized their joint action was. The unorganized, in fact utterly disorganized condition of parties among the people at large so late in 1794 is exemplified by the Massachusetts state election that year, and public opinion in Massachusetts, by reason of its town-meetings system of government, was many times better organized than in any other state. The Federalists nominated for governor