

Politics 75 Years Ago.

The following letters deserve considerations for two reasons. They were written by one of the most distinguished men this county ever produced to one still more distinguished in the annals of the State and the nation. Both the writer of them and the receiver were distinguished statesmen and prominent politicians.

Hon. Amos Ellmaker, the writer of these letters, was of sturdy German ancestry. He was the grandson of Leonard Ellmaker, who came to Pennsylvania, from Germany, in 1726, and located in Earl township, this county. He was a farmer by occupation, and became a man of note in his community. His son, Nathaniel Ellmaker, the father of Amos, was noted all over this county as a man of more than average abilities. He was sent to the State Senate in 1796. He left behind him a reputation for great perseverance, independence and integrity, qualities which he transmitted to his still more distinguished son in the fullest measure.

Amos Ellmaker was born February 2, 1787. As he manifested no little ability as a boy, his father, whose means were ample, determined to give him all the advantages which a collegiate education could confer. He was, accordingly, sent to Yale College, where he graduated in due time. Later he entered and graduated from the then famous law school at Litchfield, Conn. His professional career was begun in Harrisburg, this State, where he soon became a successful practitioner.

He held an officer's commission in the Pennsylvania troops that marched to

the defense of Baltimore, in 1812. He served an appointment as Prosecuting Attorney for Dauphin county, and later was thrice elected to fill the same position. Meanwhile, his reputation was rapidly growing, and in 1814 he was elected to the Congress of the United States, but declined the honor, in order to accept the appointment of President Judge of the Judicial District comprising the counties of Dauphin, Lebanon and Schuylkill. This position he also resigned after a while, having been appointed Attorney General of the Commonwealth by Governor William Findley. That position he also resigned before the completion of his term, and, Harrisburg having lost its attractions for him, he removed to Lancaster, where he resided until the close of his life, on November 28, 1851.

The same measure of professional success which attended him at Harrisburg fell to his lot here. He took high standing at the Bar, and his name was a synonym for personal integrity and professional honor. He was one of those old-time lawyers who discouraged litigations and always advised the settlement of cases out of Court, where such a thing was possible. He always considered the interests of his clients rather than his own. With him personal honesty was the true foundation for all human excellence.

Although he was always more or less of a politician, that seductive profession could not win his affections from his first mistress, the law. When the anti-Masonic political wave swept over this State and country, in 1828, he became deeply engaged in it. Few parties had such a sudden rise and growth. In 1832 it was sufficiently strong and influential to place candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency in the

field. The candidate for the former office was the celebrated lawyer and orator, William Wirt, while Mr. Ellmaker was given the second place. It was while this very interesting Presidential canvass was in progress that the first of these letters was written.

Jackson and Calhoun headed the Democratic ticket; Henry Clay and John Sargeant that of the National Republicans. Clay was disastrously defeated, receiving only 79 electoral votes, to Jackson's 219. Wirt got the seven electoral votes of Vermont, no more, and a popular vote of only 33,108. I do not think that any well-informed politicians of the day believed in the possible success of the Anti-Masonic party and its candidates. The letters of Mr. Ellmaker themselves give no indication of any such belief. Their chief interest lies in their minute analysis of the prevailing and contending political factions which existed in this State at that time, and their speculations concerning the probabilities that might arise to turn the balance in this or that direction. It shows a very intimate acquaintance with the political situation, and incidentally reveals that even seventy-five years ago our forefathers understood the game of politics quite as well as we do now. In its freedom from vituperation and defamation, it sets an example which the politicians of to-day could follow with credit to themselves, something they are not likely to do, however.

F. R. D.

First Letter to Thaddus Stevens.

Lancaster, August 16, 1832.

Dear Sir: I rec'd your letter yesterday and had nearly finished a reply, when Mr. Alex. Pipe of Harg called and among other things informed me that the Clay State committee had met on Saturday & had agreed to permit the Clay men to vote as they pleased

for Gov.—& also agreed to convene the Clay convention directly after the election when the result of the election for Gov. should be known, to take some measures as might be deemed expedient relative to their electoral ticket.

I concur with you as to the effect on our party of the proceedings of the Clay party.—No movement on their part could serve us so effectively as their nominating a candidate of their own for Gov. or adopting Wolf. It would give us great increase of votes from Jackson men—& would I am confident make more than half the Clay men in the State not only vote for Ritner & Wirt, but become real and true anti-masons.

Next to the above, the best step they could take for us, was not to nominate or recommend Ritner. Such a nomination or recommendation would have injured our party & Ritner's vote to the extent of many thousand votes. The remotest suspicion of anti-masons combining with any other party or fragment of party, would be & ought to be injurious, if not fatal, to the election of Ritner.

The Clay masons and Clay leaders who are not masons will vote for Wolf—and most of them for Jackson—whether there be or be not Clay candidates for Gov. & electors, and if they could do so, they would carry the whole of the Clay men in the State with them to Wolf and Jackson. I am fully convinced that the exceptions, to this remark on the Clay leaders, masonic & unmasonic, are exceedingly few.

But they have discovered they cannot lead the body of Clay men to such extremes—tho' a large portion of them are not only disposed to vote for Ritner but to become anti-masons. Therefore they, the leaders make a merit of necessity, or endeavour to do so & ap-

pear to grant to Ritner, what they cannot withhold. And now if Ritner be elected, altho' not one or at least very few of the Clay masons & active Jacks will give him a vote, yet they will say that they (the Clay men) elected Ritner and gave him 20,000 votes. And they will say the same of Wolf, if he be elected.

I think it probable the Clay committee on Saturday would have recommended Ritner, had it not been for James Hopkins, who saved an entire party from so heavy a blow, by reason of his embittered opposition to anti-masonry. I presume he opposed it & did so lest it should benefit Ritner. So little do our opponents know of the character of the anti-masonic party.

Now after the election is ad; I fear indeed I feel certain they will abandon their electoral ticket—and then they will claim not only to have elected Ritner, but to have given him the electoral vote of the State. They will call themselves 20,000 strong, when I am confident they are not 7,000, or 5,000 real Clay men in the State. If Ritner be elected and the Clay electoral ticket stands it will not I believe receive 7—perhaps not 5,000 votes.

Some persons estimate the Clay party as the Adams & Clay parties were some yrs. ago. If the Jackson party be estimated in the same way—where is the anti-masonic party to be found?

I fervently wish they would keep up their electoral ticket—it would show them their strength, or rather their weakness in the State. It would have the all important effect of preventing any of the Clay men, as Clay men, from claiming anything from Ritner or the anti-masonic party. For surely no one who would vote for Clay (any more than one who votes for Jackson) can be so imprudent & silly as to pretend to be anything of an anti-mason.

It is not pretended that Clay masons take different oaths from those taken by Jackson masons. Besides as every one must know that the election of Clay would effect anti-masonry more & more, than the election of Jackson, those who support the election of Clay must be more inveterate in their opposition to anti-masonry than those who support Jackson. A man must be supposed to produce that effect, which he knows will be the consequence of his own voluntary act.

I verily believe that the Clay partys running their own electoral ticket will give more votes than their abandonment of it. If the Clay men adhere to their electoral ticket, I mean if the Clay leaders keep up that ticket, it will satisfy the most scrupulous and fearful that anti-masons are pure, single hearted & upright, & give ~~ts~~ increased numbers of votes from those who are now adherents of Jackson, from attachment to what they honestly tho' mistakenly call the democratic party. And moreover, it would actually, as I believe give us additional votes from honest Clay men of the country. In short, I think Wirt will get more Clay votes, if there be a Clay electoral ticket, than he can possibly get if this ticket be withdrawn. Let the Clay men be seen pushing their own electoral ticket, and thousands of the honest men of the party will be convinced that altho' they may prefer Clay to Jackson, they prefer Jackson to Wirt & masonry to everything in the world.

But suppose these conjectures to be wrong—suppose that the running of a Clay electoral ticket should deprive Wirt of the electoral vote of the State—(a supposition which I do not now & never shall admit to be at all possible)—be it so. Let Jackson get the vote of this State and be elected by

the electors of the Union—rather than anti-masonry should bend a hairs-breadth from its erect and lofty bearings.

Next to the election of Wirt by the electors of U. S. (an event manifestly impossible), I should prefer Jackson being elected by the electors. If the election of Prest. devolves on the A. S. Clay will be chosen. Masonry will determine the matter in a considerable degree—or at least may be well supposed to have influence. If it be believed in Congress that the election of Clay would do more to curb or suppress anti-masonry than that of Jackson, for when would even Pa. vote if the vote of Pa. for Clay were necessary to his election?

Another idea on what I was before speaking of^d is worthy of note. Many, too many, of our papers and politicians are courting the Clay votes for Ritner & Wirt. They forget that former Jackson men also have their prejudices & that with many, very many, anti-masons who were Jackson men there is a strong disposition to give Jackson the electoral vote of Pa., & prevent the election of Prest. going to the H. R., & giving to Clay another chance in that body. These men of whom I now speak are honest, sincere & true anti-masons, tho' limited in their views in the estimation of Clay men. They prefer Wirt, of course—but, believing that he has no chance, their second choice is Jackson. Now, is it not as important to keep these men firm to Wirt as to forfeit them to a certainty by our going & courting for some slippery votes of Clay men, & of Clay men, too, who disclaim anti-masonry? The Adams and Lancaster county anti-masonic papers are sound on this head, but how few follow them! I was a decided advocate of Jackson in 1824 & 1828—and I know that if Wirt loses the electoral

vote of Pa. it will be from being abandoned by anti-masons, who were Jackson men formerly, on account of honest suspicions and belief on their part, that too many of the anti-masonic party are anti-Jackson men, rather than anti-masons, and seeking alliance with the advocates of Clay. As a former advocate of Jackson, I have the opportunity of knowing the feelings of the anti-masons, who were & are opposed to Clay—feeling while it is almost vain to attempt to repress, refute those who entertain them, can point to so many anti-masonic newspapers, whose whole object seems to be not to make anti-masons of Clay men, but to convince the latter that they ought to become anti-masons, & need not do so in order to obtain the first rank and the first honors of the anti-masonic party. If such conduct was only deeply degrading, we might pity its authors—but it is also extremely injurious, & is repelling from the support of our cause, hundreds of & thousands of men who were supporters of Jackson. In Lancaster county the cause of Ritner is now sustaining injury by this conduct.

Of Luzerne county, which you mention, I have no particular authentic information. The anti-masonic paper there seems to be a pretty good and spirited one. Of Berks, I still rely very confidently on the information obtained there by Mr. Parke, corroborated by many letters & others who have lately been there. Of Montgomery I can add nothing to what Mr. Parke got in Norristown, but I think he is correct that the election there will be close. In Chester the estimate of a majority of near 3,000 was based on the ground that most of the Bar-room party, as they are called, would vote for Ritner. This seems likely to be the case, as there are strong rumors of the Wolf men & Barroom men of

the county having smoked the calumet of peace together. Indeed, it is not impossible that the union which I confidently anticipated 3 mos. ago, of Van B. (Buren) men & Wolf men, may soon take place, & Wilkins withdraw, & Van B. hoisted in Pa.

I would vastly prefer the election of Van B. to that of Sargeant, so far as anti-masonry is concerned. Mr. Rush says—"Mr. S. is, I have reason to know, a very bitter enemy of our cause"—and this comports with information rec'd from a variety of other sources equally entitled to confidence. If the death or resignation of Jackson should make Van B. President he should be more readily ousted by anti-masonry in 1836 than Sargeant. But this leads to a topic that would add another sheet to this long talk—while I stop with the request to you to write as often as you can.

I am respectfully,

Your friend,
AMOS ELLMAKER.

August 16, 1832.

Thaddeus Stevens, Esq.

Second Letter to Same.

Lancaster, July 16, 1850.

D. Sir: Of all the plans of reconciling the North & South, that of extending the Missouri-compromise line to the Pacific appears to me to be the worst.

It would cut off more than half of New Mexico; and almost half of California.

In theory it is plausible to have slavery south of that line established or not, as the people may direct, but in practice there will be slavery authorized by the people, if only one voter in twenty be a slaveholder. The slaveholders will, of course, vote for it; so will their relatives and most of their friends, and also all persons that want to be deemed liberal.

In Pa. the majority were not 1-20 of the voters; yet they elected their Governor at every election except in 1835.

In the N. W. counties of Va. & Md. I have been told that the slaveholders are not 1-20 of the voters; yet the slaveholders carry every election.

Your speech of June 10 is as much or more read than the one of July 20.

But what surprises me most is the fact that both contain so much of new arguments, or old ones in a new form, although my opinions on the subject do not differ from yours; & I have always read and looked over everything I ever saw on either side.

To attempt to please opponents is idle. G. M. Dallas got 3 votes at the Baltimore Convention of 1848. Of all feelings, contempt is the hardest to conceal. In public the masons praised the jacks for liberality, but despised them in reality. The anti-masons they hated, but did not despise.

If Stanley's Galphin speech on defaulters of the democratic party be published in pamphlet form, I will thank you for a copy. (On the back of this letter Mr. Stevens has written: "Amos Ellmaker; Send Stanley's speech on the Galphin — —.") Not that it will have any political effect. If the democrats cannot answer a charge triumphantly, they wisely say nothing about it.

Their plan is to keep their opponents on the defensive, and, without such a practice, no party can succeed—except temporarily. On the contrary, most of the Whigs endeavor to answer every charge; & they are almost always on the defensive.

A charge can be made in a few words, which everybody reads; the answer is unusually long, which few read.

I just now see by the Lancaster Tribune that a Union caucus at Washington have agreed to give such part

of New Mexico as lies north of 34 to Texas.

Latitude 34 cuts Alabama, Mississippi and S. Carolina; & prohibits slavery in N. M.

If that part of New Mexico lying south of 34 be given to Texas, we shall see if Texas won't repeal that so-called law of God.

This, like all other letters, is to yourself alone.

I am respectfully,

Your friend,

AMOS ELLMAKER.

Thaddeus Stevens, Esq.

The Litchfield Law School, where Mr. Ellmaker received his legal education, was established in 1782, by the Hon. Tapping Reeve, Chief Justice of Connecticut, and continued under his sole direction until 1798, when the Hon. J. Gould became associated with him. They conducted it jointly until 1820. From this latter date until 1833, when it was discontinued, Judge Gould alone conducted it. It was the first, and for many years the only, Law School in the United States. The usual course was completed in fourteen months, including two vacations of four weeks each. The terms were, \$100 for the first year and \$60 for the second. Lectures were delivered every day, usually occupying an hour and a-half each. Students were required to write out the lectures as fully as possible. Examinations were held every Saturday on the lectures of the preceding week. Moot Court was held at least once each week. When not attending lectures, the students were required to read the most approved legal authors and in searching out the authorities referred to in the lectures.

Some of the ablest legal luminaries of the first third of the nineteenth century were graduated from this school.

Its reputation was deservedly high all over the country. The 1,015 men who graduated from it were drawn from twenty of the then existing States of the Union. The Southern States were largely represented in its catalogues. In one year (1813) fifty-four men were graduated from it. In various other years nearly as many. In 1806, the year in which Mr. Ellmaker graduated, the number was twenty-one. As some indication of the class of men this famous Law School turned out, I may add that, of its graduates, sixteen became United States Senators, fifty members of Congress, forty Judges of higher State Courts, eight Chief Justices of States, two Justices of the United States Supreme Court, ten Governors of States, five Cabinet Ministers, while many became distinguished at the Bar. I question whether any school of any kind in this country, numbering so few graduates, has been able to show such a record as the Litchfield Law School.

F. R. D.

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