

Why Are You a Democrat or a Republican?

We Are Fortunate in Having a Permanent Election Issue on Which We May Take Sides Without Impairing Our Loyalty

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IT has often been made a matter of reproach to the inhabitants of these United States that we are unduly vainglorious and that we are prone to vaunt our advantages over other nationalities, even going so far on occasion as to claim superiority above all other peoples, present and past. Boastfulness like this is never pleasant to overhear, either from an individual or from a nation; it tends to repel sympathy and to discourage mutual understanding; and it is a confession of juvenility, or at least of social immaturity. That American is fortunate who has never been made to blush either abroad or at home by the loud tall-talk of chance compatriots encountered in his travels. But although not a few of us are now and again guilty of this puerile lapse from good manners, a competent and cosmopolitan observer would doubt whether we are greater or more frequent transgressors than the French or the Germans; and he would hesitate to assert that our boastfulness, even if it may be more blatant, is really more insistent than theirs.

Furthermore, we Americans can comfort/ourself with the knowledge that in so far as we possess this unlovely characteristic, we have at least come by it honestly, having brought it over with us in the original package from the mother country. From the days of Shakespeare to the days of Kipling our kin across the sea in their island kingdom have never been successful in concealing their conviction that one Englishman could out-fight five Frenchmen. Superb self-confidence, expressing itself in lofty self-appreciation, is not the exclusive privilege of any one race; it seems to be a fundamental trait of humanity; and we need not apologize that we share it with

the rest of the world. Nor need we regret this, for it has its good side as well as its bad. An imperturbable belief in ourselves and in our destiny is not an evil thing in itself, even if its casual manifestations may be offensive. On occasion this belief might be a very precious possession for any people, even if—like other precious possessions—it had to be paid for. Perhaps we may as well admit that this sort of overt self-confidence is not a little like the schoolboy's definition of a lie—"an abomination in the sight of the Lord, but a very present help in time of need."

Moreover, we ought to be able to see that beneath the top-lofty brags of the forthputting peoples there is likely to exist a sober basis of solid fact. The Frenchman is justified, and the German no less, in his conviction that he has obvious superiorities of one kind or another which men of alien stocks cannot emulate, even if they may seek vainly and enviously to imitate. So the lone Englishman may not be able to vanquish five Frenchmen in single combat, and yet at sea he has been willing to give long odds without losing the fight. We Americans, in our turn, cannot help knowing that fortune has favored us and that we have had advantages denied to other peoples. Some of these advantages are the bounty of nature; some of them are the result of our remoteness from the dynastic complexity of European politics; and some again are to be ascribed to the fact that we are a selected stock, hardier than others, since we are the descendants of the stalwart pioneers who fought each for his own

hand in a new country with the red Indians in front of him and the white terror of the ocean at his back.

Most of the many aspects of our multifarious good fortune we have magnified greatly. Perhaps, however, there is one advantage, purely accidental as it may be, that we have failed to value as highly as we might or even to perceive as clearly as we ought, although it is a piece of national good luck that every other nation may well envy us. It is the result of the fact that we are profoundly satisfied with the framework of our government as this was made for us by the Fathers of the Republic, and of the further fact that we possess a permanent issue upon which we may take sides without impairing our unhesitating loyalty to the Constitution. In other words, we are doubly fortunate, first in our universal acceptance of our constitutional scheme of government, and second, in our perennial difference of opinion as to the proper interpretation of the Constitution, a difference of opinion which leads us instinctively to gather ourselves into opposing groups and thus create the strong and coherent political parties which are requisite for the satisfactory working of parliamentary institutions.

First then, we Americans are fortunate in our loyalty to the Constitution, that is to say, in our hearty acquiescence in the form of government under which we live. We may wish to amend the Constitution, and we may regret that the process of amendment, which ought to be difficult, is obviously, a little too difficult. But we not only

accept the Constitution as a whole, we are really attached to it. This good fortune has befallen no one of the more powerful countries of Europe—whatever may be the case in certain of the weaker States, like Switzerland. In none of the larger nations is there a general acceptance of the fundamental framework of its government. In France, for example, the republic has had a forty-year fight for its life, and the Royalists, the Bonapartists, and the Clericals have been frank in expressing their detestation of republican rule and of their anxiety to change the form of government to a monarchy. In France, therefore, patriotic citizens have rarely felt free to divide on questions of policy, since they might be forced to unite in defending the very existence of the republic. In Germany the hereditary autocracy of the Kaiser is abhorrent to a very large proportion of the population, who would, if they could, substitute a different kind of rule. In Great Britain there have been of late abrupt alterations of the Constitution, such as the subordination of the upper house to the lower, and many other changes as violent must take place before an outworn and semi-feudal organization can be adjusted to the political needs of an industrial people.

It is scarcely too much to say that there are powerful political parties in Great Britain, in Germany and in France whose avowed object has been not to capture the administration but to wreck the governmental machinery altogether. But there is in the United States no political party which is hostile to the Constitution as a whole, however imperative may be the demand for its amendment to conform to conditions its makers could not foresee. In this agreement of all parties in the United States upon the fundamental organization, we

may see the explanation of the striking fact, observed by every friendly alien who happens to visit us in the Fall, that our political campaigning is far less bitter than elections are in France and in England, less abusive and less rancorous.

In the second place, we were singularly fortunate also in that our parties here tend to divide upon a question which is incapable of ultimate solution and which therefore affords a permanent opportunity for taking sides—a question furthermore upon which honest and clear-eyed men may hold opposite views, so that no partisan has any warrant for thinking his opponents to be either knaves or fools. Just what this perennial question is it is not easy to put into a single precise phrase. What is the exact scope and range of governmental activity? Shall the Government let the individual alone? Or shall it endeavor to help him where it can? Is that Government best that governs least? Or is that Government best which has a full consciousness both of its powers and of its duties? As the Constitution was a compromise between the political principles of Alexander Hamilton and the political principles of Thomas Jefferson, are we to interpret it now and to guide its development in the future in accord with the beliefs of the New Yorker or in accord with the beliefs of the Virginian?

It is because we have this fundamental issue that we have had in the century and a quarter since the Constitution was adopted only two permanent groups, and that we are not cursed with the splitting up of our parties into half a dozen or half a score of petty factions such as interfere in France and in Italy with the automatic working of parliamentary government. It is true, of course, that in these six score years many third parties have sprung up, but they have been either relatively feeble bodies of little weight or else they have been so powerful as to substitute themselves for one or the other of their earlier rivals. While there are generally three or four or more nominees for the Presidency the battle is actually between two of them and the others' candidates are not really in the running. The two main parties have changed names more than once; and they may change names again in the future, far or near. The Republican Party today is the descendant of the Whig Party, as the Whig Party was the descendant of the Federalist Party. The Democratic Party today is the descendant of the party that called itself Republican in the earlier years of the Constitution. The chiefs of each group have, now and again, on occasion, and under the pressure of circumstances, departed from their own party principles to act in accord with the principles of their opponents. Lincoln, for example, the chief of the Republican group, was guided more than once by the theories of Jefferson. Jefferson himself, when he made the Louisiana purchase, was not acting in accord with his own theories; and Cleveland, when he sent the militia to protect the mail trains in Chicago, was acting in accord with the theories of Hamilton.

Furthermore, it may be noted that each of the two parties in turn has been tempted to take up notions unrelated to its fundamental convictions. Perhaps the most striking instance of this is the long alliance of the Democratic Party with those who were banded together in defense of negro slavery, although slavery of any kind was absolutely inconsistent with the dominating beliefs of Jefferson. Regardless of these changes of name and of these momentary suspensions of abiding principle, the two parties are integral and persistent. In spite of George Eliot's assertion that of all forms of human error "prophecy is the most gratuitous," the prediction may be ventured boldly that the Republican and the Democratic parties—whatever their respective names may then be—will stand over against each a hundred years from now, as they stood over against each other a century ago. It may also be asserted, without great danger of contradiction by the event, that they will then stand, one of them for the principles of Hamilton and the other for the principles of Jefferson. It may happen now and again that these differences of doctrines may seem almost to disappear, and that the platforms will not recall the eternally opposing principles, and it may happen that either of the two parties may be led astray for the moment by theories not in harmony with these principles.

But the people of the United States will continue to divide in accord with their respective affinities for one or the other of these antipodal beliefs. The opposition between these theories is eternal; it is the opposition of the centrifugal tendency to the centripetal. It is, in fact, the everlasting and irrepressible conflict between the rights of the individual and the rights of the social organization of which the individual is a constituent element. Just as the Constitution of the United States is the result of a compromise between the beliefs of Hamilton and the beliefs of Jefferson, so any social organization must be a compromise between the necessary authority of that organization and the natural desire of every individual in it to live his own life in his own fashion,

none the less we cannot help seeing that if we push the doctrines of Jefferson as far as they can be made to stretch they tend toward anarchy, or the state of no government; and we cannot help seeing that if we push the doctrines of Hamilton as far as they can be made to stretch they tend toward socialism, or the state that has taken all things to itself. And if this is true we must admit it, in spite of the fact that Jefferson would have shrunk with horror from the suggestion that his views were in any way anarchistic, just as Hamilton would have shrunk with horror from the suggestion that his views were in any way socialistic.

At the opposite ends of the political seesaw are anarchy and socialism, and it is not at these extremities, but nearer

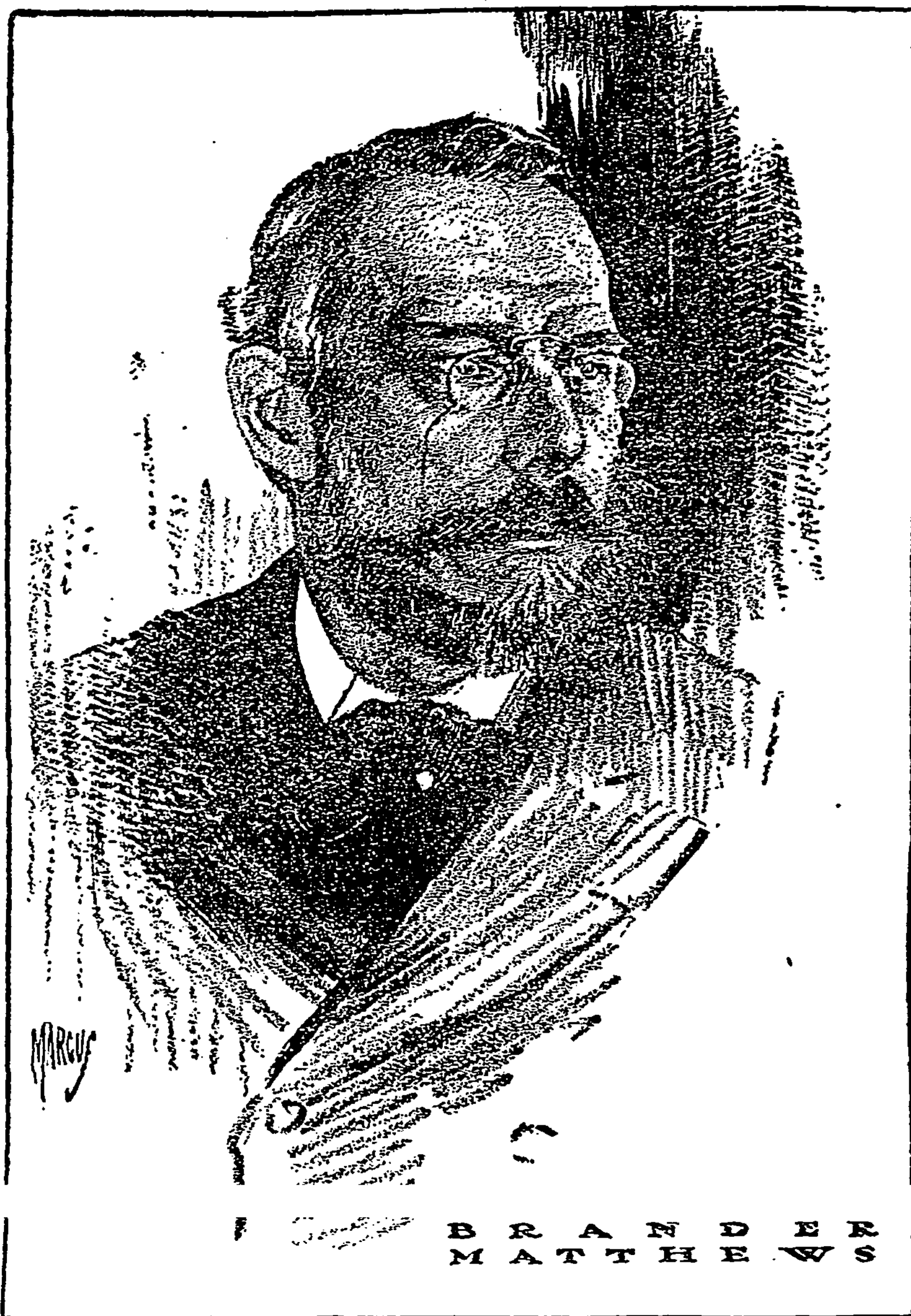
inherit the tradition of the wrong party for us and cling to it all our days, although ever impelled away from it to the other party; and in this case our utility as citizens is sadly diminished, since we must be in constant disaccord with our associates.

Now, it is impossible to declare abstractly that either party is absolutely right. The staunchest followers of Hamilton ought to be able to admit that there is much to be said in favor of the Jeffersonian doctrines; and the most fervid admirer of Jefferson ought to be broad-minded enough to perceive the strength of the Hamiltonian tradition. Each can respect the other and respect the other's point of view. Both can agree to disagree without being moved to hatred or to contempt. And here is where we Americans have our inextinguishable advantage over the voters of most other countries. Here also is where the American citizen who has had the benefit of an education which has liberated his mind, which has freed him from the unnecessary prejudices, and which has trained him to try to understand (and even to esteem) the opinions he does not share—here is where the intelligent American may find his most immediate opportunity for service to the Commonwealth.

He should take his place a little nearer to the centre of the political seesaw than the position naturally assumed by the majority of those who hold the same beliefs. He should keep his mind forever open, holding himself always in readiness to move still closer to the centre, and even to go over to the other side for a little space, if he sees that the principles of the other party may be more beneficial for the moment. That is what the War Democrats did when they made possible the ultimate triumph of the national cause. That is what the Republican mugwumps did when they supported Cleveland. Then, when the pressure of the passing exigency is relaxed and the temporary crisis is past, the intelligent man may feel himself at liberty to go back to the group where he naturally belongs.

It is impossible to overestimate the value to good government of the men of character and conviction and courage who are willing to stand up and be counted in behalf of a cause which chances to be momentarily unpopular. Few men in American history have ever deserved better of the Republic than the half dozen Senators of the United States who broke from their party allegiance and voted according to their consciences for the acquittal of Andrew Johnson. No single acts of Grant and of Cleveland redound more to their credit than their stubborn and rugged resistance to inflation, the one to the expansion of the greenbacks and the other to the free coinage of silver. Lowell once said in casual conversation that the pressure of public opinion was like the pressure of the atmosphere; "you could not see it, but none the less was it sixteen pounds to the square inch;" and the pressure of party opinion is even heavier. Only strong men can do their own thinking and act in accord with their own sense of duty in resistance to this invisible force. It behooves us to cultivate that kind of strength and to train our moral muscles against the emergency.

When this emergency arrives the intelligent man need not fear that he will have to raise a lonely voice against the mob. Everywhere will he find allies, fit though few. That keen observer of American conditions, the late William Garrett Brown, called the Hamiltonian group the party of strength and the Jeffersonian the party of freedom; and he has asserted that the wise citizen "will support the strong government party when he must, the free government party when he dares. In time of peril from without he will naturally look to the party which is readiest in emergencies. When there is merely a difficult work to do, he will again look to the party which is intelligently led. * * * But whenever the essential character of the Republic is truly involved, when the question is of tendencies rather than of things, he will oftener turn to the teaching of Jefferson. * * * For there are two Jinns, two slaves of the lamp, that serve the Republic. One, the nimbler and more intelligent, is best employed in care of its material interests, its bodily welfare. The other, a turbulent, huge and mighty demon, guards with a ferocious jealousy the twofold liberty which is its soul."



regardless of the needs of his fellows. Thus we see that the opposing theories which are the vital principles of the two persistent American parties are not merely local, not merely American, not even European only. They are irreconcilable now, and they have been irreconcilable ever since the probably arboreal ancestor of man descended from his family tree and abandoned the use of that prehensile tail by the aid of which he had suspended himself from the boughs of the forest primeval.

Man had no sooner become man than these question marks hung themselves up before his eyes: What are the rights of the individual? What are the duties and the powers of society? How much or how little shall the Government undertake in the city, in the State, and in the nation? To the true Jeffersonian that government is best that governs least, and, therefore, if we insist on going to the logical extreme, the best possible government might be no government at all—and that is simply anarchy. To the true Hamiltonian the State should recognize its duties toward the individual; it should interfere to help him, and so long as it can help it should continue to interfere as often as need be; and, therefore, if we insist on going to the logical extreme, that government might be best which took over everything to itself and substituted itself everywhere for the individual—and that is simply socialism.

We all know that the Democratic Party has never advocated anarchy and that the Republican Party has never advocated socialism. We may go further and rest assured that they never will urge doctrines so extreme. But

to the middle of the rising and falling plank, that the Jeffersonian and the Hamiltonian stand face to face, turning their backs on what may be behind them on the extremities of the board. The Hamiltonian believes in government by the best, by the selected leaders, competent to guide the less competent mass; and this is true aristocracy in the best sense of that abused word. The Jeffersonian believes that the average man, however unenlightened, actually knows his own business, or at least knows what he wants, better than any superior person can know it for him; and this is true democracy in the best sense of that abused term.

These two attitudes are inevitably antagonistic; they are instinctive, intuitive, innate. To which of the two parties, the aristocratic, (in the finer meaning of that term,) or the democratic, (in the finer meaning of that term,) to which of the two any one of us shall belong is not a matter of choice. For each of us it has been decided, once for all, before we were born. By a native bias, beyond his control, an American is necessarily either a Hamiltonian or a Jeffersonian, just as a philosopher must be Platonist or an Aristotelian, and just as a novelist must be either a realist or a romanticist. It is a case of predestination; it is not an example of free will. We are born to vote with Hamilton and against Jefferson, or with Jefferson and against Hamilton. We may, any one of us, grow up in the wrong group and then sooner or later discover that we do not fit where we find ourselves, whereupon we will go over to the other group, to remain thereafter where we belong. We may even