

## The Evolution of Political Parties.

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You all know how, at election times, each party alleges black spots of all kinds in the past of its rival.

For a newchum, unaware of that past, and who is sincerely anxious to vote for the best the problem is bewildering.

That is how I came first to ask myself what was that past?

But when I began to inquire I found there was much more still that was interesting in the question.

In a country like ours, with representative institutions on a popular basis, there is hardly any matter of public import likely to miss finding expression in Parliament. Even if the people themselves were disinclined to have their grievances or aspirations voiced there, candidates bidding for support in their quest for political promotion would offer and even force their services. The whirl of those cross currents must gather in turn into more or less distinct masses around opposing poles, rival leaders, diverging humours, contrary principles. In studying the evolution of political parties, we should strive to discern and disentangle the several forces, trace them back to their origin, gauge their mutual influences, how they hurried, delayed, or deflected the progress of one another.

Is the trouble worth taking? No doubt. We complain of the low standard of our statesmanship: we forget the helps and inducements provided in older lands for aspiring politicians: what information, what guidance they may find amidst the maze of conflicting interests and passions in a large body of historical and theoretical literature with a direct bearing on the problems they have to solve. Ours have to grope in the dark, or worse still, they are misled by views, inspired by theorists whose experiences in other lands were due to quite other circumstances.

But what of the dryness, the prosaic dryness of our Australian history?—it is not Australian history which is dry: may be, it is the imagination which considers it. How could it be dry? Have men dropped anything of their human nature when they migrated across the Equator?

Then, if they have not, the more they differ from their forefathers in their expression of that nature, the newer, and therefore the more interesting the study must be.

Quite a peculiar interest should attach for us to the explanation of our surroundings, and even of our own passions: traditions are already being formed. Why should we allow the process to go on unconsciously; neglect to consider whether they are such as should be strengthened or discouraged; and forego our right to control the springs of our children's future?

I go further: such a study has in it more than local interest. Where else in the world could you trace the history of a nation right down to its beginning; and, as Mr. Cumbræ Stewart was doing the other day, name the men from whom it first sprang—or, at least so many of them.

In the case of Queensland, the history of political parties and that of the country begin, so to speak, together. Brisbane had not been open to free immigrants more than a year, when its inhabitants were called upon to send a representative to the Legislative Council newly established in Sydney.

Brisbane, or rather the district of Moreton Bay, was then an outlying part of the extensive electorate of the Macquarie and Upper Hunter, so inconsiderable a part, that both then and at the following election neither of the candidates thought it worth while to visit it.

After what I said, I need hardly disclaim any pretence to give you a history of the political parties. My purpose is only to draw a preliminary sketch, a canvass upon which we may work as opportunity offers.

I would divide that history into five main stages:—

During the first, which, beginning in 1842, ended in 1859, Moreton Bay, although involved in the struggles of the Sydney parties, acquired such a consciousness of preponderant local interests as to lead its inhabitants to unite in demanding and obtaining their separation from the Mother Colony.

The second stage lasted from 1859 to 1870. That temporary union having attained its object. The political system was thrown for a time into confusion till two poles of attraction asserted sufficient force to group the people into fresh parties.

During the third stage from 1870 to 1888 the line of cleavage remained the fundamental conflict of interests between the town trader and the country grazier.

The fourth stage, from 1888 to 1908 saw the inception and growth of a new dominating contrast: that of employee and employer, till at last the country and town employers had to sink their rivalry to face the common attack together.

The fifth stage is still developing as a contention between the employers and the leaders of the employees, who are made by their numerical preponderance the arbiters of the political arena.

#### FIRST PERIOD (1842-1859).

A fair grasp of the first period may be gained by reading Wm. Coote's History of Queensland—Dr. Lang's Cooksland and Henry Stuart Russell's Genesis of Queensland. The first book, copies of which are unhappily growing very scarce, appears to be mainly a digest of local newspapers and official publications. The two others are specially valuable for the light they throw on the psychology of the contending parties, the traders and the graziers: I use those terms as chosen by the editor of the first issue of our first newspaper, the "Moreton Bay Courier."

The first local sign of that cleavage was a public meeting held in 1844 to protest against squatting regulations. It sprang from a fundamental clash of interest on the land and immigration questions—the squatters wanted to produce goods for export at the lowest possible cost—the traders wanted as much money as possible to be spent locally on the goods they imported.

A disturbing factor was the rivalry of Brisbane and Ipswich, both of which wanted the profits to be made by distributing the imports after their arrival, and collecting the exports before shipping them away.

The squatters' position had in it elements of weakness which were the greater because the squatters failed, it seems, to appreciate them fully: for them, to leave their stations and attend Parliament in Sydney was as wasteful as it was perhaps profitable for traders to get there on the chief market in the colonies. Their interest, cheap labour, ran, of course, as much against the ambitions of their employees, as high wages for the latter

suited the traders' aims. Newspapers would naturally side with those who had wares to advertise, and favoured an increase of the reading public.

To these natural disabilities the squatters added a strange misconception of their constitutional position. They relied upon the Colonial Office in London to override any hostile resolution of the councils in Sydney; while the Home Authorities looked upon those councils as the sole qualified exponents of colonial opinion and interests.

They had, however, a few compensating advantages, mostly due to their birth and family connections: easier access to the members of the Home Government and their local representatives, the Governors: a better usage of the world, more winning manners, a deeper insight into legal intricacies, a wider sense of the limitations imposed upon a tiny and distant colony dependent for capital and protection upon the good will of the external world.

Several anecdotes might illustrate those points: for instance a certain election when, on nomination day only three voters appeared: they had no candidate to propose: someone happened to pass by: "Propose him," said one, "I shall second him." So was it done; the third voter proposed someone else, but as nobody could second, the chance candidate of the first was returned unopposed. Of course, he was not a squatter. On the other hand, some elections were fought with desperate doggedness. In one, a polling vote had been proclaimed outside the constituency at Toowoomba. No poll was taken, of course; but Dr. Lang, the squatters' enemy, being returned, they claimed on this oversight to have the election annulled.

#### SECOND PERIOD (1859-1870).

I shall dwell more at length on the second period. Unfortunately Wm. Coote's History stops at the first Governor's arrival in Brisbane on December 10th, 1859, and for some years after the chief sources, official papers and local newspapers are spoiled by frequent gaps. I have not been able, for instance, to obtain a file of the "Courier" covering the first general election.

Our first Governor disembarked with definite prejudices against the wiles of the squatters, so much had their repeated petitions made them unpopular with the Colonial Office. To avoid falling into the traps of local residents he appointed as his Prime Minister his own

private secretary, Herbert; Herbert picked out immediately for his Attorney-General a local lawyer, Ratcliffe Pring. He hesitated some days to choose a Treasurer. Nevertheless the squatters' social advantages played their part, no doubt, for the prize fell to one of them, Robert Ramsay Mackenzie. Although there were several late representatives of the colony to the Sydney Parliament, they were all passed over: two of them, Macalister and Walsh, voiced their resentment at this neglect of their rights.

The squatters' reliance on legal quibbles had a share in delaying the elections till April 29th, 1860. Parliament met on May 29th. Of those who had gained Parliamentary experience in Sydney only two were returned, Macalister, who practised the law in Ipswich, and a squatter, Elliott. Elliott was unanimously elected to the chair. Macalister won, in spite of the Government, the position of Chairman of Committee. A party division on the Address-in-Reply showed a House equally divided into two groups of 12 members. Such information as I possess shows no common bond among the men of either group. The leaders of the Opposition, as far as there were leaders, were Macalister and another lawyer, Charles Lilley, who had figured in the election campaign as President of a so-called "Liberal Association," of which I know but the report of banquets celebrating Lilley's election. The very evenness of the parties points at their resulting from a careful balancing of individual ambitions and private spites.

The subsequent changes in the Ministry by which Herbert managed to remain six years in power confirm this hypothesis: they seem intended to disintegrate any incipient organisation among his disunited opponents, with the humorous result, that in 1866, Macalister and Lilley were both Ministers, Pring and Mackenzie both in Opposition.

A first serious clash of interest had taken place between Ipswich and Brisbane, both of which claimed to be the terminus of the railway to Toowoomba. The Ipswich solution, being the most wasteful, carried the day, for it preserved the need for transshipping from sea-going ships to river barges, and from river barges to railway trucks.

The same principle of greatest waste was later in Brisbane itself to keep the rail from the river so as to give employment to carriers.

Herbert might have retained his Premiership much longer, but that, in 1866 he resigned it into the hands of Macalister, his very first opponent. Besides his skill in handling individual ambitions, this long lease of power was helped by the pressing need for placing the colony on its feet. The first sessions especially had been marked by an unparalleled legislative activity which certainly calls for study by us, especially by future students of law.

On becoming Prime Minister, Macalister had followed Herbert's teaching of Christian forgiveness, and reopened the Cabinet to Mackenzie, the man whose place he had first taken. Comedies have been written with less humorous material than could be gleaned by a detailed study of these years of political shuffling.

Herbert gave as a reason for his resignation his wish to return to England. There may have been other considerations too, as is shown by his remaining in Parliament and taking his seat on the Opposition side. Whatever the prompting motive, the Governor had soon cause to be thankful he was there.

Young Queensland had gone for public works on a magnificent scale: the chief source of expenditure was that very railway from Ipswich to Toowoomba. Its financing had been undertaken by the Agra and Masterman Bank. Herbert had not long relinquished office when the bank failed. Macalister proposed to issue notes with forced currency: I fancy the idea was to bully the banks into proffering their help on the easiest terms. The Governor warned the Ministers that his commission compelled him to refer to the Royal Assent any bill tampering with the currency. The Ministry resigned.

On resigning Macalister had advised the Governor to send for Raff, one of the members for Brisbane. Whether by design or otherwise, this brought Raff's political career to an abrupt end. Although he declined the Premiership, his constituents never forgave him for consenting to serve under Herbert, who had to come to the Governor's rescue. A meeting of indignation described Macalister's downfall as a scheme of the squatters, who "had always possessed the political power until

Macalister's Ministry came into office, and who, since that time, were making every effort to regain their position."

How inaccurate was this affirmation is shown by Mackenzie's presence among Macalister's colleagues, and the inclusion of Pring, Mackenzie's original fellow Minister, with Raff in Herbert's second Administration. With a wise disregard for Constitutional niceties, Herbert and his colleagues hurried through an agreement with the banks, without waiting for their re-election, which was then a necessary consequence of their accepting office. Pring failed to be re-elected, and Macalister returned to the Treasury bench, with all the popularity and none of the inconvenience which attached to his financial expedients.

The humour of it is that the staunch opponent of squatterdom dropped two previous assistants for two prominent squatters, McLean and Watt, preserving only with Charles Lilley, a third squatter, Bell. You notice that from three, the Cabinet had grown to include five members; so much the easier for its head to manipulate the parties.

Pring soon managed to re-enter Parliament, and assumed the leadership of the unreconciled opponents.

Short was the life of the new Cabinet, in spite of its advantage. The Legislative Assembly took objection to an internal redistribution of portfolios among its members, due to the opposition of squatter John Douglas to the conciliating temperaments of his colleagues on the land and immigration questions. Macalister did not resign, but dissolved Parliament, only postponing, however, his downfall till the new House met in August, 1867.

In the course of the electoral campaign a correspondent wrote to the "Courier" (June 1, p. 5, col. 6): "We are now witnessing in Queensland the struggle of two principles, ill-defined indeed, but real. . . . The squatting power has long been supreme, and although it has, at intervals, passed through several phases of apparent Liberalism, still, at heart, it has been and always will be the same. . . . Our squatters, as a body, have not learnt much from the experiences of their brethren in the South. . . . During the last half dozen years, a new power has been slowly rising, and for half that period, it has dared occasionally to try its strength as against the

old. It comprises the commercial, agricultural and mining interests. These form a phalanx which, if once well combined, is not easily broken. . . ."

That, however, did not materialise; the great interest of this particular electoral campaign lies on the contrary in the variety of its political cries: every article of future platforms seems to make its appearance. One candidate (Edmonstone, "Courier, June 10, p. 2, col. 1) called a meeting to consider what steps should be taken to secure a better representation in Parliament of the agricultural interests. Another (Smythe) declared himself in favour of Free-trade in every sense of the term, whilst a third (Pugh, "Courier," June 10, p. 2, col. 4) objected to the Government importing any goods that could be produced in the colony. On March 29th, a Protectionist League had been established. This first Protectionist Movement had its origin in the distress caused by the stoppage of public works after the failure of the Agra and Masterman Bank.

All these suggestions were, however, individual gropings after a policy. Every candidate propounded his own bunch of panaceas for colonial grievances, and much give and take had to be gone through before they could collect in numbers upon one common platform.

The one immediate consequence of the elections was the fall of Macalister. Far from being a success for the rising classes of our theorist in the "Courier," they gave Mackenzie an opportunity to gather what was called the Pure Merino Ministry: all approved squatters with the one exception of the Attorney-General, Ratcliffe Pring. Such unity, in the still nebulous state of the parties was a fatal weakness. They succeeded in passing the Polynesian Labourers Act, and so originated the kanaka question; then dissolved the third Parliament on August 27th, 1868.

During the subsequent campaign, Mackenzie and Macalister assumed actively the position of party leaders. In one case at least (Pritchard, "Courier," October 2nd, p. 2) the latter formally set up a candidate against a Minister, while the Government brought openly pressure to bear upon a local man (Captain Sadlier) to retire in favor of Hodgson, their fellow member.

This consolidation of parties, however incomplete, had indeed the results foreseen by the "Courier" contributor. Mackenzie found the new Parliament unmanage-

able, both sides being equal; he resigned, and Charles Lilley assumed the Premiership.

Personally, there was no doubt about Lilley's sympathies with Democratic aspirations. His views on education were, I think, far ahead of those of other colonials; and he started with a band of colleagues more homogeneous, if possible, than the merinoes of his predecessor. The same rock threatened, of course; and to steer his ship of State he had to resort to Herbert's expedient; frequent changes in his personnel. His position was further aggravated by an autocratic turn of mind, not uncommon among Democratic leaders. For instance, he abolished fees in primary schools without taking his colleagues' advice. The more merinoes found their way among them, the more untenable his position became, till at last he resigned.

### THIRD PERIOD, (1870-1888).

Critics of Mackenzie's Premiership accused him of being but the instrument of another squatter, Arthur Hunter Palmer. This man it was who now took in hand the reins, and with him, we reach our third period of evolution (1870-88).

For four years Palmer hung on to the Treasury Bench by means of yearly dissolutions. When at last he gave way, the true squatter element relinquished for ever its direct hold on local politics; as in business transactions, it relied henceforth on its town agents; the men who disposed of the wool and hides which the squatters produced. It was no longer trader against squatter, but rather, one might say, exporter against importer, a step towards the stage when it would become both importer and exporter against manufacturer.

The Parliament which had replaced Palmer by Macalister was the first in Queensland to last its normal term of five years. Twice the Premiership changed hands, but only by virtue of internal rearrangements within the Government party. The next Parliament (the eighth) brought about its fall and McIlwraith became Premier. The ninth reversed the position, and Sir Samuel Griffith took the helm; the tenth replaced the power in the hands of McIlwraith.

### FOURTH PERIOD (1888-1908).

This was in 1888, and by this time many important changes had taken place. This tenth Parliament was the first whose members were paid; and itself, it reduced from

5 to 3 years the duration of Parliament. The election campaign out of which it issued was notable also by the advent of the Labor Party on the political stage, and the preponderating importance of the Tariff question among its several issues.

The ascendancy of the trading class had matured its natural fruits: while nursing masses of customers, it had nursed competitors; the working classes, the consuming classes, had multiplied beyond control. In spite of the squatters' systematic preference for childless married couples, children had been born, who could not always, and were not often anxious to find room on the land. In town, the improved organisation of the importing and exporting business shut out the earlier prospects of the small but enterprising men. Bad seasons emphasised the difficulty; the European growth of the Labor and Socialist movements suggested new departures. Fresh economic outlets were sought in the building up of secondary industries, which, in turn, sharpened the conflict of interests between the buyers and sellers of labor.

These altered conditions in the electorate were reflected in the chequered career of this tenth Parliament, McIlwraith handing over to Morehead the leadership of his party and displacing towards its end, Griffith as leader of the other, which had meanwhile captured the Treasury Bench.

With the next Parliament, elected in 1893, in the midst of the worst crisis of Australian history, the Labor Party gained the strategical position of controlling third party; but, to tell how it used it, and how the menace of a common enemy forced the disunited employers to combine, would be a long story, which should be told apart.