IX

DEMOCRACY

All the talk, all the aspiration and work that is making now towards this conception of a world securely at peace, under the direction of a League of Free Nations, has interwoven with it an idea that is often rather felt than understood, the idea of Democracy. Not only is justice to prevail between race and race and nation and nation, but also between man and man; there is to be a universal respect for human life throughout the earth; the world, in the words of President Wilson, is to be made "safe for democracy." I would like to subject that word to a certain scrutiny to see whether the things we are apt to think and assume about it correspond exactly with the feeling of the word. I would like to ask what, under modern conditions, does democracy mean, and whether we have got it now anywhere in the world in its fulness and completion.

And to begin with I must have a quarrel with the word itself. The eccentricities of modern education make us dependent for a number of our primary political terms upon those used by the thinkers of the small Greek republics of ancient times before those petty states collapsed, through sheer political ineptitude, before the Macedonians. They thought in terms of states so small that it was possible to gather all the citizens together for the purposes of legislation. These states were scarcely more than what we English might call sovereign urban districts.

Fast communications were made by runners; even the policeman with a bicycle of the modern urban district was beyond the scope of the Greek imagination. There were no railways, telegraphs, telephones, books or newspapers, there was no need for the state to maintain a system of education, and the affairs of the state were so simple that they could be discussed and decided by the human voice and open voting in an assembly of all the citizens. That is what democracy, meant. In Andorra, or perhaps in Canton Uri, such democracy may still be possible; in any other modern state it cannot exist. The opposite term to it was oligarchy, in which a small council of men controlled the affairs of the state. Oligarchy, narrowed down to one man, became monarchy. If you wished to be polite to an oligarchy you called it an aristocracy; if you wished to point out that a monarch was rather by way of being self-appointed, you called him a Tyrant. An oligarchy with a property qualification was a plutocracy.

Now the modern intelligence, being under a sort of magic slavery to the ancient Greeks, has to adapt all these terms to the problems of states so vast and complex that they have the same relation to the Greek states that the anatomy of a man has to the anatomy of a jellyfish. They are not only greater in extent and denser in population, but they are increasingly innervated by more and more rapid means of communication and excitement. In the classical past--except for such special cases as the feeding of Rome with Egyptian corn--trade was a traffic in luxuries or slaves, war a small specialized affair of infantry and horsemen in search of slaves and loot, and empire the exaction of tribute. The modern state must conduct its enormous businesses through a system of

ministries; its vital interests go all round the earth; nothing that any ancient Greek would have recognized as democracy is conceivable in a great modern state. It is absolutely necessary, if we are to get things clear in our minds about what democracy really means in relation to modern politics, first to make a quite fresh classification in order to find what items there really are to consider, and then to inquire which seem to correspond more or less closely in spirit with our ideas about ancient democracy.

Now there are two primary classes of idea about government in the modern world depending upon our conception of the political capacity of the common man. We may suppose he is a microcosm, with complete ideas and wishes about the state and the world, or we may suppose that he isn't. We may believe that the common man can govern, or we may believe that he can't. We may think further along the first line that he is so wise and good and right that we only have to get out of his way for him to act rightly and for the good of all mankind, or we may doubt it. And if we doubt that we may still believe that, though perhaps "you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time," the common man, expressing himself by a majority vote, still remains the secure source of human wisdom. But next, while we may deny this universal distribution of political wisdom, we may, if we are sufficiently under the sway of modern ideas about collective psychology, believe that it is necessary to poke up the political indifference and inability of the common man as much as possible, to thrust political ideas and facts upon him, to incite him to a watchful and critical attitude towards them, and above all to secure his assent to the

proceedings of the able people who are managing public affairs. Or finally, we may treat him as a thing to be ruled and not consulted. Let me at this stage make out a classificatory diagram of these elementary ideas of government in a modern country.

CLASS I. It is supposed that the common man can govern:

(1) without further organization (Anarchy);

(2) through a majority vote by delegates.

CLASS II. It is supposed that the common man cannot govern, and that government therefore must be through the agency of Able Persons who may be classified under one of the following sub-heads, either as

(1) persons elected by the common man because he believes them to be persons able to govern--just as he chooses his doctors as persons able to secure health, and his electrical engineers as persons able to attend to his tramways, lighting, etc., etc.;

(2) persons of a special class, as, for example, persons born and educated to rule (e.g. Aristocracy), or rich business adventurers (Plutocracy) who rule without consulting the common man at all.

To which two sub-classes we may perhaps add a sort of intermediate stage between them, namely:

(3) persons elected by a special class of voter.

Monarchy may be either a special case of Class II.(1), (2) or (3), in which the persons who rule have narrowed down in number to one person, and the duration of monarchy may be either for life or a term of years. These two classes and the five sub-classes cover, I believe, all the elementary political types in our world.

Now in the constitution of a modern state, because of the conflict and confusion of ideas, all or most of these five sub-classes may usually be found intertwined. The British constitution, for instance, is a complicated tangle of arrangements, due to a struggle between the ideas of Class I.(2), Class II.(3), tending to become Class II.(1) and Class II.(2) in both its aristocratic and monarchist forms. The American constitution is largely dominated by Class I.(2), from which it breaks away in the case of the President to a short-term monarchist aspect of Class II.(1). I will not elaborate this classification further. I have made it here in order to render clear first, that what we moderns mean by democracy is not what the Greeks meant at all, that is to say, direct government by the assembly of all the citizens, and secondly and more important, that the word "democracy" is being used very largely in current discussion, so that it is impossible to say in any particular case whether the intention is Class I.(2) or Class II.(1), and that we have to make up our minds whether we mean, if I may coin two phrases, "delegate democracy" or "selective democracy," or some definite combination of these two, when we talk about "democracy," before we can get on much beyond a generous gesture of equality and enfranchisement

towards our brother man. The word is being used, in fact, confusingly for these two quite widely different things.

Now, it seems to me that though there has been no very clear discussion of the issue between those two very opposite conceptions of democracy, largely because of the want of proper distinctive terms, there has nevertheless been a wide movement of public opinion away from "delegate democracy" and towards "selective democracy." People have gone on saying "democracy," while gradually changing its meaning from the former to the latter. It is notable in Great Britain, for example, that while there has been no perceptible diminution in our faith in democracy, there has been a growing criticism of "party" and "politicians," and a great weakening in the power and influence of representatives and representative institutions. There has been a growing demand for personality and initiative in elected persons. The press, which was once entirely subordinate politically to parliamentary politics, adopts an attitude towards parliament and party leaders nowadays which would have seemed inconceivable insolence in the days of Lord Palmerston. And there has been a vigorous agitation in support of electoral methods which are manifestly calculated to subordinate "delegated" to "selected" men.

The movement for electoral reform in Great Britain at the present time is one of quite fundamental importance in the development of modern democracy. The case of the reformers is that heretofore modern democracy has not had a fair opportunity of showing its best possibilities to the world, because the methods of election have persistently set aside the better types of public men, or rather of would-be public men, in favour

of mere party hacks. That is a story common to Britain and the American democracies, but in America it was expressed in rather different terms and dealt with in a less analytical fashion than it has been in Great Britain. It was not at first clearly understood that the failure of democracy to produce good government came through the preference of "delegated" over "selected" men, the idea of delegation did in fact dominate the minds of both electoral reformers and electoral conservatives alike, and the earlier stages of the reform movement in Great Britain were inspired not so much by the idea of getting a better type of representative as by the idea of getting a fairer representation of minorities. It was only slowly that the idea that sensible men do not usually belong to any political "party" took hold. It is only now being realized that what sensible men desire in a member of parliament is honour and capacity rather than a mechanical loyalty to a "platform." They do not want to dictate to their representative; they want a man they can trust as their representative. In the fifties and sixties of the last century, in which this electoral reform movement began and the method of Proportional Representation was thought out, it was possible for the reformers to work untroubled upon the assumption that if a man was not necessarily born a

> "... little Liber-al,
> or else a little Conservative,"

he must at least be a Liberal-Unionist or a Conservative Free-Trader. But seeking a fair representation for party minorities, these reformers produced a system of voting at once simple and incapable of

manipulation, that leads straight, not to the representation of small parties, but to a type of democratic government by selected best men.

Before giving the essential features of that system, it may be well to state in its simplest form the evils at which the reform aims. An election, the reformers point out, is not the simple matter it appears to be at the first blush. Methods of voting can be manipulated in various ways, and nearly every method has its own liability to falsification. We may take for illustration the commonest, simplest case--the case that is the perplexity of every clear-thinking voter under British or American conditions--the case of a constituency in which every elector has one vote, and which returns one representative to Parliament. The naive theory on which people go is that all the possible candidates are put up, that each voter votes for the one he likes best, and that the best man wins. The bitter experience is that hardly ever are there more than two candidates, and still more rarely is either of these the best man possible. Suppose, for example, the constituency is mainly Conservative. A little group of pothouse politicians, wire-pullers, busybodies, local journalists, and small lawyers, working for various monetary interests, have "captured" the local Conservative organization. They have time and energy to capture it, because they have no other interest in life except that. It is their "business," and honest men are busy with other duties. For reasons that do not appear these local "workers" put up an unknown Mr. Goldbug as the official Conservative candidate. He professes a generally Conservative view of things, but few people are sure of him and few people trust him. Against him the weaker (and therefore still more venal) Liberal

organization now puts up a Mr. Kentshire (formerly Wurstberg) to represent the broader thought and finer generosities of the English mind. A number of Conservative gentlemen, generally too busy about their honest businesses to attend the party "smokers" and the party cave, realize suddenly that they want Goldbug hardly more than they want Wurstberg. They put up their long-admired, trusted, and able friend Mr. Sanity as an Independent Conservative.

Every one knows the trouble that follows. Mr. Sanity is "going to split the party vote." The hesitating voter is told, with considerable truth, that a vote given for Mr. Sanity is a vote given for Wurstberg. At any price the constituency does not want Wurstberg. So at the eleventh hour Mr. Sanity is induced to withdraw, and Mr. Goldbug goes into Parliament to misrepresent this constituency. And so with most constituencies, and the result is a legislative body consisting largely of men of unknown character and obscure aims, whose only credential is the wearing of a party label. They come into parliament not to forward the great interests they ostensibly support, but with an eye to the railway jobbery, corporation business, concessions and financial operations that necessarily go on in and about the national legislature. That in its simplest form is the dilemma of democracy. The problem that has confronted modern democracy since its beginning has not really been the representation of organized minorities--they are very well able to look after themselves--but the protection of the unorganized mass of busily occupied, fairly intelligent men from the tricks of the specialists who work the party machines. We know Mr. Sanity, we want Mr. Sanity, but we are too busy to watch the incessant intrigues to oust him in favour of

the obscurely influential people, politically docile, who are favoured by the organization. We want an organizer-proof method of voting. It is in answer to this demand, as the outcome of a most careful examination of the ways in which voting may be protected from the exploitation of those who work elections, that the method of Proportional Representation with a single transferable vote has been evolved. It is organizer-proof. It defies the caucus. If you do not like Mr. Goldbug you can put up and vote for Mr. Sanity, giving Mr. Goldbug your second choice, in the most perfect confidence that in any case your vote cannot help to return Mr. Wurstberg.

With Proportional Representation with a single transferable vote (this specification is necessary, because there are also the inferior imitations of various election-riggers figuring as proportional representation), it is impossible to prevent the effective candidature of independent men of repute beside the official candidates.

The method of voting under the Proportional Representation system has been ignorantly represented as complex. It is really almost ideally simple. You mark the list of candidates with numbers in the order of your preference. For example, you believe A to be absolutely the best man for parliament; you mark him 1. But B you think is the next best man; you mark him 2. That means that if A gets an enormous amount of support, ever so many more votes than he requires for his return, your vote will not be wasted. Only so much of your vote as is needed will go to A; the rest will go to B. Or, on the other hand, if A has so little support that his chances are hopeless, you will not have thrown your

vote away upon him; it will go to B. Similarly you may indicate a third, a fourth, and a fifth choice; if you like you may mark every name on your paper with a number to indicate the order of your preferences. And that is all the voter has to do. The reckoning and counting of the votes presents not the slightest difficulty to any one used to the business of computation. Silly and dishonest men, appealing to still sillier audiences, have got themselves and their audiences into humorous muddles over this business, but the principles are perfectly plain and simple. Let me state them here; they can be fully and exactly stated, with various ornaments, comments, arguments, sarcastic remarks, and digressions, in seventy lines of this type.

It will be evident that, in any election under this system, any one who has got a certain proportion of No. 1 votes will be elected. If, for instance, five people have to be elected and 20,000 voters vote, then any one who has got 4001 first votes or more must be elected. 4001 votes is in that case enough to elect a candidate. This sufficient number of votes is called the quota, and any one who has more than that number of votes has obviously got more votes than is needful for election. So, to begin with, the voting papers are classified according to their first votes, and any candidates who have got more than a quota of first votes are forthwith declared elected. But most of these elected men would under the old system waste votes because they would have too many; for manifestly a candidate who gets more than the quota of votes needs only a fraction of each of these votes to return him. If, for instance, he gets double the quota he needs only half each vote. He takes that fraction, therefore, under this new and better system, and

the rest of each vote is entered on to No. 2 upon that voting paper. And so on. Now this is an extremely easy job for an accountant or skilled computer, and it is quite easily checked by any other accountant and skilled computer. A reader with a bad arithmetical education, ignorant of the very existence of such a thing as a slide rule, knowing nothing of account keeping, who thinks of himself working out the resultant fractions with a stumpy pencil on a bit of greasy paper in a bad light, may easily think of this transfer of fractions as a dangerous and terrifying process. It is, for a properly trained man, the easiest, exactest job conceivable. The Cash Register people will invent machines to do it for you while you wait. What happens, then, is that every candidate with more than a quota, beginning with the top candidate, sheds a traction of each vote he has received, down the list, and the next one sheds his surplus fraction in the same way, and so on until candidates lower in the list, who are at first below the quota, fill up to it. When all the surplus votes of the candidates at the head of the list have been disposed of, then the hopeless candidates at the bottom of the list are dealt with. The second votes on their voting papers are treated as whole votes and distributed up the list, and so on. It will be plain to the quick-minded that, towards the end, there will be a certain chasing about of little fractions of votes, and a slight modification of the quota due to voting papers having no second or third preferences marked upon them, a chasing about that it will be difficult for an untrained intelligence to follow. But untrained intelligences are not required to follow it. For the skilled computer these things offer no difficulty at all. And they are not difficulties of principle but of manipulation. One might as well refuse to travel in a taxicab

until the driver had explained the magneto as refuse to accept the principle of Proportional Representation by the single transferable vote until one had remedied all the deficiencies of one's arithmetical education. The fundamental principle of the thing, that a candidate who gets more votes than he wants is made to hand on a fraction of each vote to the voter's second choice, and that a candidate whose chances are hopeless is made to hand on the whole vote to the voter's second choice, so that practically only a small number of votes are ineffective, is within the compass of the mind of a boy of ten.

But simple as this method is, it completely kills the organization and manipulation of voting. It completely solves the Goldbug-Wurstberg-Sanity problem. It is knave-proof--short of forging, stealing, or destroying voting papers. A man of repute, a leaderly man, may defy all the party organizations in existence and stand beside and be returned over the head of a worthless man, though the latter be smothered with party labels. That is the gist of this business. The difference in effect between Proportional Representation and the old method of voting must ultimately be to change the moral and intellectual quality of elected persons profoundly. People are only beginning to realize the huge possibilities of advance inherent in this change of political method. It means no less than a revolution from "delegate democracy" to "selective democracy."

Now, I will not pretend to be anything but a strong partizan in this matter. When I speak of "democracy" I mean "selective democracy." I believe that "delegate democracy" is already provably a failure in the

world, and that the reason why to-day, after three and a half years of struggle, we are still fighting German autocracy and fighting with no certainty of absolute victory, is because the affairs of the three great Atlantic democracies have been largely in the hands not of selected men but of delegated men, men of intrigue and the party machine, of dodges rather than initiatives, second-rate men. When Lord Haldane, defending his party for certain insufficiencies in their preparation for the eventuality of the great war, pleaded that they had no "mandate" from the country to do anything of the sort, he did more than commit political suicide, he bore conclusive witness against the whole system which had made him what he was. Neither Britain nor France in this struggle has produced better statesmen nor better generals than the German autocracy. The British and French Foreign Offices are old monarchist organizations still. To this day the British and French politicians haggle and argue with the German ministers upon petty points and debating society advantages, smart and cunning, while the peoples perish. The one man who has risen to the greatness of this great occasion, the man who is, in default of any rival, rapidly becoming the leader of the world towards peace, is neither a delegate politician nor the choice of a monarch and his councillors. He is the one authoritative figure in these transactions whose mind has not been subdued either by long discipline in the party machine or by court intrigue, who has continued his education beyond those early twenties when the mind of the "budding politician" ceases to expand, who has thought, and thought things out, who is an educated man among dexterous under-educated specialists. By something very like a belated accident in the framing of the American constitution, the President of the United States is more

in the nature of a selected man than any other conspicuous figure at the present time. He is specially elected by a special electoral college after an elaborate preliminary selection of candidates by the two great party machines. And be it remembered that Mr. Wilson is not the first great President the United States have had, he is one of a series of figures who tower over their European contemporaries. The United States have had many advantageous circumstances to thank for their present ascendancy in the world's affairs: isolation from militarist pressure for a century and a quarter, a vast virgin continent, plenty of land, freedom from centralization, freedom from titles and social vulgarities, common schools, a real democratic spirit in its people, and a great enthusiasm for universities; but no single advantage has been so great as this happy accident which has given it a specially selected man as its voice and figurehead in the world's affairs. In the average congressman, in the average senator, as Ostrogorski's great book so industriously demonstrated, the United States have no great occasion for pride. Neither the Senate nor the House of Representatives seem to rise above the level of the British Houses of Parliament, with a Government unable to control the rebel forces of Ulster, unable to promote or dismiss generals without an outcry, weakly amenable to the press, and terrifyingly incapable of great designs. It is to the United States of America we must look now if the world is to be made "safe for democracy." It is to the method of selection, as distinguished from delegation, that we must look if democracy is to be saved from itself.