

Presidential Campaigns Remembered By A Printer---1868

By LeROY ARMSTRONG

THERE was a total eclipse of the sun in the summer of 1868; and the Democrats had a rally in town that day. I was helping Henry Nichols in the harvest field, it seems to me; but it may have been later than that. They don't usually get the campaigns very red hot in July; and Indiana wheat harvests are in that month. But any way I heard the men talking about the speaking in the grove at the school house, and of how wicked a man "old Dave Turpie" was—the advertised orator of the day. And then the sky began to darken, and the chickens went to roost, and Henry remembered the paper had said there would be an eclipse. And it certainly fulfilled all prophecy, for the darkness was complete.

But to me it seemed this was the frown of the Almighty on the activities of the Democrats. It didn't occur to me that the eclipse would be quite as frowning on the Republican meeting to be held at Rochester, where Schuyler Colfax was speaking.

Grant was not only the idol, but the candidate. And some Democrats said they were going to vote for him because he had always been a Democrat. I think that made us Republicans madder than if they had attacked him. Old Mr. Covert, who had sent two boys to the war, but had remained at home himself, was sadly doubtful about Grant, because that leader of armies was reported to be not a total abstainer.

It was Seymour and Blair on the Democratic side, and there seemed no flaw in the moral character of either of them.

Still, we felt that Colfax—our own Indiana Colfax—would provide the moral balance for the ticket. He was so seraphically good.

Colfax was a great campaign speaker. I remember him in that summer delivering a speech in Plymouth, and asking: "What are the charges against me?" And then answering: "They say I am a smiler." Which was true. He did smile a good deal, and was handsome in his beard and with his pleasant, twinkling eyes. But he had made a good congressman and a capable speaker of the house.

That was a great year for rallies. My big brother belonged to the "Tanners' club" and marched in procession when they had Republican meetings in town. I wasn't supposed to be big enough for that, and went in the wagon with mother and my younger brother and sister. And I suppose ours was one of the wagons "without a voter in them" with which the Democratic paper taunted us in its report of the event.

The Tanners wore leather aprons, and oilcloth capes and red-white-and-blue caps; and they carried kerosene torches. The township bringing in the biggest delegation received a prize of money; and all the people gathered on some vacant lots and waited there a weary while, till the marshals of the

day were forming the line. And there was much pomp and circumstance. Union township sent a "ship of state," with thirty-six girls in white sitting uncomfortably but gloriously on the various decks. And the wagon wheels settled so deep in the soft earth that when the six-horse team started, they walked away with the front truck, and the prow of the ship dipped dangerously, then listed to port, and all the little girls came flying in wild leaps for safety, without a lifeboat to receive them. I don't think any one was hurt; but Union township didn't get the prize.

Some talented person had written a campaign song for the Tanners, and part of it ran this way:

Our leader is a tanner true,
For four long years he wore the blue,
And now where'er his ranks unroll
Each frightened serpent hunts his hole.
Then hunt, ye Tanners, hunt,
Then hunt, ye Tanners, hunt,
Hunt all the summer on the
Union line,
And tan their hides in the autumn.

"Serpent" was a reference to the "copperheads"—a term of reproach for the Democrats.

The whole day was given up to the celebration, and the town was full of teams. There was a good deal of drinking, though Mr. Covert told mother it was a good deal worse on Democratic rally days, which was a great consolation for all of us. And a good deal of a surprise, too; since I really couldn't see how it could have been much worse.

In the evening the torchlight processions were worth seeing. The lines were more than a mile long, and there was a great deal of cheering as the boys marched about the streets—and a good deal of singing of war songs, and the attempts at verse devised for the campaign.

One time while the line was standing John Corbaley stepped out of the ranks and offered to "wrassel" any man then in town, barring none on account of residence, age, weight or politics. And a man was hustled along from the waiting crowds on the wooden sidewalk, and the challenge was accepted.

They took off their outer garments and went at it rough and tumble. As in the fights of that period no man would think of using a weapon, so in the wrestles there was no hitting with the fist. But it was an awful trial of strength and skill, and finally John Corbaley got his enemy on his hip just as the command came for attention, and the accepter of the challenge went high in the air, then described a circle—I can still see his long legs, trousers in boot-tops, sweep a mighty arc—and then I still seem to hear the thud of him as his body struck the ground.

Corbaley hurried into his garments, picked up his torch, and caught step

Some people Point with Pride at the word juggler who can pick up a dornick and write a book about it. But as an ad. writer he would be only a Poor Boob.

with his comrades. A few people stooped over the man who had been thrown, but he was an unconsidered trifle, so far as the masses were concerned. He may be lying there yet. My big brother told me next day that the man Corbaley threw was a Democrat, and that the contest had been devised to shame the Republicans on their own rally day.

It must have been after 9 o'clock that night when we all got in the wagon and waited at the Edwards house corner for my big brother to get discharged, so he could go home with us. And a little group of bad boys came along, and one of them shouted the announcement that he could whip any blank Republican son of a sea-cook in town—or words to like effect. Maybe there was no Republican in town who answered the rest of the description. Any way, there was no fight, as I had fearfully expected there would be.

Stirred by patriotic fervor I wrote a poem that year, and took it to the Republican office in Plymouth. It must have been after 6 o'clock, for the editor was the only person still working. He was very pleasant, and promised to print the poem. Mean time, he talked to me about writing, and said that Mrs. Stewe had received more than ten thousand dollars for "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I have often wondered if the poem really were bad enough to warrant him in punishing me with that temptation.

The Republicans were not much afraid of the result of the election, but the Democrats appeared to be sanguine. And it was with a sort of sigh of relief and gratification that we read the result in the Chicago Tribune on Thursday. Grant was elected. The results of the war were secure. Treason had not won in voting what it had lost in fighting. The Union could not be dissolved, and slavery could not be extended. It was all very glorious. The wounds of war were healing. Business was very good. Three years had made a great difference. The armies that had followed Grant had

bent their spears to pruning hooks, and the fields of the great northwest were filling. There was plenty and prosperity, and a big horizon. We hadn't been very proud of Andy Johnson—and didn't pretend to defend him. But now there was an end of his equivocal contribution to Republican progress. Grant would be inaugurated in March. Colfax would be vice-president. All that Lincoln had hoped for, all he had worked for was now assured. The Union was complete. The south was friendly. The nation was perfected—everywhere.

The histories call Monroe's administration "the Era of Good Feeling." I doubt if it were more completely so than that which saw the beginning of the Grant regime.

JOY, OH, JOY!

Come and trip it as ye go,
On the light dramatic toe,
Dole abandon, dry the tear,
Ye who hope to enter here.

For our end and aim is Joy;
All our offerings brace and buoy;
We, whose watchword is "Be gay,"
We will chase old Care away.

Are you morbid, are you blue?
Is the weary world askew?—
Do not drown yourself in drink;
Come and laugh with Maesterflock.

Are you solemn, are you sad?—
Something Greek will make you glad.
Are you wallowing in grief?—
Ibsen will provide relief.

Are you troubled with the pip?—
There is balm in quirk and gulp.
Stridberg is the man you need;
He's the cheery little Swede!

Haste thee, then, and let us prance
In a Dionysiac dance.
Come and trip it as ye go
On the light dramatic toe.

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