

The Three Great Theories
of Suffrage,

by

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I

"All governments derive their just powers 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 themselves 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 be exterminated - a kingdom vanquished. They knew not right as we today interpret it. To them 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. That little good there was was buried beneath a mountain of sorrow, suffering and pain, deceit, dishonesty and crime.

We regard the past as valuable

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for the lessons it teaches to us. It tells us what the experiments of those who have gone before have been; and whether these 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. That 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 sacred by the blood of millions of noble and heroic souls, showing us the necessity of planting in our time the policy of peace.

II To the past we must turn in the consideration of the first theory of suffrage. It is really a relic of

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antiquity, though to some, ^{at} the present time, it appeals most forcibly. Born amid the horrors of a ~~medieval~~ 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 battle fields—The demonstrating of power—The maintaining of a national supremacy. Life apparently had no real value what-so-ever. 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 weaker even though victory crowns it in battle. It was self evident that wars could not be wholly averted - 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 their 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. There then lies the basic principle involved in this theory. It is the canvassing

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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.

III

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 principals 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 ^{maintain} change or modify the action, in accordance with change of policy, as the experiment proves successful or unsuccessful, ^{is coherent in it.} In other

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words the expression of the views held on a subject at one time by the commonwealth, and again the expression of their 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 top most wave of a popular enthusiasm. Under this system of suffrage the blind action of the people may easily induce a revolution—Divide 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 which, Mr. Fouillée, said, "The individual cannot feel or account for a general

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want, especially when they concern international affairs." This seems to me the proper answer to give to Mr. Spencer. We can hardly conceive that a general want is the result of a number of simple wants. It is apparent that aside from moral and æsthetic 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 near 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 peoples understanding of them, and of what they are ready to maintain." Here Mr. Spencer gives a hint of the great and over 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 with out a thought of the future.

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The ultimate outcome of this 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 pianoist 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 battlement, an over powering foe—The result of a false conception—Fruit of thoughtlessness. Here we find the truth of John Stuart Mill's statement "That the best interests 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.

IV

The third theory lies within the province, "Justice 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
 enter 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- be used 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.

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Seeing simply the individual, the contractual or the social side implies a narrowness of view, not permissible 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 fourth, to stimulate and encourage popular education. This

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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. Moved and directed by honesty and intelligence suffrage will be as has been said, "useful by means of its sheer inertia, as the flywheel of a machine regulates and augments the force of the motor."

V In the great struggle of the Nations
V For existence the future will assure
to those who best comprehend the
highest interests of intelligence, moral
and social culture, the highest attain-
ments in grandeur and power. The friends
of good government will ever be endeavoring
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 exists the eternal

certainly, that - if you give to the powers
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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