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# GOVERNMENT & THE PEOPLE ; A PLEA FOR REFORM.

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THE question about to be considered may be divided into two parts—first, Government ; and secondly, the People. The object in dealing with these divisions will be to show that reform is required upon the part of those who govern, and that improvement is necessary among those who are governed. Let us understand what is meant by the word government. It is a term applied to a body of men who superintend the making and administering of laws, and who conduct the general affairs of the nation. A true government should represent the wishes of the people it governs ; if it fails to do this, it is an usurpation, and therefore unworthy of the support of the community at large. There are many forms of government, but it will suffice to notice here two of the principal ones that have hitherto existed in this country. The author of the “ Rights of Man ” has written “ that governments arise either *out* of the people, or *over* the people.” The governments which arise out of the people are Democratic or Republican, and therefore of a nature to represent the public will, having, as it doubtless would, a practical knowledge of the wants of the people. Now the very reverse of this is true of the governments of this country. As the writer just mentioned observes : “ The English Government is one of those which arose out of a conquest, and not out of society, and consequently, it arose over the people.” The reins of government in this country have been held by a few aristocratic persons—so few that a person could almost count them on the ends of his fingers. When one family had held the reins long enough to grow tired, and had well filled their pockets, then they handed the reins to some other aristocratic family, without consulting the wishes of the people, and thus our governments had been kept in a narrow circle, ignoring the working-classes, who are the great support of the nation. Thus patronage has been used for personal gratification rather than for the public good. The great object of successive governments in filling the positions in the Church, has not been to comply with the alleged pious desires of the people, nor has the morality or qualification of the persons that have been put into office been always considered ; but the great aim of the “ powers that be ” has been to place some member of the aristocratic families into good livings. That has been so patent, that Lord John Russell, in his “ Essay on the English Constitution,” says : “ In the Church the immense and valuable patronage of Government is uniformly bestowed on their political adherents. No talent, no learning, no piety, can advance the fortunes of a clergyman whose political opinions are adverse to those of the governing powers.” The great bishoprics

throughout the country have not been filled by men remarkable for intelligence or moral purity, but by those who had sworn allegiance to the Government of the time. Bishop Warburton wrote that the "Church has been of old the cradle and the throne of the younger nobility."

A true government should be guided by constitutional laws. Much has been said recently about our "glorious constitution." When Conservatives, or "Constitutionalists," talk of loving the English constitution, they are indulging in a delusion, because, as a matter of fact, we have no political constitution in this country—not a political constitution in its most comprehensive sense. What is a political constitution? "A constitution is not a thing in name only, but in fact. It has not an idea, but a real existence; and wherever it cannot be produced in a visible form, there is none. A constitution is a thing *antecedent* to a government, and a government is only the creature of a constitution. The constitution of a country is not the act of its government, but of the people constituting its government. It is the body of elements, to which you can refer and quote article by article; and which contains the principles on which the government shall be established, the manner in which it shall be organised, the powers it shall have, the mode of elections, the duration of parliaments, or by what other name such bodies may be called; the powers which the executive part of the government shall have; and, in fine, everything that relates to the complete organisation of a civil government, and the principles on which it shall act, and by which it shall be bound. A constitution, therefore, is to a government what the laws made afterwards by that government are to a court of judicature. The court of judicature does not make the laws, neither can it alter them; it only acts in conformity to the laws made; and the government is in like manner governed by the constitution." In order to have a constitution it is necessary to have a political programme, drawn up by the people, to which the government—whether Whig or Tory—should conform, and be guided by. Therefore, if we were asked as Republicans whether we would support a constitutional form of government, the answer would be, by all means; but let us have a properly-constructed constitution, and not that sham constitution which we have hitherto had, which has been for the benefit of the few, and to the injury of the many. What are the defects of the form of government now in existence? First, its exclusive and aristocratic nature. In it there is no provision made for the general representation of the people. It is only certain classes of society which are represented. If we analyse the House of Commons, as at present constituted, we shall find that, while wealth, law, and land are fully represented, poverty and labour have no *bona fide* representatives there. It cannot be a true form of government where the working classes are thus ignored. True, there are a few men in the House who sometimes speak boldly on behalf of the toiling millions, but even those cannot fairly represent the wants of the excluded classes. Labour requires for its advocates

those who know what it is to toil; poverty needs men to speak for it who have felt its pangs. And the system that does not allow this is partial and unconstitutional. The facts which Sir Charles Dilke gave in his Manchester speech, every working man should be made acquainted with, for they show the imperfection of our representative system, and indicate clearly that under its unequal provisions, the majority of the public are not represented. The votes of the large towns are more than counteracted by those of small aristocratic boroughs and counties. Sir Charles Dilke drew the attention of his audience to the fact that, whereas 136 electors in Portarlington return a Member to Parliament, the 56,000 electors who are on the register for Glasgow only have three representatives awarded to them. They were reminded that, while Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Birmingham, make up with the ten metropolitan boroughs, a population of five millions, and an electoral body collectively amounting to 450,000 voters, they return but thirty-four members in all; yet seventy boroughs, with a population about equal to that of Manchester, and about the same number of voters, send eighty-three members to the House. Instances also were quoted of counties returning two members only, though possessing a population and a number of voters equal to those of other boroughs, which together return twelve or fourteen. Sixty-two boroughs return sixty-two members by 42,800 votes, and possess a population of about 400,000 souls. Hackney, with about the same number of voters, and nearly as large a population, returns two members instead of sixty-two; and as a final illustration, it was stated that 110 members sit for 1,080,000 voters, and another 110 for 83,000. If under the reign of a monarch we are obliged to yield to this kind of representation, it would be far better that Monarchy should be swept away, and that we should have that form of government that would recognise the rights of the working classes.

There is an important defect in connection with the present mode of government, and that is, its whole machinery is so expensive. Take parliamentary elections. There is no fair chance for a working man to be successful at those elections. Why are they made so expensive? Surely it is not necessary under a proper form of government that a candidate should be kept down under the weight of money bags, and that the influence of the aristocracy should be brought against him, to crush him when he is doing his best to become a member of Parliament. Not only are the elections expensive, but the associations therewith are also expensive. Hence, until we obtain something like a proper arrangement of elections, and also the payment of members, we have little hope of having a real and legitimate form of government. The expenses attending law are the result of an imperfect form of government. At present its use is principally enjoyed by the rich, instead of being within the reach of all classes. In a properly-constructed constitution, the poor should be able to avail themselves of the law as well as the rich. Now, the poor man is obliged to keep clear of the clutches of the law, in consequence of the enormous expense which it entails. The

salaries which are paid to the legal profession are so high that many clients have frequently to turn aside, and not pursue the course of justice. Another great defect in the government is the present monopoly of land. No more gigantic injustice could be done to a country than is being perpetrated by the aristocratic millionaires of England in reference to the monopoly of land. The land of the United Kingdom, it has been estimated, is owned by about 30,000 men, and the bulk of the land in England and Wales by only 150 families. The Duke of Richmond and Lord Leconfield own between them, in the county of Sussex, land to the extent of nearly 800 square miles. The Marquis of Westminster has an annual income of nearly a million from his property. The Earl of Derby has £40,000 per year from land at Liverpool alone, upon which he has never spent one farthing to increase its value; while the Marquis of Breadalbane can ride upon one hundred miles without going off his own property. Are these things just, and do they not indicate a necessity for a different form of government to that under which we are living? Professor Levi has estimated that there are 2,000,000 acres of land devoted to deer forests in Scotland; and Baillie Ross, of Aberdeen, has made a calculation that 20,000,000 pounds of meat are lost every year through such misappropriation of land. Many complaints are made as to the high price of meat, and some persons have stated that the working classes ought to do without it. While those who are willing to do without that which is now becoming almost a luxury have a perfect right to do so, it is unjust that they should be compelled to do so because of the monopoly of the land. Our first and primary duty, is to protest against such monopoly. In less than 160 years there have been no less than 7,000,000 acres of land enclosed and devoted to the interests of the aristocrats of the country—for the amusement and benefit of those who have never studied the wants of the population, who never knew what it was to want food, and who lived idle and—many of them—reckless lives, forgetting the claims of their fellow countrymen who were starving for that food which was being denied to them. No wonder that the people should agitate for the repeal of the Game Laws—laws which ought not to exist, and which are a curse to the nation, excluding as they do the people from the advantages of the land. We do not want to do things recklessly, but we desire that the present monopoly of the land should be destroyed; and we are determined not to rest till our desire is realised. Our intentions are to pursue a peaceable advocacy, and we trust ere long to be able to say to the landowners: "You must use the land for the benefit of all, or give it up to those who are able and willing to do so."

There is another serious impeachment against the present form of government. Whether Whigs or Tories were in office, they had ever objected to reforms. The people had met together in public assemblies, and decided upon the necessity for reform, and the will of the nation had been almost unanimous

in its favour, but the Government still refused it. So long as the people acted quietly and temperately, so long had their appeals been disregarded. The result was, that often in a state of desperation they did what they would not otherwise have committed themselves to. The riots we have had in times past were to be attributed in a large degree to the refusals of necessary reform by the Government of the country. Take the struggle for reform in 1832. What did Wellington do? He who represented the old form of government put his command in this form : "The people were born to be governed, and governed they should be, and if they would not be governed contentedly, then at the cannon's mouth they should be made to obey the 'powers that be.'" The Duke affirmed that "Under the Bill it would be impossible for the government of the country to be carried on upon any recognised principle of the constitution." The Duke of Newcastle said, "If the Bill passed it would destroy the throne, despoil the church, abolish the House of Lords, overthrow the constitution, violate property, desolate the country, and annihilate liberty." It was only after the riots of Bristol, London, and Manchester, when prisons were set fire to, and when prisoners were released ; it was not till the people had committed such acts of desperation, that the Government granted the reform that had been quietly asked for. Now, precisely the same thing applied to Catholic Emancipation. It was not until the Government by their obstinate conduct had driven the country to the eve of a civil war that they granted that measure of religious liberty. The fact is, that hitherto the Governments had granted to force what to reason they had denied. Governments that did this were unworthy of support, because as the guide and protector of the nation, they should endeavour to foster the moral and intellectual aspirations of the people, and not make them desperate by withholding such reforms as they desired.

The leading defects, then, of the English form of Government are its exclusive and aristocratic nature ; its class policy ; its imperfect representative system ; its monopoly of land, and its reluctance to grant required reforms. What has been the effect of this mode of government on the nation ? Shall we judge of the tree by its fruits ? Let us turn to the people and endeavour to ascertain their real condition. This is a fair argument, for if among the masses the governmental tree has borne disastrous fruit, is it not a duty to uproot it, that something better may thrive in its stead ?

If the condition of a people may be taken as a reflex of the government under which they live, the governing classes of England have indeed much to answer for. For among the toiling millions of this country, ignorance, privation, and social inequalities exist to an extent perhaps unparalleled in the history of civilised nations. The two reports presented to the House of Commons in 1868 and 1870, exhibited the degrading state into which the agricultural labourers had been driven through class customs and unequal legislation. The evidence of Mr. Simon, medical inspector, showed that more than one-half of our southern

agricultural population, was so inadequately fed that starvation, disease, and ill-trained minds were the necessary results. As a sample of many like cases, it was mentioned that in Haverhill, Suffolk, nine out of ten adults could neither read nor write, and only one in twenty-five could both read and write. The report states that the population round Mayhill appeared "to lie entirely out of the pale of civilisation, type after type of social life degraded to the level of barbarism." It refers to the "immorality and degradation arising from the crowded and neglected state of the dwellings of the poor" in many parts of Yorkshire. "In Northamptonshire, some of the cottages are disgraceful, necessarily unhealthy, and a reproach to civilisation." The Reverend J. Fraser, in his report, says of the wretched condition of the parishes in Gloucestershire and Norfolk: "It is impossible to exaggerate the ill-effects of such a state of things in every respect..... Modesty must be an unknown virtue, decency an unimaginable thing, where in one small chamber, with the beds lying as thickly as they can be packed, father, mother, young men, lads, grown and growing up girls—two and sometimes three generations—are herded promiscuously; where every operation of the toilette and of nature—dressings, undressings, births, deaths—is performed by each within the sight or hearing of all; where children of both sexes, to as high an age as twelve or fourteen, or even more, occupy the same bed; where the whole atmosphere is sensual, and human nature is degraded into something below the level of the swine. It is a hideous picture, and the picture is drawn from life." In alluding to the same class of labourers, Professor Fawcett writes: "In some districts their children could not grow up in greater ignorance if England had lost her Christianity and her civilisation; the houses in which, in many cases, they (the labourers) are compelled to dwell, do not deserve the name of human habitations." Nor is the condition of many of the working people in some of our large towns much better. Despite our boasted national wealth, there are thousands who exist in daily anxiety as to how to obtain food to eat, and to whom the rights, comforts, and pleasures of real living are strangers. In his work, "Pauperism, its Causes and Remedies," the Professor says: "Visit the great centres of our commerce and trade, and what will be observed? The direst poverty always accompanying the greatest wealth..... Within a stone's throw" of the stately streets and large manufactories of such towns as Manchester and Liverpool, "there will be found miserable alleys and narrow courts in which people drag out an existence, steeped in a misery and a wretchedness which baffle description..... Not long since, I was conversing with a West-end clergyman, and he was speaking, not of Bethnal Green, nor of Seven Dials, but of a street quite within the precincts of luxurious and glittering Belgravia, in which he knew from his personal knowledge that every house had a separate family living in each room. Dr. Whitmore, the medical superintendent of Marylebone, in a recent report, states that in his district there are

hundreds of houses with a family in every room.....Official returns show that in London there are never less than 125,000 paupers, and that as each winter recurs the number rises to 170,000. There is abundant reason to conclude that a number at least equally large are just on the verge of pauperism." Such facts as these require no comment, they speak in language terrible enough in all conscience. We have become so accustomed to the verdict "died from starvation," that the extent of misery it represents is not always fully recognised. It is not merely the death of the victim to be contemplated, but the pain of body and torture of mind experienced ere the spark of life was extinguished; also the sorrow and bitter pangs of the relatives of the deceased left to mourn the loss of the one departed. And, judging by the past, there is but little hope of much improvement while the present form of government lasts. Mr. Joshua Fielden recently stated, in his speech at Todmorden, that in the last eighteen years our poor rates had increased £2,700,000.

Our laws touching imperial taxation are so unjust that its burden falls unfairly upon the shoulders of the working classes. Last year the imperial taxation in round numbers was £70,000,000. Now, from whom was this revenue derived? During the reign of Charles II. an important change took place in our fiscal arrangements. Up to that time land had borne a more equal share of the taxation of the country. Charles II., being desirous of favouring the aristocracy, relieved them of much of the taxation then upon the land, and placed instead heavy duties upon articles of consumption. From that time up to the present an unjust system of taxation had been in existence, and had been working as injuriously as it possibly could upon the labouring portion of the community. In the last century the land of this country paid one-third of all the taxes, now it pays less than one-seventieth. And this palpable injustice has been going on while land-rents have increased enormously, for the same land that seventy-two years ago yielded a little over £22,000,000, now yields nearly £100,000,000. The following extract is from the papers issued by the Financial Reform Union:—

"The acknowledged principles of all fiscal reforms since the report of the Import Duties Committee of 1840, are the repeal of all duties upon the necessaries of life, the remission of unproductive duties, and the abolition of protections and prohibitions. Notwithstanding this report, a duty is still levied upon corn, which yields the greatest return when the people are least able to pay it, and involves a necessity for fourteen other duties, yielding from nothing to £2, £3, and up to £2,841 per annum each. The total revenue from these sources in 1866-7 was nearly £800,000! The duty on sugar, an article described by Mr. Gladstone as next to corn in importance as a necessary of life, produces above £5,800,000, and involves duties on nine other articles in which it is an ingredient, yielding a yearly revenue varying from £1 to £2,000 per annum. Tea, coffee, chicory, and cocoa, all of which have become necessaries of life to the great bulk of the population, produce upwards of £3,200,000.

Currants, figs, plums, prunes, and raisins, notwithstanding dates are admitted free, are taxed to the extent of £400,000. The total revenue from these sources in 1866-7 was £10,310,056, or nearly one-fourth of the total revenue from customs and excise."

A recent writer in the *Liverpool Financial Reformer*, divided the community into three divisions—first, the aristocratic, represented by those who have an annual income of £1,000 and upwards; the middle classes were represented by those who had incomes from £100 to £1000; and the artisan or working-classes were those who were supposed to have incomes under £100 per year. He then assessed their incomes respectively at £208,385,000; £174,579,000; and £149,745,000. Towards the taxation, each division paid as follows: The aristocratic portion contributed £8,500,000, the middle classes £19,513,453, and the working classes £32,861,474. The writer remarks: "The burden of the revenue, as it is here shown to fall on the different classes, may not be fractionally accurate, either on the one side or the other, for that is an impossibility in the case, but it is sufficiently so to afford a fair representation in reference to those classes on whom the burden chiefly falls. Passing over the middle classes, who thus probably contribute about their share, the result in regard to the upper and lower classes stands thus:—Amount which should be paid to the revenue by the higher classes (that is, the classes above £1,000 a year), £23,437,688; amount which they do pay, £8,500,000; leaving a difference of £14,937,000, so that the higher classes are paying nearly £15,000,000 less than their fair share of taxation. Amount which should be paid by the working classes (or those having incomes below £100), £16,846,312; amount which they do pay, £32,861,474; making a difference of £16,015,162; so that the working classes are paying about £16,000,000 more than their fair share. In other words, the respective average rates paid upon the assessable income of the two classes are—by the higher classes, 10d. per pound; the working classes, 4s. 4d. That is to say, the working classes are paying at a rate five times more heavily than the wealthy classes."

Now, with these inequalities existing, is not a reformation of government highly desirable? The happiness of the people requires it, and the progress of the nation demands it. How is it to be obtained? There are two fundamental remedies necessary in order to effect true reform. First, the real representation for the people, and, second, their control over the national purse. Until these are obtained true government will exist only in name. Let the working classes be united, discreet, and determined in their present struggles; and if the "stupid party" and their supporters will not be "wise in time," they must marvel not if that electricity that now charges the political atmosphere shall ultimately strike the present imperfect institutions, thereby making way for the establishment of principles that will secure political justice and social equality.