

Reviews and Notices

The Election of 1868 (Columbia University Studies in History Economics and Public Law, number 392). By Charles H. Coleman. New York, 1933. Pp. 407, \$5.00.

This monograph in the field of party history has for a sub-title, "The Democratic Effort to Regain Control." The common view is that there was no chance whatever for the discredited, divided, disorganized Democratic party to win in 1868. Nevertheless, things just as strange have happened in the course of American party history. Though the general currents of party history are determined very largely by economic and social factors, the turn of events is often changed or greatly modified by personal ambitions or misunderstandings. Had not General Grant broken with President Johnson he could have become the candidate of the Democratic party, which might have changed very greatly the history of parties during the succeeding generation.

With the majority of the white men of the country in the Democratic ranks in 1868, as the author contends (p. 45), though many southern whites were disfranchised, it would seem that the re-born Republican party won a majority of the popular and electoral votes only because General Grant became the candidate. There was a chance for the Democratic party to nominate Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, but it is an open question whether he could have polled more votes than did Horatio Seymour. In fact the New York leader, whom the Democratic convention was stampeded into nominating, ran well under all the existing circumstances. He was not defeated on account of the reconstructed states of the South (p. 363). Though the author seems reluctant to accept the contention that the victory of General Grant was due to his widespread popularity, he does not disprove it. It is true that Seymour ran consistently behind Democratic candidates on state tickets, (p. 363) but even had this not been the case, he would still have met with defeat.

This study of the campaign and election of 1868 has been done in a praiseworthy manner. The chief actors have been handled without bias, and they have been made to stand out quite clearly. The sources have been judiciously used. The account is clear and satisfactory in regard to conditions issues

and men. The ease with which General Grant could cease to be a seemingly sincere supporter of the reconstruction policy of Lincoln and Johnson and become the hero of the Radicals is not made clear. The only explanation of the taking up of the General by the Radicals is interesting, but the matter is left shrouded in some mystery. Did Grant join the Radicals because of his break with Johnson or did he break with Johnson because the Radicals were anxious to take him up? This fascinating question is not well answered, but we have the interesting assertion (p. 85) that "the fall elections of 1867 showing a strong Democratic swing led the Radicals to cast their doubts aside and to accept Grant to avert their threatened defeat." The open rupture with the President which came on January 28, the author thinks "precluded any possibility of the Democrats nominating Grant". A not too definite conclusion is reached: "By the beginning of Grant's quarrel with Johnson (January 28, 1868), the movement for his nomination by the Republicans had achieved such proportions that it is doubtful if it could have been stopped even if the quarrel had not occurred." If this be correct, it is hard to understand why Johnson clung to Grant so long, unless he did not see the drift among the Republicans.

The aim of the author, as indicated in his sub-title, was to stress the part played by the Democratic party in the campaign of 1868, but it seems strange that he could so thoroughly ignore some salient facts about the Republican party. There is no mention of the Union party of the Civil War period and the illuminating article of William A. Dunning, "The Second Birth of the Republican Party" (*American Historical Review*, XVI, 56-63) is not listed in the bibliography. That the convention which nominated Grant and Colfax called itself the "Republican National Union Convention" is noticed, but nothing is said of the interesting and significant transformation of the Union party which had to take place between 1864 and 1868 before there could be a Republican party again. It would have been difficult to fuse the moderate men of the Union party with the Radicals into a successful party in 1868 without a candidate like General Grant.

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