The Three Great Theories of Suffrage,
by
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Outline

I. Introduction.
   1. Medieval relation of government to the governed.
   2. The highest object.
   3. Accompanying results.
   4. Right.
   5. Virtue.

Discussion

II. The first theory of suffrage.
   1. Its connection with past experience.
   2. Its place of birth.
   4. The outgrowth.
      a. Relation to masses.
      b. Relation to rulers.
   5. Principle involved in the theory.

III. The second theory and its relation to modern nations.
   1. Its basic principles.
      a. Utility.
      b. Common welfare.
   2. What it comprehends.
   3. Experiments.
      a. Results.
4. The views of others.
5. The great evil of the system.
6. The necessary requirement.
7. The guarantee not secured.

IV. The Third theory.
1. The basic principle Right
2. Individual rights
3. Governmental rights
4. The required knowledge.
5. The Cardinal Features
   a. Relation of the individual to himself
   b. " " " " to other individual
   c. " " " " to the government as an organized whole.
6. The power vested in the individual.
7. The philosophy of suffrage and what it comprehends.

V. Conclusion
1. What the future assures.
2. The friends of good government.
3. Good will assert itself the victor.
"All governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed."

The relation of the governed to the government was in the not far distant past, very much the same as the relation of the slave to his master. A few persons stood beneath the canopy of a throne, embodying in them selves all that might be implied in the phrase: "The divine right of kings." To conquer was their highest ambition. Before the sway of their scepter a nation would spring into being: a tribe to be exterminated; a kingdom vanquished. They knew not right as we today interpret it. Is it might mean any wrong exercised in the interest of self aggrandizement? Virtue with them was at its best viewed from the present, a personification of the vulgar and uncouth. What little good there was was buried beneath a mountain of sorrow, suffering and pain, deceit, dishonesty and crime.

We regard the past as valuable...
for the lessons it teaches to us. It tells us what the experiences of those who have gone before have been, and whether those experiments have been fraught with dangers, menacing the peace and safety of individuals and nations alike; or whether they have been made apart of the world's great progressive structure. From it then we learn what has been good in the world, and what has been bad. What the world has seen fit to save, and what it has seen fit to destroy. This is not meant to imply that all good has been saved, and all bad destroyed. From its written pages we read a record and judge for ourselves whether or not they did a righteous act or an ever lasting wrong. We are able to appreciate, the lessons made proved by the blood of millions of noble and heroic souls, showing us the necessity of planting in our time the policy of peace.

To the past we must turn in the consideration of the first theory of suffrage. It is really a relic of
antiquity, though to come at the present time, it appeals most forcibly. Born amid the horrors of a mediæval age, its object could not have been based on a real moral purpose, yet as an unobserved element, a moral feature intrudes. The system is the outgrowth of a necessity. For ages the conflict of power had been waged, with no apparent end in view save that of gaining glory on battlefields—the demonstrating of power—the maintaining of a national supremacy. Life apparently had no real value whatever. At best, the condition of affairs was deplorable. But out of this came the desire to live, that is the desire to retain life until nature sees fit to remove it. It is a desire to live on the part of struggling humanity—a desire on the part of rulers to preserve as far as possible the lives of their subjects, for the sake of power, knowing that here lies the secret of their strength. We have then the first theory of suffrage, as that which assumes shape and form, when man is
making his infant struggles for existence.

The policy of blindly destroying life makes a nation invincible even though victory crowns it in battle. It was self-evident that war could not be wholly avoided—conflicts must be fought. Yet it became obvious that a policy should be adopted, which would work in the interest of all concerned. A knowledge of the exact number of individuals in a nation would meet a long felt want. Rulers saw an economy in counting heads. Knowing this available force and the force of their antagonist, they would know when it was policy to wage a war, and when it was policy to sue for peace. Sectional and national factions derived from it an advantage in knowing the strength possessed by each other. With a moderate degree of safety, the faction of greatest strength could impose its views on the opposition. Here then lies the basic principle involved in this theory. It is the canvassing
of the forces in society, in the interest of society, determining the forces arrayed on the various contending sides. As a secondary factor embodying a moral element, it has the feature of preventing to a great extent an uncalled-for, extravagant sacrifice of life.

The second and more modern theory of suffrage is that one upon which the greater number of nations depend for the expression of views held by the governed, on the various questions relating to the general welfare. The system is the outgrowth of the development of freedom in the modern nations. It has for its basic principles utility and common welfare. It comprehends a liberty of action, in compliance with the immediate wish, the immediate want, the immediate desire of the common wealth to the accomplishment of some determined end. The ultimate result being unknown, the power to change or modify the action, in accordance with change of policy as the experiment proves successful or unsuccessful. In other
words, the expression of the views held on a subject at one time by the commonwealth, and again the expression of the views held at a future time. There is in this system an instability of action, exemplified in the oceans’ calm and storm, a resting in the lap of peace. A tossing on the topmost wave of a popular enthusiasm. Under this system of suffrage the third action of the people may easily induce a revolution—thrive a nation—obliterate a government. The result of a governmental experiment is generally learned too late. The evil that it does lives after it. That which seemed to satisfy the views of all is found to be an instrument of ruin. How true, deeds done with out due consideration—acts gone beyond recall, work harm, untold. Mr. Spencer says, the vote of each individual is the expression of the want that he feels, so the votes of a nation are the product of a generally felt want.” In replying to this, Mr. Fournier said, “The individual cannot feel or account for a general
want, especially when they concern international affairs." This seems to me the proper answer to give to Mr. Spencer. It can hardly conceive that a general want is the result of a number of simple wants. It is apparent that aside from moral and aesthetic interests there are others (from the standpoint of this theory superior) economical and political of which the individual as a man can have neither knowledge nor means feeling. On this point Mr. Spencer says: "Although the vote of the people is not the expression of absolute utility and truth, it is the people's understanding of them, and of what they are ready to maintain." Here Mr. Spencer gives a hint of the great and ever shadowing evil of this system. It lies in a lack of considerate action on the part of the masses—more properly perhaps lack of foresight. Lack of understanding of questions under consideration, ignorance, pure ignorance if you please. They act with regard to the present without a thought of the future.
The ultimate outcome of their action does not appeal to them. The masses act instinctively and not reflectively. They are made the sport or victims of intrigue—played upon by dishonest, deceitful demagogues, as the pianist plays upon his instrument—swept hither and thither by changing winds, they give to those who desire it, a coveted power; and awake to the realization that the fallen masque discloses behind the nation's battlements an over power ing foe—The result of a false conception—fruit of thoughtlessness. Here we find the truth of John Stuart Mill's statement "that the best interest of democracy consists in giving the different classes force enough to make reason prevail, but not enough to prevail against reason." The truth is apparent. The existing organization of suffrage does not and cannot secure this guarantee.

The third theory lies within the province, "Justice is to all men a Temple. More high and noble is it than those
those theories based on force and interest. Around it clusters all the virtues of good government—The elements which entered into true nobility of life—the foundation of all good. Based on right, it embodies a just appreciation of the rights of self, the rights of others and the rights of nations. No man under this system can claim for himself a single right he does not delegate to every one else. Equal rights then is a concomitant of this system, in so far as this right to use with due consideration for the betterment of all. The individual must learn the rights that are coherent in self. The delegated rights accorded to him and in concordance with these he must learn to act with considerateness. He must learn to control self—to be able to withstand the flattery of those who would destroy. In other words he must learn to think—Think for himself—Be his own reasoner.

It is required of us that we see in suffrage more than one feature.
Seeing simply the individual, the contractual or the social side implies a narrowness of view, not [prepar]able with the casual thinker. He sees in the subject not one but all the three cardinal features: The relation of the individual to himself, The relation of the individual to other individuals as such—And the relation of the individual to the state as an organized whole. From these basic principles we draw the conclusion that each individual has vested in him power to govern himself. That through the medium of the ballot he exercises a power over others, and that he possesses a right to exercise a social function through the same medium in the name of the state. These statements comprehend all there is in the philosophy of suffrage. First, to vanquish the way of demagogism; second, to stimulate public enterprise; third, to encourage all high efforts of intelligence; and forth, to stimulate and encourage popular education. This
is the province of the true theory of suffrage. It inspires with grand ideas of public morals, civic virtues, and patriotism. Liberty now demands that there must be a comprehensive political education in all democracies. Modeled and directed by honesty and intelligence, suffrage will be, as has been said, "useful by means of the wheel which, as the flywheel of a machine regulates and augments the force of the motor."

In the great struggle of the nation for existence the future will assure to those who seek to comprehend the highest interests of intelligence, moral and social culture, the highest attainments in grandeur and power. The friends of good government will ever endeavor to raise the general average. They will ever be found with their shoulder at the wheel of reform and progress. Ever endeavoring to broaden the intellect — securing a wider knowledge of facts and other functions of intellectual power. Knowing that in it lies the eternal
certainty, that if you give to the power of life a reasonable chance to do their work, right will subdue wrong, truth will subdue falsehood, and in general good will be stronger than evil.
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