

THE STUDY AND PROPAGANDA OF DEMOCRACY

In the preceding chapter I have dealt with the discussion of Proportional Representation in the British House of Commons in order to illustrate the intellectual squalor amidst which public affairs have to be handled at the present time, even in a country professedly "democratic." I have taken this one discussion as a sample to illustrate the present imperfection of our democratic instrument. All over the world, in every country, great multitudes of intelligent and serious people are now inspired by the idea of a new order of things in the world, of a world-wide establishment of peace and mutual aid between nation and nation and man and man. But, chiefly because of the elementary crudity of existing electoral methods, hardly anywhere at present, except at Washington, do these great ideas and this world-wide will find expression. Amidst the other politicians and statesmen of the world President Wilson towers up with an effect almost divine. But it is no ingratitude to him to say that he is not nearly so exceptional a being among educated men as he is among the official leaders of mankind. Everywhere now one may find something of the Wilson purpose and intelligence, but nearly everywhere it is silenced or muffled or made ineffective by the political advantage of privileged or of violent and adventurous inferior men. He is "one of us," but it is his good fortune to have got his head out of the sack that is about the heads of most of us. In the official world, in the world of rulers and representatives

and "statesmen," he almost alone, speaks for the modern intelligence.

This general stifling of the better intelligence of the world and its possible release to expression and power, seems to me to be the fundamental issue underlying all the present troubles of mankind. We cannot get on while everywhere fools and vulgarians hold the levers that can kill, imprison, silence and starve men. We cannot get on with false government and we cannot get on with mob government; we must have right government. The intellectual people of the world have a duty of co-operation they have too long neglected. The modernization of political institutions, the study of these institutions until we have worked out and achieved the very best and most efficient methods whereby the whole community of mankind may work together under the direction of its chosen intelligences, is the common duty of every one who has a brain for the service. And before everything else we have to realize this crudity and imperfection in what we call "democracy" at the present time. Democracy is still chiefly an aspiration, it is a spirit, it is an idea; for the most part its methods are still to seek. And still more is this "League of Free Nations" as yet but an aspiration. Let us not underrate the task before us. Only the disinterested devotion of hundreds of thousands of active brains in school, in pulpit, in book and press and assembly can ever bring these redeeming conceptions down to the solid earth to rule.

All round the world there is this same obscuration of the real intelligence of men. In Germany, human good will and every fine mind are subordinated to political forms that have for a mouthpiece a Chancellor

with his brains manifestly addled by the theories of Welt-Politik and the Bismarckian tradition, and for a figurehead a mad Kaiser. Nevertheless there comes even from Germany muffled cries for a new age. A grinning figure like a bloodstained Punch is all that speaks for the best brains in Bulgaria. Yes. We Western allies know all that by heart; but, after all, the immediate question for each one of us is, "What speaks for me?" So far as official political forms go I myself am as ineffective as any right-thinking German or Bulgarian could possibly be. I am more ineffective than a Galician Pole or a Bohemian who votes for his nationalist representative. Politically I am a negligible item in the constituency of this Mr. Burdett Coutts into whose brain we have been peeping. Politically I am less than a waistcoat button on that quaint figure. And that is all I am--except that I revolt. I have written of it so far as if it were just a joke. But indeed bad and foolish political institutions cannot be a joke. Sooner or later they prove themselves to be tragedy. This war is that. It is yesterday's lazy, tolerant, "sense of humour" wading out now into the lakes of blood it refused to foresee.

It is absurd to suppose that anywhere to-day the nationalisms, the suspicions and hatreds, the cant and policies, and dead phrases that sway men represent the current intelligence of mankind. They are merely the evidences of its disorganization. Even now we know we could do far better. Give mankind but a generation or so of peace and right education and this world could mock at the poor imaginations that conceived a millennium. But we have to get intelligences together, we have to canalize thought before it can work and produce its due effects. To that

end, I suppose, there has been a vast amount of mental activity among us political "negligibles." For my own part I have thought of the idea of God as the banner of human unity and justice, and I have made some tentatives in that direction, but men, I perceive, have argued themselves mean and petty about religion. At the word "God" passions bristle. The word "God" does not unite men, it angers them. But I doubt if God cares greatly whether we call Him God or no. His service is the service of man. This double idea of the League of Free Nations, linked with the idea of democracy as universal justice, is free from the jealousy of the theologians and great enough for men to unite upon everywhere. I know how warily one must reckon with the spite of the priest, but surely these ideas may call upon the teachers of all the great world religions for their support. The world is full now of confused propaganda, propaganda of national ideas, of traditions of hate, of sentimental and degrading loyalties, of every sort of error that divides and tortures and slays mankind. All human institutions are made of propaganda, are sustained by propaganda and perish when it ceases; they must be continually explained and re-explained to the young and the negligent. And for this new world of democracy and the League of Free Nations to which all reasonable men are looking, there must needs be the greatest of all propagandas. For that cause every one must become a teacher and a missionary. "Persuade to it and make the idea of it and the necessity for it plain," that is the duty of every school teacher, every tutor, every religious teacher, every writer, every lecturer, every parent, every trusted friend throughout the world. For it, too, every one must become a student, must go on with the task of making vague intentions into definite intentions, of analyzing and

destroying obstacles, of mastering the ten thousand difficulties of detail....

I am a man who looks now towards the end of life; fifty-one years have I scratched off from my calendar, another slips by, and I cannot tell how many more of the sparse remainder of possible years are really mine. I live in days of hardship and privation, when it seems more natural to feel ill than well; without holidays or rest or peace; friends and the sons of my friends have been killed; death seems to be feeling always now for those I most love; the newspapers that come in to my house tell mostly of blood and disaster, of drownings and slaughterings, of cruelties and base intrigues. Yet never have I been so sure that there is a divinity in man and that a great order of human life, a reign of justice and world-wide happiness, of plenty, power, hope, and gigantic creative effort, lies close at hand. Even now we have the science and the ability available for a universal welfare, though it is scattered about the world like a handful of money dropped by a child; even now there exists all the knowledge that is needed to make mankind universally free and human life sweet and noble. We need but the faith for it, and it is at hand; we need but the courage to lay our hands upon it and in a little space of years it can be ours.

THE END.