

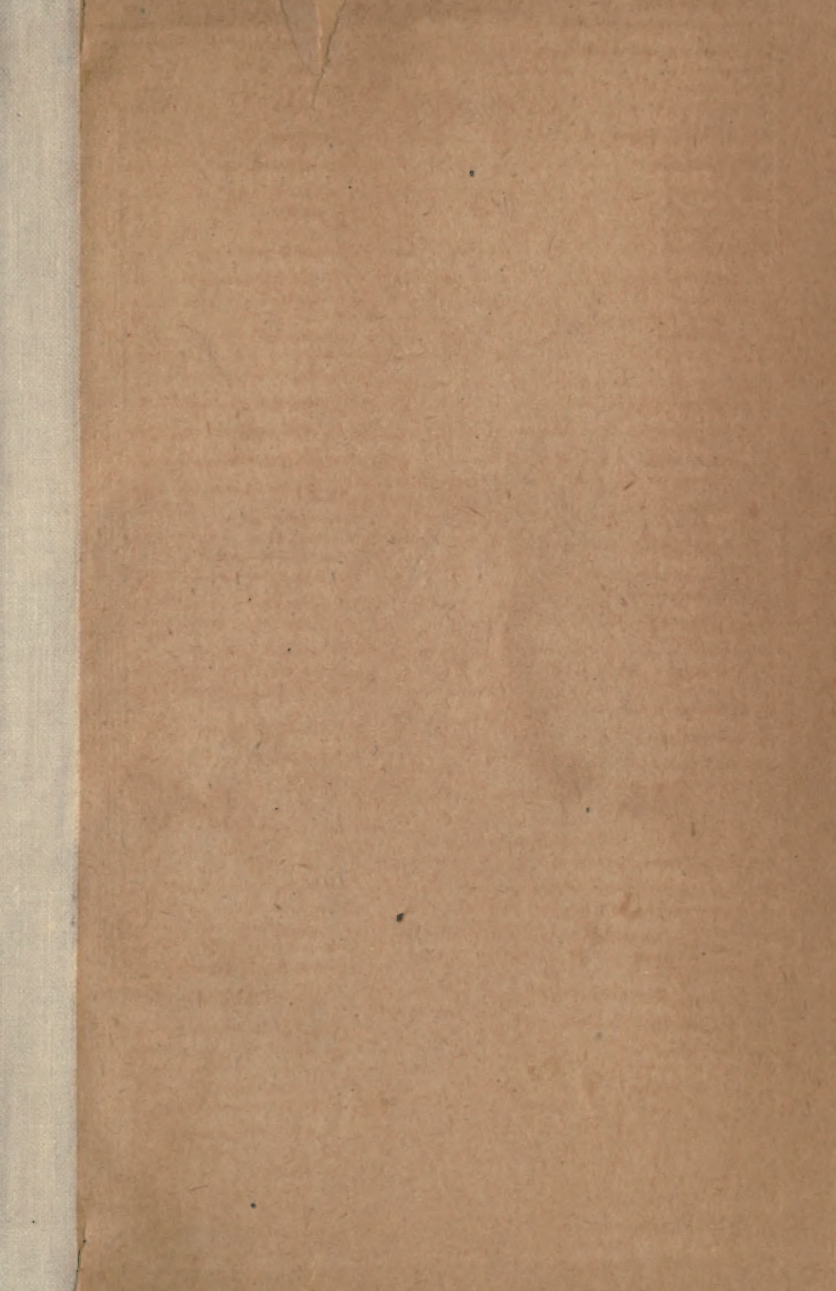
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THE HOUSE OF COMMONS  
AND MONARCHY  
H. BELLOC





*By* HILAIRE BELLOC

THE FREE PRESS

THE PATH TO ROME

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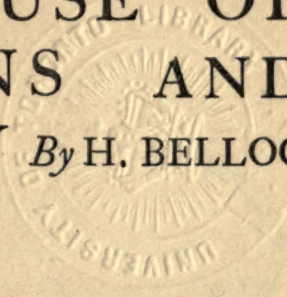
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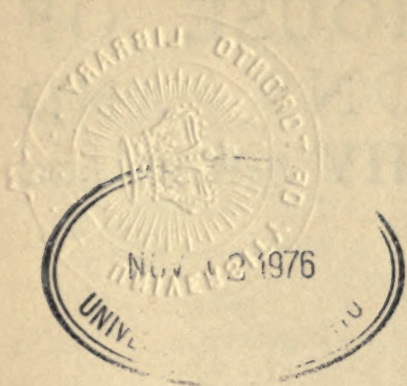
# THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND MONARCHY

By H. BELLOC



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THE THESIS: THE HOUSE OF COMMONS  
WAS FORMED BY, AND IS ESSENTIALLY  
PART OF, AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE

ENGLAND HAVING CEASED TO BE AN  
ARISTOCRATIC STATE THE HOUSE OF  
COMMONS IS CEASING TO FUNCTION



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## I

THE THESIS : THE HOUSE OF COMMONS WAS FORMED BY, AND IS ESSENTIALLY PART OF, AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE. ENGLAND HAVING CEASED TO BE AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IS CEASING TO FUNCTION.

**T**HE House of Commons was for fully 250 years really, theoretically still is, the central institution of the English.

Within it the powers of the State were—and in theory still are—concentrated in a degree unknown to any other polity.

Whereas in other modern countries great organisms of capital value to the life of the community, and exercising clearly determined and independent functions, coexist with, modify, and check the executive power, *here* all was centralized.

From the House of Commons proceeded ultimately all laws, all the appointments of those who interpret and administer laws, and all execution of laws. The Ministers who

are still in constitutional theory its servants and responsible to it, nominate all new candidates to the Second Chamber. They not only decide the general lines of foreign and domestic policy, but have absolute power over their details. New universities are created, existing ones reformed under the authority of the House or its Ministers. An established national religion is similarly attached to the Central Parliamentary Executive, and the chief officers of that religion are nominated by the Prime Minister. Even the Magistracy—in all other countries rendered as far as possible independent (through actual constitution, public opinion, or custom) of executive power (an independence regarded everywhere else in Europe as an essential to freedom)—is here in England so closely linked with the one great organ of government that the specially restricted body of higher magistrates—the Judges (who possess a power incomparably greater than do any of their foreign colleagues) are in great part actually drawn from the membership of the House of Commons, and are always nominated at the discretion of Parliamentarians; while the whole machinery of the lawyers and their personnel, all that the Legal Guild means to this State above every other State, is so closely inter-

twined with the House of Commons as to be almost indistinguishable from it. Through membership of the House of Commons are attained the great prizes of the legal profession, and the very hours and arrangements of the Commons Debates are moulded to the convenience of the Courts.

What great strength such high centralization has given this country in the past, it needs no wide knowledge of history to confirm. Men eager for freedom and dignity of living in the individual rightly demand the separation of the various powers in Sovereignty. They insist on an independent Judiciary; on a Legislature uncontrolled by the Executive. But men who are concerned rather with the strength of the State, and especially with its action abroad, men concerned with the homogeneity and quiet continuance of their country, coupled with its expansion in foreign dominion and its invincibility against foreign aggression, rejoice to recognize a high and successful centralization of Sovereignty, however masked, or under whatever name.

Nowhere has that centralization proceeded to such lengths as it did in the England of the nineteenth century, especially just after the middle of that period. It may be said with justice that the British House of Commons

was, in the generation immediately preceding our own, the most absolute and the strongest Prince on earth. That absolute strength was reflected in the peace within, the proud security without, the vast expansion in wealth and territory which this country could boast from the close of the Napoleonic Wars to times well within our own memory.

Such is the fundamental postulate a man must take before proceeding to any examination of our political case to-day. The House of Commons was everything to England. On it all stood—and it worked well.

To-day, as is notorious, it is working badly : and more and more badly. Its authority is failing, or rather has failed ; and from that failure chiefly proceeds the political anxiety of our time.

It is my purpose in this essay to examine first why Parliament has failed ; next, the cause of this failure being found, to discover what should or may succeed the lost power of the House of Commons.

In this connection two questions have to be answered :

*First*, whether the organ itself can be healed, i.e., whether the House of Commons can be reformed, or aided in some such fashion as will restore its original position ;

*Secondly*, if this prove impossible, what other organ can take its place.

The thesis I shall maintain is the following :  
The House of Commons, though containing a representative element, was, and is, essentially not a representative body, but an Oligarchy; that is, a small body of men segregated from the mass of the citizens and renewing itself. But no Oligarchy works (that is, can be morally accepted or exercise authority) unless it be an Aristocracy. Mere Oligarchy, the mere rule of a clique without the excuse of an imputed excellence, will never be tolerated among men. The whole meaning of Aristocracy is the provision of a sort of worship addressed to the few that govern. Therefore the House of Commons was vigorous and healthy in its function only so long as it was the Aristocratic organ of an Aristocratic State.

For the definition of "The Aristocracy" in an Aristocratic State is, not a body recruited by birth or even from wealth, not a caste (though it may be a caste), least of all a plutocracy, but essentially *an Oligarchy enjoying a Peculiar Respect from its fellow citizens*. Upon the failure of the Aristocratic quality in the House of Commons, upon the decline

of that body into a clique no longer respected, its moral authority disappeared; and, with that moral authority disappeared its power of government.

Meanwhile the functions of this highly centralized form of executive, magistracy, and legislature combined, was vastly increased through the rapid development of the modern State. Hence, a double evil and a double peril were present: the rapid accretion of material power in something which, as rapidly, was growing morally unfitted to exercise that power.

In seeking an issue we shall find that no external reform, nor any act from within, can restore an organism so far decayed as is the House of Commons to-day. We shall further find that no subsidiary body, or bodies, such as a Trades Council or other Chambers can take its *sovereign* place. It must be replaced, and can only be replaced in this Great State by that which is the only alternative to aristocracy in a Great State, I mean a Monarchy. If some form of Monarchy does not succeed to the lost inheritance of the House of Commons, the State will lose its *governance*.

Such is the argument I set forth to develop.



## II

THE HISTORY OF THE NAME  
"HOUSE OF COMMONS"

IT ORIGINALLY ATTACHED TO  
SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT  
FROM WHAT WE HAVE KNOWN  
AS THE HOUSE OF COMMONS FOR  
THE LAST THREE CENTURIES



## II

THE HISTORY OF THE NAME "HOUSE OF COMMONS." IT ORIGINALLY ATTACHED TO SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE HAVE KNOWN AS THE HOUSE OF COMMONS DURING THE LAST THREE CENTURIES.

TO understand what has happened to the House of Commons in our time, the nature of its mortal sickness, we must begin with the history of it. First we must learn how it acquired the name it bears; next how that old thing of which it inherited the name disappeared and gave birth to that great *Sovereign* Governing Assembly which has been the Person of England since the Civil Wars.

We say to-day, and with justice, that the House of Commons is, and has been for over two and a half centuries, the capital institution; the centre of the State; an organism gathering up into itself the threads of all the national life, until, to-day—in contrast

with all other *modern* States—England is completely centralized, and that centralization lies wholly in this one point: the House of Commons.

But in this definition the modifying words "two and a half centuries" are essential to exactitude. The mere words "House of Commons"—the name—is older by far than the seventeenth century. It is a literal translation of the mediæval phrases "*Communz*," "*Communitas*," and the rest; French and Latin titles for certain institutions common to all Christendom in the Middle Ages. But it was in the early seventeenth century that the thing which we call the House of Commons, as distinguished from the name, came into being: say, 1620-50, just as the figment called "The Crown" then first begins to replace the old reality of English Kingship.

There are many patriotic men who would desire that the thing itself should be older, for all patriotic men love to see the institutions of their country derived from as old a lineage as possible. But these should be content with the knowledge that no European nation to-day has a continuous constitutional history of anything like two hundred and fifty years, and that the House of Commons

with its three hundred years of continuity is the oldest governing organism in Christendom.

The genesis of this singular, powerful, and national oligarchy was as follows :

When the West arose from its long sleep at the end of the Dark Ages, it broke, as all the world knows, into a new and very vigorous life which we call the life of the Middle Ages.

Europe stood up upon its feet and became a new thing with the Reformation of the Papacy by St. Gregory VII, the imperial adventures of the Normans, and, lastly, the great Crusading march—all matters of the eleventh century. The outward signs of this awakening still remain in all European States, and are the vernacular languages, the Gothic architecture, the codification of custom (and with it of titles), the Universities, the National Kingships, the Parliaments.

These Parliaments, springing up spontaneously from the body of Christendom, were based, of course, upon the model of the great monastic system, where the representative principle was born. It would be waste of time in so short an essay as this to go into the silly "Teutonic" theories of the last generation, common in the German and

English universities at that time. It was attempted to discover some aboriginal, barbaric, prehistoric origin for a system which obviously and naturally sprang from the conditions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was like trying to prove a theory that the first, second, and third class on modern railway trains arose from the division of nobles, free men, and serfs six hundred years before our time.

Parliaments were the spontaneous product of that great moment of youth and of spring in our blood, the sunrise or boyhood of which was the twelfth century, and the noon or strong manhood the thirteenth century. It is not germane to this short essay to discuss the doubt as to where the first of these assemblies may have arisen. Nor is it of practical value to history. One might as well discuss where had been found in some county the first green shoots of the year: there was an outburst of new life. Probably the first Parliament arose in that crucible of all our history, the place where the defence of Europe against the Mahommedans was most acute, and where life was therefore most intense—the Southern issues of the Pyrenees. The town of Jaca has a special claim. At any rate the new idea of lay representation

modelled on the already long existing monastic system was universal in all the West by the beginning of the thirteenth century, and its effects were equally universal and spontaneous.<sup>1</sup> Communal effort, the modification, aid, restriction, and support of authority from below, was the very spirit of the Middle Ages. That time gave birth, in its passion for reality, to institutions not deduced from abstract formulæ, but corresponding to existing social needs. Therefore these Parliaments (the word means "gatherings for discussion") included the King (or in a Republic the Senate and other chief authorities) and Councils corresponding to the various real divisions of Society. The Council of the most important men, that is, the great Nobles and the Bishops, was permanent, and, with the King, did all the debating and fixing of the laws. But there was also a Council of the mass of Free Men from the towns and villages, and Councils of the lower Clergy. These Councils of Free Men and of Clergy were summoned only for particular occasions. They did no permanent work, as did the Nobles; and all the while the chief Legislator,

<sup>1</sup> The first seeds were sown in this island by King John, who, in 1213, summoned four representatives from each shire to his Council.

still more the chief Executive, was the King.

Now in the case of the Clergy, and in that of the Free Men you had the obvious difficulty that not all of them, even in a small State, could meet in the presence of whatever was the fixed and permanent authority of the State; not all of them, even in a very small State, could crowd into the presence of the King and his Nobles and Bishops. Therefore, following the examples of the great religious orders, was introduced the system of *representation*. The mass of the Clergy and the mass of the Free Men, landholders in the villages, and Burgesses in the towns, chose deputies to speak for them in the Lower Clerical House and the Lower Lay House.

The method of choice was not universal: it differed with local custom and need. The town council or a popular, traditional, gathering directed by the local officer of the King might decide what persons should be sent to the central discussion, so far as laymen were concerned. The clerical elections, as the Church was universally organized, would normally be more regular. But whatever the methods of election the *object* was simple and everywhere the same. The masses, whether clergy or laymen, were *represented*



—just as monks and monastic houses were represented in their central councils—because it was the only way of getting a few to speak for all. *And what they were sent to speak about was taxation.*

On rare occasions, this expanded Council when summoned, finding itself in the presence of the Government, would talk of other things than taxation. If the State was in peril, for instance, the representatives might counsel a remedy. But taxation was the main object of their coming. For the twin conceptions of private property and of liberty were, in the Middle Ages, so strong that our modern idea (which is the old Roman idea) of a tax being imposed arbitrarily by the Government, and being paid without question, was abhorrent to those times. A tax was, for the men of the Middle Ages, essentially a *grant*. The Government had to go to its subjects and say: "We need for public purposes so much: can you meet us? What can you voluntarily give us?" And the essential principle of the Representative Houses of the Clergy and of the Laymen all over Europe was a convocation for this purpose; taxation was in those distant days a *voluntary* subsidy to the needs of the King, that is, of the public service.

It was clear that, such a system once established, the growth of the modern State, with its increasing expenditure and the decay of the King's old feudal revenues, would tend to make the presence of representatives to discuss such voluntary grants more and more a permanent feature of the King's Court and Council. It became a regularly recurrent feature of that Council. With the regular return of representatives to the National Council it at last became necessary that all the "Estates of the Realm" should agree, before any innovation could be introduced as a permanent and binding law, and that they should concur in its promulgation. Thus, for the second period of the Middle Ages, was government conceived throughout a united Christendom.

But with the last century of the Middle Ages there entered into England a feature destined slightly to modify the development of Parliaments *here*. The realm was small, compact, and wealthy, and its Kings had therefore always been at issue with the powerful men below them. The descendants of the great Roman landowners—those whom to-day we call "squires"—were not counter-balanced by the populace in England as they could be in larger countries. There was no

room for the King's curbing the rich by relying on the masses, as he did elsewhere—notably in France. There was always a tendency on the part of the English rich territorial lords and of the great merchants in the English towns to encroach upon the power of the King, to act as the spokesmen of the national traditions, and as the masters of the common people.

That tendency might have been checked and might have disappeared, but for a very important revolution in English affairs. This revolution was the usurpation of the Crown by the House of Lancaster in 1399.

By all the ideas of that time this usurpation was a breach in custom and right, and a wound inflicted upon the national life.

Though the usurper was the King's own cousin and the next heir to the throne, he had to do what all men have to do when they are in the wrong before the public: he had to find allies who would, at a price, support an action which they did not morally approve, and to which their souls were alien. The Lancastrian usurpation during its little moment of power (less than the lifetime of a man) tried all the tricks which the history of usurpers has made familiar. It tried terrorism by violent punishments. It tried foreign

adventure. Above all, it relied upon an artificial alliance with, and deference to, the wealthier class, lay and cleric. The growing power of the squires and the big merchants of the towns was bribed—insecurely—to the Lancastrian side.

The squires were given more power by the King. He truckled to them and to the merchant fortunes. The rich men were made *local magistrates*—a policy fatal to equality, and, therefore, in the long run, to kingship—they began to dominate local life; they captured representation. The faint beginnings of aristocratic rule had appeared through the Lancastrian tradition, even before the Reformation approached.

The storm of the Reformation, therefore, the effects of which are the turning point of the whole history of Europe, fell upon an England in which the representative body, the Estates of the Realm, the Parliament, was already beginning to be an oligarchy, and in which the Lower House had already become permanently a House of Squires and Merchants. In such a state was the general European institution of the "Parliament" in England, in such a state were the "Commons," when the wind of the Reformation blew first upon this island.

This was four centuries ago, and at that time your local representative who was sent to the Commons, though now sent regularly, was still in the main no more than a person sent to grant taxation for his class. Such men rarely debated important affairs of State (save in a great crisis). They had very little to do with the initiation of new laws, and hardly anything to do with policy. They were utterly different from what we call the House of Commons in later times.

When, as an effect of the Reformation, the squires and merchants had become the governing power of the realm ; when England, after the century of the Reformation, had become an oligarchy ; when the King's power had disappeared—the House of Commons was to become above all *an expression of the governing class*, and to assume that modern formation, to become that modern *thing* which we know, and which has been associated with all the glory and strength of England for three hundred years.



### III

THE INSTITUTION WE KNOW AS  
"THE HOUSE OF COMMONS"  
AROSE FROM THE REFORMATION,  
AND WAS INSEPARABLE FROM,  
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### III

THE INSTITUTION WE KNOW AS "THE HOUSE OF COMMONS" AROSE FROM THE REFORMATION, AND WAS INSEPARABLE FROM, AND CREATED BY, ARISTOCRACY: FOR ARISTOCRACY WAS THE MAIN POLITICAL PRODUCT OF THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND.

THE Reformation, like every other great revolution in history—excepting the foundation of the Catholic Church—had for its main effects things quite unexpected by its original agents; things not observable until long after their death.

Here in particular, here in England, the Reformation was essentially due to the determination of a Government with high mechanical power (although morally not so secure) to affirm itself, by a temporary expedient, against all other authority, domestic or foreign. But the result was utterly different from that which the main actor—Henry VIII—or his chief servants, or any associated with them,

intended or could foresee. A temporary expedient of pressure against the Pope turned into a final policy, and led to what no one then dreamt of—an England without the Faith. The subsidiary attack upon the monasteries (the principal support of the Papacy) produced an enormous economic catastrophe and change in the distribution of wealth. Through this the Monarchy ultimately lost its preponderant position as the centre of the National Money-power, and was therefore replaced as a governing agent by the newly enriched landlords and the great merchants of the towns. Indeed, it may be said that there was here another case of a power calling in auxiliaries who, in turn, oust their employers and become themselves the masters.

Henry VIII, the tool of a red, vicious, and very unwise woman, had proposed, as many a monarch had proposed before him up and down Europe, to play the Pope for a time in his own realm. To confiscate monastic property seemed to him at the moment, and to most others (including many of the monks themselves), a "modern," and therefore "an inevitable," thing; a singular example of that ephemeral influence upon the human mind, whereby the fashion of the

moment takes on the colour of necessary things.

The confiscation of the monastic land was at least intended to support the revenues of the national authority. Those revenues were to decline in real value through the rapid change in prices due to the Spanish conquest of the New World, through the expansion of the functions of the State (a necessary result of the Renaissance), and through the absence of any machinery whereby the old traditional revenues of the Crown could be normally and regularly increased.

It is debatable whether a stronger and more sober character than that of Henry might not have retained the monastic rents in his own hand. Had he done so it is conceivable that the British Crown would have been the strongest in Europe; would have rivalled, surpassed, and survived its French competitor. In point of fact, the monastic revenues were lost to the Crown. The squires and merchants were already too strong for the King; too strong, at any rate, for a king of that sort and in a crisis of that sort. The third parliamentary estate, the Commons, supported the loot of the monastic land—and shared in it.

Take the list of the county members sum-

moned to that Parliament which witnessed the dissolution of the monasteries, and you will find that every one of them, without exception, carried off his portion of the plunder. Quite apart, of course, from those selected representatives of the territorial and merchant classes, there was the great mass of their colleagues outside. The squires grew rich, and the merchants too, at the expense of the Throne. All shared in the general sack.

On Henry's death the process was vastly accelerated. A little group of country squires, the Seymours, whom his weakness had favoured as the brothers and relatives of his dead queen, and who were hardly gentlemen by origin, indulged in unlimited rapine and set the pace to their fellows. All England was ravaged, and the small freeholder began his long fall into dependence. When the national reaction came which supported Queen Mary, it was not strong enough to restore the abbey lands. On the contrary, Queen Mary, though she was by far the most firm and dignified of the Tudors, was compelled to acquiesce in the further strengthening of that class which was to destroy the Monarchy. As for Elizabeth, *her* reign is nothing more than a confirmation of the new great landlords,

with the Cecils at their head, who played the Queen as a card in their hands.

On the death of Elizabeth there were men still living who could just remember the older England. But this is all one can say. The religious revolution was certainly not consummated. The mass of men were still either indifferent or attached in various degrees of sentiment to the Catholic civilization of their fathers. But the strong minority in the saddle had broken entirely with the ancestral legend of England. Many of this minority sincerely, and all by profession, accepted the various forms of religious revolt, and on the economic or social side the results of the loss of religion were firmly established. The mass of the people had begun—though at first slowly—to lose, with their religion, their economic independence; a wealthy Oligarchy was now rooted and about to rule England.

That rule was expressed through the new character of the House of Commons. The House of Commons now—from the first decade of the seventeenth century—becomes a new thing.

The House of Commons became in the first generation of the seventeenth century something hitherto quite unknown in English history. It became—as the mouthpiece of

the big merchants of the towns and of the new big landowners of the country—a power which challenged the King: by its now consolidated rules, by its new organic continuity and strength, by its regular debates, and its inmixture in foreign and domestic policy, its claim to *all* revenue—by these novelties, the House of Commons became now an increasing hourly necessity without which the State could not proceed.

We all know how this conflict between the growing and the failing thing, between the new oligarchy and the kingship, came to a head. The squires and merchants—having created that new thing, the House of Commons which we know to-day—challenged the King. The lawyers, formerly clerical, were now more and more of the gentry, or allied with the gentry. Formerly dependent upon and supporting the King, they were now more and more identified with his opponents. So were the universities; for the old high popular education had been ruined by the Reformation, and the canalization of educational endowment towards the wealthier classes had begun.

A new doctrine of taxation was invented. Magna Charta was revived from the dead and glossed at random in favour of the new Commons. The rising quarrel (confused in

its eddies but clear in its main stream) produced the Civil Wars and the destruction of English kingship.

The new Oligarchy put to death the last true Monarch in 1649. His son came back eleven years later, but only as a salaried official, and from that day to within these last few years England enjoyed, as a State, a great national adventure, the like of which no other modern nation has enjoyed, and the marks of which have been a continuous advance in total wealth, in population, in domestic security, in the arts, in dominion abroad, and in recurrent and advancing success against external enemies.

Throughout this long period of greatness the House of Commons has been at once the symbol of the nation on its political side, and the motive force of the State in action. It has directed, moderated, and confirmed all England. It is so far representative of the fortunes of the State that one might almost incline to the superstition that its decline or peril might prove coincident with that of the nation.

But why was all this? Why should the supplanting after civil war of one form of government by another, of Monarchy by Oligarchy, have produced so large an effect

and one of such advantage to national greatness and glory? One might rather expect that the destruction of an ancient form of government should lead to turmoil and decay: revolutions commonly have that effect. *This* revolution led, on the contrary, to an unbroken progress of the sort I have described. The masses grew more dependent, the rich more powerful and even immune; but of the external growth and wealth and dominion, and all that of which patriotic men are proud, there can be no doubt. With all the strength of a growing thing, the England of the seventeenth century, the House of Commons in command, broke through obstacle after obstacle, surmounted difficulty after difficulty, proceeded from limit to further limit, until it stood out in the nineteenth century the strongest State in Europe.

And why?

*Essentially because the Oligarchy, which had thus seated itself firmly in the saddle after the destruction of the Monarchy, was growing (through the national sentiment and through the new religion on which that sentiment was based) into an Aristocracy.*

That is the point. That is the whole understanding of modern English history. *As an ultimate result of the Reformation the Kings*



*were broken and replaced by a Governing Class, of which the House of Commons was the organ.*

But that new governing class was not a mere clique, not a small minority merely seizing power. Men have never tolerated such usurpation. They have never allowed an irresponsible few to rule without moral sanction. It would be an insupportable rule.

The new governing class which supplanted the Kings of England three hundred years ago became a sacramental thing. It was worshipped. It sought to deserve worship. What had come, in the place of kingship, was an *Aristocratic State*, a State governed by an Oligarchy indeed, but by an Oligarchy which received the permanent and carefully preserved respect of its fellow-citizens.

Under such a rule did Modern England arise. The idea of a "gentleman" arose, and with it, the only England Englishmen now know.

But why is an Aristocracy so strong? Why, while it lasts, does it have such prodigious effect upon the State? Why, when it fails, does it fail for ever, and despair of discovering remedies for its failure?

These are the next questions we have to answer, and with the answer to them we

shall discover how grave is the crisis through which we are passing to-day, when at last, after long warning, the Aristocratic quality of the English State has failed, and with it the House of Commons.

# IV

## THE NATURE OF AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE



## IV

### THE NATURE OF AN ARISTOCRATIC STATE

ENGLAND then, as an effect of the Reformation, became an Aristocratic State. The nation developed organs proper to its new need—organs, that is, Aristocratic in quality, the chief and central one of them, governing all the rest, the House of Commons.

As an Aristocracy the nation proceeded till all memory of another political mood had disappeared.

The House of Commons, reflecting and concentrating the Aristocratic mood of the nation, fostered an increasing national greatness and acquired such a position in the Commonwealth as was comparable only to the national institution of the Monarchy in contemporary France. The House of Commons outlasted all foreign civil institutions contemporary with itself. It grew in power, as did the nation, from decade to decade, until it reached within our own memory the summit of institutional importance: unques-

tioned in its authority, the target of the national attention, the heart of civic life. But all this growth, leadership, and final eminence of an Oligarchy like the House of Commons was possible only in an Aristocratic Society. The whole process took place under and through the Aristocratic temper of the English.

Now, to repeat the question with which I concluded the last section, why has an Aristocracy this particular character of strength and of endurance expressed through an Assembly? Or rather (since, in another form, strength and endurance attach also to other polities), what is the essential character of an Aristocracy?

What was that which began in the seventeenth century to mark England off from the Continent, and at the same time to develop the unbroken expansion of English power abroad?

We must answer this question at the very outset of our study if we are to understand the time in which we live. *For the note of the time in which we live is the rapid decay in England of Aristocracy and, with it, of the House of Commons.*

Great and permanent communities of men have for the most part reposed upon the

mystic doctrine of human equality, and this temper has been reflected in their governing institutions. For either these institutions have been Monarchies, wherein one man was representative of the whole, and had beneath him, as it were, a great level—in spite of all the differences of title and of wealth; or (where the small size of the State permitted it) they were Democracies, that is, communities ruled by organs which perpetually attempted to reflect *directly* the common will—if possible by an actual gathering in one place of all free men—and by magistrates appointed indifferently from among all: sometimes even by lot.

Whether as great despotic Monarchies or as small Democracies, these enduring States had in common the belief in, and passion for, human equality as their foundation. They may be called the Egalitarian type of State.

Why men should be thus driven by a mysterious doctrine of human equality for which there is no positive proof, and against which all external evidence is arrayed, this is no place to inquire. We know that we find it dominating history and penetrating its legal codes.

By far the greater part of mankind has

lived under such form of rule and much the greater part of States in history have been Egalitarian States.

But there are certain other, exceptional, States which are arranged in a very different manner, and these it is convenient to term Aristocracies; using that term, not to mean "the government of the best," which is its old Greek meaning, but a particular public temper which favours the power of a restricted class.

In these Aristocratic States an Oligarchy rules; but that Oligarchy is much more than a mere Oligarchy. It is an *Aristocracy*, because it enjoys the quasi-religious respect of its fellow-citizens. It is not appointed by its fellow-citizens; it has a life and growth of its own. It co-opts more or less unconsciously into its own body, perpetually digesting new men into its own substance. Nevertheless it exists by the active consent and desire of those below it.

In an Aristocratic State the power is in the hands not of one, nor of all, but of a few. And not of some few at random, as you may find elsewhere (for actual administration can only be in the hands of a few men at any one time), but in the hands of a peculiar few: of "a few" in the sense that the Aristocracy



form a separate, though not strict, organism ; an organism which continuously reproduces itself and keeps up its own life. This Governing Group may, or may not, be hereditary, though in the nature of things it tends to be largely hereditary. It may or may not be in the aggregate wealthier than the average of the citizens, though in the nature of things it tends to be wealthier. Its prime characteristic is neither its wealth nor its hereditary element. Its prime characteristic is that of a permanent (though often vague) body in the State which governs through the moral authority conferred on it by a general respect.

So different do the passions of an Aristocratic State become (after a sufficient tradition has confirmed them) from those of a Monarchy or Democracy, that the one arrangement becomes almost unintelligible to the others. An Aristocratic State comes to stand quite apart from the other and commoner sorts of polity. It has an individual life often repugnant to them, always strange, like a marked human character with a sharply individual voice and manner. I am not here concerned with the quarrel as to which may be the best form of government, but with a recognition of one—the Aristocratic. And to this certain tests can be applied by

which we may immediately discover its presence.

The most obvious test, the most salient, is the attitude of an Aristocratic State towards its public servants. In Monarchy, as in Democracy, the public servant is an object of suspicion. In the Aristocratic State he is an object of reverence.

The former think of a public servant as a man thinks of his own servant. The occupant of public office is subject to perpetual scrutiny, to a strict discipline, and to the permanent imputation of the various faults to which service is specially liable: of corruption especially, but also of other forms of disability, as of sloth and of incapacity. The public servant in an Aristocracy is, upon the contrary, the superior of those whom he governs, and this not through any active sense of delegation (as from a Monarch or a people), but in himself and through the prestige of the governing class, of which he is a member.

That test is universal and always rings true. It is the unfailing criterion by which we may judge whether a human community be in its soul and essence Aristocratic or no. Find me a State in which the public servant is perpetually criticized, works under

a full light, is frequently punished and removable at will (and once removed has no further claim); or even a State in which such a condition is only desired and the immunity and privilege of public officers regarded, though existent, as odious, and there you have an Egalitarian State. Find me one in which the public servant, by his very service, is largely immune from suspicion, belongs to a permanent social body whose permanent superiority all admit; find me a State where the punishment of such men is a sort of sacrilege, and there you have the spirit of Aristocracy. And of all public servants the Judges are most typical in this regard. The measure in which Judges are immune from punishment and really revered is the measure of Aristocracy.

It is a feature common to all States that their form of government, when it is stable and accepted, is from below. It is the popular instinct of each, moulded ultimately by religion, which produces in each its sort of authority, and you may note how a mind accustomed to one sort of Authority will misinterpret altogether the fundamental ideas of another mind accustomed to another form of Authority.

The citizen of a founded Aristocratic State

cannot conceive of Monarchy save as tyranny, or of Democracy save as something at once chaotic and insufficient. The citizen of an Egalitarian State foolishly conceives the Governing Class of an Aristocratic State to be something which imposes itself unjustly upon its fellow citizens.

So far is either of these views from the truth that the whole mass of many a State has done what seems to an Aristocratic State an aberration. It has insisted, after a period of distress, upon reimposing Monarchy upon itself. Many such States have looked back on periods tending towards Aristocratic rule as disasters. Great Monarchies, when the Monarch fails, will often by some mysterious instinct like that of the swarm produce a collective government, and again make perpetual convulsive efforts to re-establish strong united rule; and, again, actually re-establish it under false and superficially oligarchic forms. France since the Revolution is an example. In such a State the presence of government by a few acts as an irritant so acute that men turn to massacre for a remedy.

In the Aristocratic State, upon the contrary, the popular instinct, with equal fidelity and strength, works through cliques and "committees," and insists upon "leaders," though

never upon one leader. There is no popular movement in them but secretes a special superior organism, which in its turn is revered. It may be a revolt of artisans against their conditions of poverty, a revolt of a nation under alien menace, or something so small as the formation of a local club. In whatever form the Aristocratic citizen works he produces Aristocracy to govern him as surely as bees make waxen cells. It is this profound appetite for government by a few, which few are clothed with moral authority, and voluntarily endowed with peculiar reverence, which marks the Aristocratic polity.

These two great types of State—the commoner one, the Egalitarian; the rarer one, the Aristocratic—exist, of course, in many forms and in several degrees of exactitude. The characteristics of the one are sometimes partly found in the other. Nevertheless, it remains true that the great States of history are in the main thus divided.

An Aristocratic State has many other characteristics attaching to it which we shall recognize at once as those attaching also to this country in the days of its unquestioned tranquillity and eminence.

Thus an Aristocratic State is the most homogeneous of all political arrangements.

It is that in which the peril of civil tumult is most thoroughly eliminated.

Again, and directly attaching to this last, it is a characteristic of the Aristocratic State—and one of its chief causes of strength—that all national functions within it are mixed. The Judiciary is not separate from the Legislature, nor the Legislature from the Executive; for all three belong essentially to the Aristocratic body. So does the personal direction of the Army and Navy, of foreign affairs, of finance, of commerce. All the activities of the State meet in a common class, the members of which support each other. There is no crevice for disruption to work on. The Judge will not imperil the Legislature or the Executive by too just a decision, nor the Executive the Judiciary by punishing an unjust Judge, nor the Soldier the Executive or Legislature through his ambition. For all are one.

Again, an Aristocratic State inclines to avoid exact political definition; for it must admit, if it is to remain Aristocratic, a large element of emotion which no formula can sufficiently contain. A Monarchy may have its exact rules and definition; since some one must command, let the monarch sum up all. A Democracy may also have its strict consti-

tution, because though invisible, corporate action is an admitted reality among men. But no book, no theory, no constitution could ever lay it down that a small permanent body had of *right* the general power in the State. No such small body could be exactly cut off from the rest by a plain definition without losing its principle of life. An Oligarchy can only exercise authority through the worship of those whom it governs, and through its own genius for commanding and retaining a mixture of awe and affection; but this it cannot do as an isolated thing: it must be interwoven with the commonwealth and separated by no exact boundary.

In an Aristocratic State, therefore, you will have anomalies appearing throughout administration, yet these anomalies in no way dissatisfy the popular mind, but rather strengthen the State through their presence.

Again, in an Aristocratic State, personality or what is called "character" will play a larger part, and definable method in the choice of rulers a smaller one. This force of "character" has always its place, of course, in any State of whatever type, especially in moments of crisis. It produces the leader in war, the popular tribune, and all those other chance governors which also Democ-

racies and Monarchies eagerly choose and follow. But when I say that character or personality is of greater moment in an Aristocratic State, I mean that it is a more permanent feature, or rather one without which Aristocratic government would be impossible. The citizen of an Egalitarian State is always astonished to note how small a degree of intelligence may be required in the public servant of the Aristocratic State. The citizen of the Aristocratic State is equally astonished (but more contemptuous) to note what a part intelligence—apart from the other elements of fitness to rule—plays among his Egalitarian neighbours. This is because in the one case—that of a Monarchy or Democracy—a public servant is an inferior set to a task; in the other—that of an Aristocracy—he is a superior who gives rather than receives orders.

Certain other essential features of the Aristocratic State must be noted in conclusion, because they apply with such force to our present conditions, and in particular to the peril the nation increasingly suffers from the decline of the House of Commons.

An Aristocratic State will commonly preserve not only an untroubled but a long life in the midst of its competitors. On the



other hand, an Aristocratic State is less able to reform itself than any other, and, if its essential principle grows weak, it has the utmost difficulty in finding a remedy for its disease. Civil dissension, normal to Democracies and common enough in great Monarchies is, as we have seen, necessarily remote from Aristocratic conditions. When it does break out in an Aristocracy it threatens the whole community with death, for that community has no tradition of dealing with such things: hence its peculiar dread of disorder.

An Aristocratic State attacked in its vital principle has no medicinal rules, no formulæ upon which to fall back for its healing. Its diseases are profoundly organic, never mechanical; for the whole action of an Aristocracy is less conscious and less defined than that of a Democracy or Monarchy.

Lastly, from two most powerful sources, the Aristocratic State tends to suffer from Illusion, especially in its old age—and illusion is the most dangerous of all things.

The two sources whence Illusion insinuates itself into the mood of an Aristocratic State are, *first*, its internal security; *second*, the legendary nature of the moral authority which the governing class exercises.

Security—the ignorance of revolution—

breeds also a dread of it ; and therefore there is in all Aristocracies (when for whatever reason their vigour begins to decline) a strong temptation for the citizens to mask reality, to shut their eyes to danger, to pretend that the new evils appearing in public life are not so weighty after all, to play with a comfortable self-deception, and above all to pretend that whatever now irks them is but some traditional malady which never yet was fatal, and therefore never will be. This pretence that some great evil menacing the State is no worse than others of its kind in the past, this conviction that something cannot but turn up to save affairs : both these habits bred of long security, make one source from which Illusion grows strong upon an Aristocratic State in its old age.

The other source of Illusion in the last days of an Aristocracy comes from the very nature of its rule. Since the mass of the people in an Aristocratic State do not feel themselves a part of government, but at the most look upon it as spectators, they must be nursed on legends. Thus, if it is necessary in the judgment of the Governing Class for the State to wage a great war in defence of its commerce, the masses must be told that the war is fought in defence of the State's

immediate life. Again, in the absence of strict Egalitarian law, the populace must have a legend of some sort of mystic power in those who administer the laws, whereby they imagine an abnormally exact justice always to be at work, and their judges to be high above the run of men. That respect for those who govern, which is the life of an Aristocracy, can only be maintained by the concealment of error and ill-doing in the Governing Class, and especially in the Judges. The habit of fostering Illusion grows from this field to others, the root of the whole affair being the necessary indifference of the populace to realities of State, which indifference is in the very condition of Aristocracy and alone makes it possible.

We may sum up and say that Aristocracy gives to the State as a State (I do not say to its individuals) the highest degree of security at home and of strength abroad, and with these two the third element of continuity—that is, of long life—for the nation. But these superiorities in it are balanced by a lack of machinery for recuperation, a lack of the power, ability, or resolution to transform things suddenly and at the expense of agony, even when such a transformation is essential to the continued prosperity of the State.

Thus it is that Aristocracies perish. They lose their vital principle. They are impotent to recover it. They nurse Illusion to protect their decay.

Moral authority, which is the foundation and necessity of all government, can attach to an intangible idea, as it does to a crown or flag, or to the abstractions of a Democracy, or to the sacredness of a Monarchy, and if it is lost to one form of these it can easily be attached to another, for such intangible ideas are to Democracy or Monarchy a sort of clothing which can easily be taken off one figure and put on to another. A Monarch is deposed and his "sanctity" is at once affixed to his successor. A flag is changed: the new combination of coloured cloth easily takes on the worship of the old.

But moral authority in the case of Aristocracies attaches to real men in themselves, to their own way of living, their manner and kind. It is the worship of something concrete, and capable therefore of destruction. You can exchange your royal house or your democratic constitution for another. But you cannot change your governing class for another. When once moral authority has passed from the governing class of an Aristocracy, nothing can restore it.

But while that moral authority is still present, while the governing class is still securely in the saddle, it will naturally present for the machinery of the State some assembly imbued with the aristocratic spirit: an Aristocratic Assembly; a central organ. And attached to that Assembly will be all the functions of the State, each of them coloured with this same Aristocratic spirit.

Such was necessarily the fortune of England when England became an Aristocracy after the Reformation, and the House of Commons was the central organ which that Aristocracy developed.

But here it may be asked: Might not the parliamentary organ produced under Aristocratic conditions, and obviously suited to these conditions, also be adaptable to conditions where Aristocracy was in decay or had disappeared? Is there something in the very nature of a small Sovereign Assembly framed in this manner which clashes hopelessly with those other moods of men in association, which are called indifferently Democratic or Monarchical? To put it briefly: is it not possible for a State no longer Aristocratic to *remain* well ruled by a *sovereign* parliament?

No; it is impossible. The matter may be proved after the fashion in which all real

conclusions are proved, first by examining it in its principles, and then by examining it through experience. We can show how, from its nature, the real power of a Governing Assembly, such as is the House of Commons, cannot survive the loss of the Aristocratic spirit, and we can show by concrete examples that it has, in fact, *not* survived the decay of the Aristocratic spirit, but is in full decline.

# V

PARLIAMENTS MUST BE OLIGARCHIES

OLIGARCHIES ONLY WORK AS  
ARISTOCRACIES

THE ARISTOCRATIC STATE DEMANDS  
ARISTOCRATIC ACTION AND TEMPER  
BOTH IN THOSE WHO GOVERN  
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**WE** have seen how England became an Aristocracy, and how her institutions (especially her capital national institution) necessarily reflected that character.

The central institution of that Aristocratic England which the Reformation had made was the House of Commons; and for two hundred and fifty years the Aristocratic House of Commons, the very heart of Aristocratic England, was a Senate ruling and leading the nation through increasing grandeur and fortune. If we consider the greatness and strength of the State rather than the happiness and dignity of its individual members

we must call it the most successful Governing Body of the modern European centuries.

This historical conception of an Aristocratic England need not be over much laboured here ; for though its origins in the Reformation are discreetly concealed, yet that England was an Aristocratic State in the immediate past is familiar even to the popular school history.

What may be less clear, is the truth that the Aristocratic central institution which this Aristocratic State developed in its own image cannot survive the decay of general Aristocratic conditions in the State as a whole. What needs particular emphasis and exposition—because it is an idea not yet sufficiently familiar—is the truth that any Sovereign Organ of Government like the House of Commons must be Aristocratic or lose its power.

But why should this be so ?

Because such a body as the House of Commons was, or any highly limited supreme group of men in a Great State is, necessarily an oligarchy, no matter what the machinery which called it into being.

It cannot but be an oligarchy, and it is universally true of oligarchies that they cannot govern unless they are Aristocratic.

If the matter be considered for a moment it will be clear that a very small body—that is a body very small compared with the mass of the State—a group of a few score men (the maximum working number, say, four or five hundred, the principals among these, say, a hundred, and the ultimate directors, say, thirty) a few score men, I say, given supreme power over the rest, no matter what the paper arrangement or even what the theory by which they are chosen, will act as an Oligarchy.

You might (it is conceivable though quite opposed to all known human action)—you might have, time after time, the individuals who were sent to form part of the central assembly chosen by great angry mobs of citizens all determined upon one plain policy, crowds of determined citizens, every man in which was determined to pin the representative down as a servant to the popular will. You may fantastically imagine such mobs composed of men having the leisure, the acuteness, the civic sense, the courage, the solidarity, and the clear thinking sufficient to enable them (all combined!) to watch their representative (*and servant*) closely hour by hour.

You might have a theoretical “right of recall.” The Member of Parliament thus

reduced to be a servant of this supposed inhuman body of active, permanent, interested, incorruptible citizens would have to render perpetually an account of his action and could be dispossessed of his powers at a moment's notice by reference to a popular vote.

But no matter what your machinery of choice—and I have purposely given a most extreme, impossible, example of a machinery the very opposite of Aristocratic—once the “representatives” are gathered together and given these immense powers—to legislate, to appoint magistrates, to administer and execute all the laws, to guide the general foreign policy of the country, and generally to act the Prince—those so assembled would necessarily turn into an Oligarchy.

They meet in one place. They are constant companions. They have to arrange their corporate life; and indeed that corporate life comes of itself from mere association. They are “members one of another”; their common character is not that they were vaguely voted for or against by absurd myriads, but that they are Chief Personages because they are the individual parts of this central small governing thing.

For each particular Member of Parliament

the other Member is "one of us." It must be so in the nature of things and of men. The elected body forms a College, a Corporation. It must do so, even if its duration were very limited and its membership fleeting and fluctuating.

But its duration cannot in practice be very limited. Still less can its membership be fleeting and fluctuating. On the contrary, such a body once formed must, if it is to endure, be continuous: and we know how, as a fact, the membership is a "career" like any other, and how the House of Commons in practice renews itself by choosing new members who are related to, or patronized by, the old.

A Parliament cannot exercise the enormous powers of Sovereignty in all its three aspects of making, administering, and executing the laws, save as a Senate. Still less can it add to these the direction of foreign policy and the hundred other lesser things which attach to the Prince, save as a permanent body. It cannot work if it is made up of a few hundred men meeting for a few days, and then of *another* few hundred meeting for another few days, and so on. The so-called "Representative" Assembly can only work (and in practice we have seen, not only in our own, but in

every other country, that it *does* only work) as a body slowly renewed, and renewed largely by its own volition; that is, largely co-opting its own new membership as elder members drop out through age, glut of loot, fatigue, tedium, disgrace, or pension.

But an organism of this kind, an instrument of government of this kind, a body comparatively small, in the main permanent, and continuous in action, is an *Oligarchy* by every definition of that term.

In practice the "Representative Assembly" of any large State is an Oligarchy. There will be in practice no question but that it is an Oligarchy. It will act and think as an Oligarchy, and be regarded by all its fellow-citizens as an Oligarchy: hated and despised if those citizens have the Egalitarian temper, but respected and followed if the citizens, of their nature, support Aristocracy, and (a most important condition) if the Oligarchy itself, the Parliament, is built after the only fashion which permits Oligarchies to endure; and that fashion is the Aristocratic fashion.

For what is that temper in the citizens of a State which reveres, admires, and demands Oligarchies?

Why, it is the Aristocratic temper: it is

by every definition the Aristocratic temper. Men never tolerate an Oligarchy imposed without Aristocratic excuse or value.

Why should Tom, Dick, and Harry, in no way distinguished from you and me, and a million of the rest of us, have these extraordinary powers? The Monarch, the Flag, the Republic, or any other symbols can be clothed with reverence. Such symbolic central organs of government can receive respect or adoration; one by its remoteness, seclusion, and all that we mean under the head of the word "Majesty"; another by its very abstraction. But where you are dealing with a small number of living men closely in touch with their fellows and recruiting themselves from their fellows, it is quite impossible that so concrete an organ of government, and one so little remote from common life, should be venerated save as an Aristocracy.

The formula is simple and of universal admission, and must be repeated. The only Oligarchy that works is an Aristocracy. Conversely, the definition of an Aristocracy is: "An Oligarchy enjoying the popular worship of its fellow-citizens."

And here we come to the second part of this essential proposition.

It is true that an Oligarchy can only work if it is Aristocratic, and that an Aristocracy means an Oligarchy, subject to popular respect from its fellow-citizens. But it is necessary for the continued power of such an organ not only that the citizens should be ready to worship it, but that it should itself be worshipful.

This is true not only of Aristocracies, but of every form of government whatever. The commander of a military unit, the master of a school, the captain of a cricket eleven or of a boat-club—any one clothed with authority over others in any form must co-operate with the instinct for authority in those subject to him. Passive in those he governs, it must be active in him.

It is not general virtue which is essential to the position of a governor, but a particular virtue, or rather *quality*, necessary to his function.

The habit of tippling is not a very terrible vice; the soul of a man suffering from that weakness is, no doubt, in far better case than the soul of the avaricious man, or of the cruel man, or of the proud man. Nevertheless, a large measure of avarice, some of cruelty, much of pride, will not any one of them destroy the authority of one that is



to govern. Most undoubtedly tippling, or any other unseemly trick (not even vicious—a mere habit of buffoonery) would be enough to destroy his authority.

An Aristocratic body governing the State must conserve its dignity as much as an individual Monarch must; otherwise it cannot govern. Further, an Aristocratic Body (as our Gentry) can only govern so long as the mass are in a mood for such government.

It will only retain its power so long as two conditions are present:—

(1) The first, the most obvious, is, as we have seen, the Aristocratic temper in the governed: that is, you must have in the mass of men a desire to be governed by a few. You cannot have an Aristocratic government in an Egalitarian State to which every form of government by a set is alien and odious.

(2) But this condition does not stand alone, and is not in itself sufficient. No matter what the appetite of the populace be for Aristocratic government, the Governing Class must, also on its side, observe, by its own instincts, certain rules of conduct; it must present a certain character which receives, nurtures, and maintains the respect given it from below. Lacking this, the whole system fails.

The necessary combination of these two conditions has often been forgotten. Men have talked—sincerely in Democratic countries, superficially when Democratic phrases were everywhere popular—as though Aristocracies imposed themselves by force. Men have also talked (on the other side) as though the mere existence of an Aristocratic body were sufficient to the Aristocratic character of the State.

But the truth is, an Aristocratic Government — that powerful and most solid polity! — requires both the desire for Aristocracy in the governed, *and* the playing of the Aristocratic part by those who govern.

Now these things being so, a Parliament set up by no matter what machinery will fail, will fall into disrepute, will lose the power of governing (and, therefore, will weaken the State), will allow a divided Sovereignty, will, in a single phrase, *break down*, if the two conditions of Aristocracy are lacking to it: the desire for Aristocracy in those who accept its rule; a response to this desire in those who exercise that rule.

It is the purpose of this book to show that these conditions are now lacking in England. The Aristocratic instinct in the people is dead: the response to it in those who chance

to govern and who are no longer natural leaders, is not attempted, and has become impossible. It also is dead.

Therefore is the Parliamentary régime ending.



## VI

THE ARISTOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE STATE HAS BROKEN DOWN BECAUSE THE ARISTOCRATIC TEMPER HAS DEPARTED BOTH FROM THOSE WHO ARE GOVERNED AND FROM THOSE WHO GOVERN

FIRST AS TO THOSE WHO GOVERN: THEIR LOSS OF ARISTOCRATIC TEMPER EVIDENT IN THE CONDITION TO WHICH THE HOUSE OF COMMONS HAS AT LAST FALLEN



## VI

THE ARISTOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE STATE HAS BROKEN DOWN BECAUSE THE ARISTOCRATIC TEMPER HAS DEPARTED BOTH FROM THOSE WHO ARE GOVERNED AND FROM THOSE WHO GOVERN. FIRST AS TO THOSE WHO GOVERN : THEIR LOSS OF THE ARISTOCRATIC TEMPER EVIDENT IN THE CONDITION TO WHICH THE HOUSE OF COMMONS HAS AT LAST FALLEN.

IF it be true, as it is, that a parliament is necessarily an Oligarchy, and will be at once national and efficient in proportion as it is an Oligarchy, and if it be true, as it most certainly is, that human beings will only tolerate Oligarchy in the particular form of Aristocracy, we conclude that a strong living organ of Parliamentary *Sovereignty* must be Aristocratic in character, and that failing such a character a *Sovereign* Parliamentary system declines. The strength of the British system lay in its Aristocratic character, and

it is the failure of this character which has led to the decline of the House of Commons.

We have next to study what this failure has been and (what is of less practical importance) how it has come about.

What has happened in this essentially Aristocratic State to lessen its ancient Aristocratic quality? What are the apparent phenomena of that change? What are the causes which have led to it?

When we have answered these questions we can proceed to the last portion of this study, which we shall find to be, first, whether the Sovereign authority of the House of Commons can be revived, and, second, if it cannot, what should or can take its place.

A State is Aristocratic, remember, when two conditions are present.

(I) The first and fundamental one is the desire upon the part of the citizens for Aristocratic government; that is, the tendency—organic, and in the main hardly conscious—for submission to an Oligarchy, and for paying a particular respect to those who compose it.

Only those men who have never lived in an Aristocratic country can doubt that such an appetite *does* arise, and is strong enough to last for centuries in certain communities,



particularly in the great commercial communities of history. An Aristocracy is from below.

Only those who have long lived both within an Aristocratic country and away from it can appreciate how strangely deep in such a country is the worship of powerful men, and how rooted the distaste in the masses for the responsibilities of government.

(II) The second character of Aristocratic government is a function of this first. The Oligarchy that is established in power over an Aristocratic State must play its part. Respect is there waiting for it. The people demand it, and will go very far rather than abandon their regard for it. But if for any reason it fails to play its part, if the governing class and its governing organ fail to fill the Aristocratic rôle, no appetite upon the part of the governed can restore it. The governed may demand an Aristocratic nucleus, their every instinct may crave for such a thing at the helm of the State, but if the thing is not there, if it ceases to be, their desire will remain unsatisfied.

Now what has clearly happened in the case of England, what was already developing in the last third of the nineteenth century, and what was fully disclosed at its close, was a weakness in *both* these elements of an Aristo-

cratic State. The mass of the people had come to demand Aristocracy far less than they did. In great sections they had come to forget, in some they had become positively hostile to, the old mood of reverence upon which Aristocracy reposed.

On the other side of the arrangement, the governing class, and in particular its special organ, the House of Commons, progressively failed to maintain the Aristocratic attitude. It slowly began to lose the respect of the governed. By our own day—in the last few years—it has lost that respect altogether. These two interacting tendencies, each increasing the other, have produced in our time an unstable political condition in which neither is the ancient organ of government, the House of Commons, respected by the people, nor, even did the populace desire it, has it left within itself the power to play its old part.

It is convenient to take the second of these phenomena first, because it is the most obvious and the least disputed. The loss of dignity and authority in the House of Commons is notorious, and even notoriously final. It can be dealt with, therefore, very briefly; whereas the other branch of the charge—the loss of the Aristocratic spirit among the people—needs a longer examination.

It would be tedious to recapitulate here the somewhat monotonous and unceasing series of spontaneous acts which have destroyed the prestige of the House of Commons in our time. They are of common knowledge. They have become commonplaces. They continue daily. They have become a part of public life. We now expect no others.

Until some ten or fifteen years ago, though the level to which the House of Commons had already fallen was very low, the indignities which it nourished, the personal corruption in which it was soaked, and the increasing nastiness of its financial intrigue were as yet insufficiently known to those of the mass whom it administered. It is always so when an institution breaks down. The crust survives by a few years the rotten interior.

The process was already far advanced by say, 1905, but a knowledge of it was confined to the few thousand individuals directly connected, as pressmen, domestic servants, secretaries, clients, and relatives, with the few hundreds engaged in professional politics. It was a healthy and necessary work in these years—say 1905 to 1912—to expose what were called the “scandals” perpetually recurring at Westminster, and to make public what already everywhere filled private conversation in London.

There still lingered, indeed, a certain hesitation on the part of patriotic men lest an exposure of what the House of Commons had become might not weaken the State without yielding any corresponding advantage. These critics of too much truth-telling argued that we might be passing through an exceptional period of nastiness, and that if the thing should right itself it would be a pity to lower the authority of that which was still, in spite of its known internal breakdown, the only existing organ of government.

But this sort of criticism was ill-founded. The truth was bound to come out, and it was better that the mass of men should know where the evils of the State lay, and of what sort they were—or at any rate that they should have examples whereby to judge—than that they should continue in ignorance. Moreover, the process had gone so far that the hope of the House of Commons recovering its old position of honour (let alone recovering it without exposure) was negligible. Therefore the work of exposure was undertaken, and, in a time curiously short for so large a task, that exposure was, I venture to think, completely successful. The whole public is now aware of the strange new atmosphere which Members of Parliament, and particularly Minis-

ters, must breathe to-day, and of their dependence upon paymasters in the background.

Even the official press which lives upon and also dominates professional politics, the few millionaire owners of which are either themselves professional politicians, or use the politicians at their will, cannot now completely boycott what has become universal knowledge.

Without any need even for such elementary research as would disclose any number of particular examples—many score could be discovered to show how these examples succeed each other daily, and are never absent from the atmosphere of Westminster—a man has but to recall the more notorious, the two or three dozen that stand out in the last seven years from Marconi to the McAlpines, and from the Samuel silver deal to the Dope Scandal. They form a sufficient list.

These leading cases alone include the giving of secret contracts, the levying of blackmail, the immunity of even exposed and proved criminals from the criminal law, not only when they themselves were professional politicians, but even when they were no more than relatives, the absurd sale of honours—a thing of no great practical importance save as a symptom—the very much more serious sale of policies, and all the rest of it.

The whole thing has moved in the atmosphere of Queer Street, and as one scandal after another has followed in dreary procession, the public at large has almost ceased to give particular attention to each newcomer, and is content with a general impression of roguery.

The character of what the House of Commons has now become is established on its financial side as is the character of a man who has been caught several times doing something funny with a cheque. His acquaintances do not particularize and may perhaps, if they are put to it at a moment's notice, be unable to write down more than a dozen or two examples of his shady dealings. But there is no doubt at all of his moral colour, or of the opinion that is held of him. He is done for.

But the thing to notice in all this, the thing which concerns the future of the State, and in particular of the institution which has now fallen so low, is not the degree of the moral descent, but its special character and colour. It is not the wrong, nor even any one comic enormity, it is the pettiness in this series of scandals which directly concerns the decline of the Aristocratic spirit in England, and with it of what was for so long its principal organ at Westminster.

As we know, this truth—that Westminster

has lost its dignity—affects many other aspects of the great change; the choice of personnel, the comedy of political pledges, the undignified mountebank tricks of their chief modern actors, the farcical phrases and situations—especially in the human parts of the play—and all the rest of the breakdown.

If there is one political lesson clear in history, and not only in history but also in our personal experience of the government of men—or of animals for that matter—it is that the qualities required for government are of a special kind. This is true not only of government, of course, but of every other human function. A man draws well or ill, sails well or ill, rides a horse well or ill, upon a basis quite different from that which makes him in general a worse or a better man. What are required of him *in his function* are the qualities consonant to that function, and in particular to the organism to which that individual belongs.

The characters which keep an Aristocratic body in the saddle are easily recognized, though difficult to define. The first, undoubtedly, is dignity. The second, closely allied to dignity, is a readiness in the individual to sacrifice himself for the good of the whole. The Aristocratic spirit demands

in those who govern a readiness to suffer personal injury and loss for the sake not only of the State—that is common to all forms of government—but of the Aristocratic quality of the State, and in particular of the special Aristocratic organism to which the individual belongs.

For instance, it is in the Aristocratic spirit that a member of the Government caught taking a bribe, or telling a public lie, should resign: and until quite lately such resignations were the rule.

Another subtle character, and one very little recognized because it is so difficult to seize (yet its presence is powerfully felt), is the *representative* character of the Aristocrat properly so called.

By various instinctive methods, of which he is even himself unconscious, he maintains a distinction between himself and those who desire to regard him as a superior; yet he must be national: he must so act that the less fortunate man reveres him as a sort of glorified example of himself. A living Aristocracy is always very careful to be in communion with, actually mixed with, the mass of which it is itself the chief. It has an unflinching *flair* for national tradition, national custom, and the real national will. It has, therefore,



as a correlative, an active suspicion of mere numerical and mechanical tests for arriving at that will.

To take a practical example: an English governing class, which in the middle of the nineteenth century had given up riding horses or playing cricket, would have ceased to govern; but the extent of the franchise was indifferent to it.

Now what we have to remark about the House of Commons in its present condition is that those peculiar qualities—which are not ethical qualities, but the special qualities of a particular function—have failed.

An Aristocracy may loot on a large scale. A particular member of the governing class may make his fortune too rapidly and almost openly through his political power. Yet there is an aristocratic way of doing it and an unaristocratic way of doing it.

To take a concrete example: it is morally far worse to buy your own land with State money at several times its market value and put the proceeds into your pocket, than it is to take a few shares secretly over a private table in Downing Street from a Jewish company promoter. It is morally far worse to enclose public land to your private advantage than it is to accept a secret private

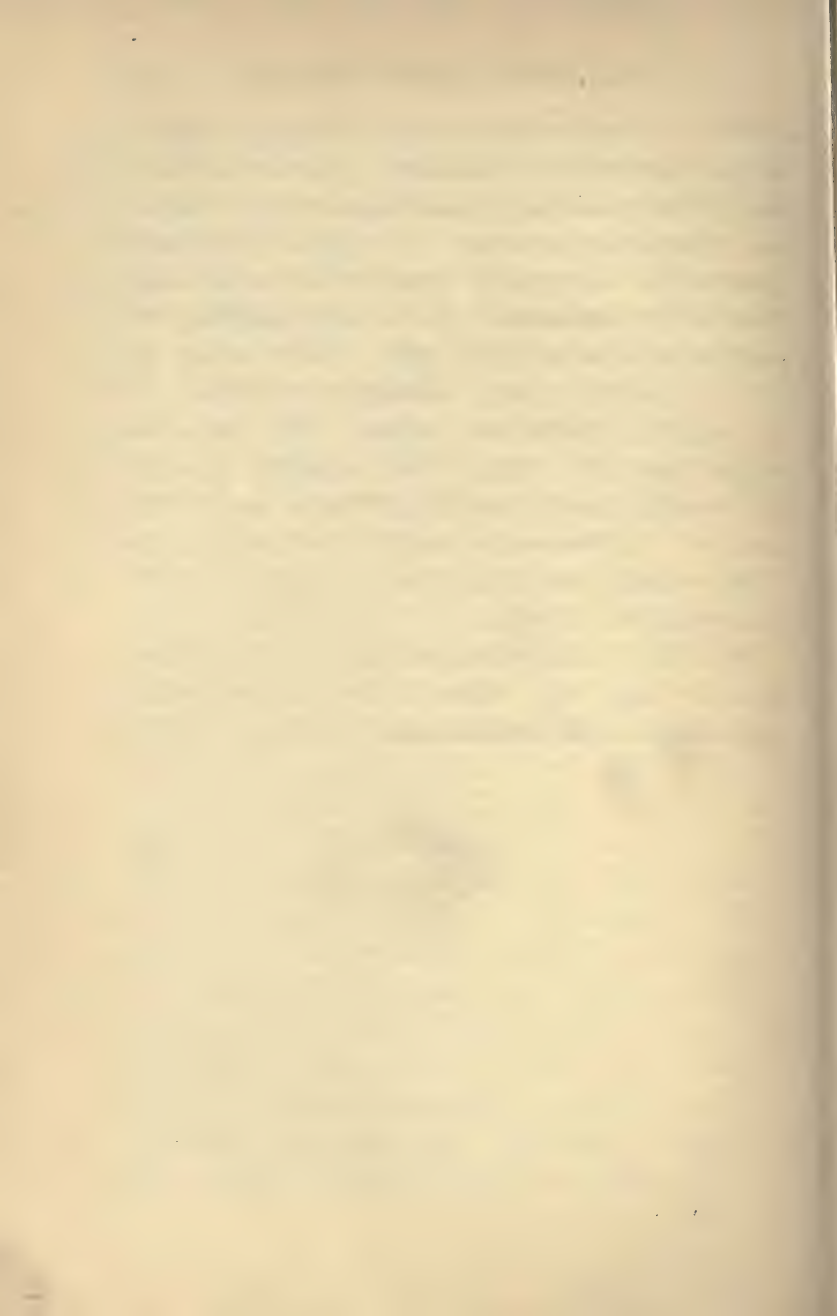
pension from a low financial backer. Yet the first set of actions will not destroy the prestige of an aristocratic body, and the second will.

To take actions of the same degree of obliquity, and that not in any very extreme degree: actions which we do not seriously blame in any man. A member of the governing class may practice nepotism, and may see that his relative gets a comfortable place at the taxpayers' expense: so may a man quite unfitted to be a member of the governing class. Yet in the eyes of those accustomed to, and demanding, Aristocracy, the first action seems natural and the second ludicrous. The relative of the Aristocrat is felt to be one of an accepted organism: but the relative of the professional politician is found intolerable, he is thought to have no claim. It is hard, it is unjust; it is so.

But the capital charge is the general one of ineptitude. When a governing clique ceases to be Aristocratic you feel it not only in specific indignities and particular buffooneries, or petty thefts; you feel it in a sort of insecurity. The frantic efforts to conceal, the silly blushing denials, the haste to get away with the swag—all these are the symptoms: and worst of all is the incapacity for

sacrifice. An aristocracy willingly—nay at regular intervals—sacrifices. Now one of its members voluntarily submits, now it makes an example of another. It plays a consistent drama in the grand manner—nor in doing this is it insincere: it is but fulfilling its nature and playing its part. But when the worst culprits are clumsily shielded or desperately promoted, when you have the impression of a gang “all hanging together lest each hang separately,” when an ardent passion for personal safety colours all the ramp—then the Aristocratic spirit is dead. It is the surest sign.

And that is the sign written in very large letters over the House of Commons, and especially its Front Benches, to-day.



## VII

THE ARISTOCRATIC SPIRIT, WHICH HAS QUITE DISAPPEARED FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, IS DISAPPEARING ALSO IN THE GOVERNING CLASS AS A WHOLE



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I SAID in my last section that the breakdown of the Aristocratic spirit was observable in two points: the first was the breakdown of the Aristocratic capacity in the governing portion of the nation, and the second the breakdown or disappearance of an appetite or desire for Aristocracy in the mass of the nation.

The first of these symptoms has two aspects. There is the breakdown of the Aristocratic spirit in the central Aristocratic institution of the House of Commons, and there is the breakdown of it in the governing class out of which the House of Commons proceeds and of which it is the reflection. This failure of the House of Commons to play the Aristocratic part and its consequent necessary loss of power I have described.

It remains to consider the loss of that power by the governing class in general before we pass to the corresponding loss of desire for it in the mass.

The loss of the Aristocratic spirit in the class which until quite recently possessed it is chiefly observable in the decline of principle.

Let me explain what I mean. I mean here by principle not a right or good observable by the mind and maintained by it as an ideal. I mean *any* standard observed by the mind and maintained as an ideal: a norm of conduct.

For instance, that man is a man of principle (in such a use of the word) who being engaged upon looting his neighbours has discovered that caution in speech is necessary to such a trade, sets up such caution for a standard and rigorously conforms to that standard. The principle here is not a good observed and followed. On the contrary it is an evil. But it is a principle none the less. *It is an appreciated and sustained framework of conduct.*

Now every governing class in every Aristocratic State has had some such moral backbone, differing with the particular colour of the State, the race, the religion, the climate, and all the rest of it. Every such special class has had a *norm of conduct*. Every such



class has been marked off by a particular character, which character served a threefold and necessary purpose: (a) It gave a basis for the respect paid to them by the governed. (b) It strengthened their own belief in their own capacity. (c) It was an instrument of self-preservation: it went with an instinct which told the governing class what errors, weaknesses, or even virtues, were to be avoided if that class were to maintain its place. For example, the character I speak of knew exactly where and when to find a scapegoat.

This special character was, and is, always the result of a standard of conduct understood thoroughly and strictly maintained. So to maintain it is the action of what we call *principle*.

Now Principle in the conduct of a whole social class has this essential quality attaching to it: that continuity of tradition is the condition of its existence. Therefore, when that continuity is broken, the principle disappears, and with its disappearance the class-character which it produced is also lost for ever. It is irrecoverable. Tradition being broken, the thing dies, and its very nature is forgotten. It can never be restored.

For instance, there must have been something, some bunch of habits, some way of walking, and of speaking, some set of things

to be done and not to be done, which gave the governing class of the old Aristocratic, independent, and strong Venice its power. It disappeared. Much as we know of that Venice, no modern book can give us a picture of *that*. What was "the standard of a Venetian gentleman"?

The decay of principle, in this sense of the word, often comes from something good in those who allow it to decline. It often indicates a better character in those who have lost it than in those who maintained it. Humorous recognition of our own limitations, honest anger against the evil side of our traditions, a cynical, or at any rate frank, analysis of our own hypocrisy and make-belief—all these are good in the individual. The modern descendant of the gentry who prefers to tell the truth about what remains of his power, who is more pitiful to the poor than were his fathers, who is more ready to laugh at himself, is the better man for all these things. But he is the less fitted for governing in an Aristocracy. Herein we may observe the truth of the old saying that Aristocratic States admire a measure of stupidity in those who govern them. They do: for too keen a wit is solvent of many things that buttress principle.

The loss of principle, then, is observable in the good development of what was the governing class, in its greater humour, its greater kindness, its greater humility. But it is observable also in other and worse things. It is observable, for instance, in the weakening of contempt for certain things which were despised because they were unfitted to Aristocratic government, but which also happened to be base. The men who, if England were still Aristocratic, would govern, now tolerate an easy domestic equality with adventurers and rascallions whom their fathers would not have admitted beyond the doorstep, and with most of whom their fathers would not even have conversed in the street. The old reason for the gentleman's despising the rascallion was not a particularly moral reason. It came rather from an instinct of self-preservation: the preservation of the Aristocratic organism and of the Aristocratic State as a whole.

There is another element in the affair: the old age of a State: weariness.

This weakening of contempt, this new intimate companionship with financial powers, not only ephemeral but base, comes in part from fatigue. And this we see in a process everywhere observable: which is the admix-

ture of apology and impudence with which the process is accompanied.

It is the commonest of modern experiences to find a man or woman still of the governing type (they no longer possess the governing power) apologizing for their frequentation of such and such a house, for their acceptance of such and such an insult, and accompanying the apology with a phrase which admits their incapacity to stand firm. It is an attitude of drift and of lassitude in luxury: of a tired need for money. It is the very contrary of that atmosphere of discipline which *all* governing organs, Monarchic, Democratic, or Aristocratic, must maintain under peril of extinction.

Next to this abandonment of principle, this loss of a stiffening standard round which the governing body could rally, and to which it would conform, we note the disintegration of the governing body. That process has not yet gone very far, but it is going very fast.

Under the old order the governing class maintained a certain hierarchy, and had a regular process of digestion and of support. The best example of this function in the old Aristocratic organism, the gentry, is its old attitude towards intelligence and creative power

(intelligence and creative power are between them the mark of the arts). The painters, the writers, the builders, the scholars, were not for the most part of the gentry. Some few of them were, but that was an accident. The mass of English poets, painters, architects could not be, and were not, gentlemen. Yet the close relations between the Aristocratic organism and this important section of the State are very interesting to note—I mean their relations at the time when the Aristocratic spirit was most vigorous. The scholar, the writer, the painter, and all that tribe, aspired, though they were not of the governing class, to a permanent acquaintance with many members of it. Not only was that acquaintance granted by the superiors, it was actively sought by them; for the value of such an association as a support to the gentry was instinctively recognized. One might compare the process to the need for light which would be felt by a man possessing the strength for some piece of work, but having to do it by night. Such a man, if he is working in the dark, will be wise to take a lantern with him. His strength will blunder unless that upon which he works is well lighted.

There was, of course, more than this. The

governing class really revered the arts and fostered them. They made the arts worth a man's while through the respect that was paid to them. The gentry reflected upon the arts something of an Aristocratic quality, and the artist, in the full sense of that word, was an adjunct to the gentleman. The disintegration of the governing class has destroyed that relation. To-day it no longer exists. The normal association of the gentleman is with great wealth—no matter how acquired or how ephemeral. The creator in letters or the plastic arts comes in as a chance trophy or a buffoon. There are often individual friendships, there is no class recognition.

The older relation was not a good thing in itself. It was not a noble relation. It did not make for the best art or the best culture. It debased the artist and corrupted his superior. In other words, that older relation suffered from detestable imperfections because it was human. But in an examination of the way in which a governing class breaks up the disappearance of this relation between the governing class and the creative intelligence of the State is to be carefully appreciated. The destruction of that relation is at once a symptom and a cause of decay.

The destruction of that old relation between

Aristocracy and creative power was but one function of Aristocracy's breakdown. It was not due to pride, it was not wilful or deliberate. You can still point to individual relations which are exactly those of the older times. But the corporate relation is different. It has become an affair of "sets." You get whole patches, as it were, of what would have been the governing class in past times, to which, to-day, the arts mean nothing. Conversely you get great bodies of the arts divorced from any intimate knowledge of what would have been the governing class a generation or two ago. The process is sometimes expressed rather crudely by the epigram that the man who would have been retained as a guest (fifty or even thirty years ago) is nowadays called into lunch as an exhibit. Another less crude and more accurate way of putting it is to say that the necessary connection between the Aristocratic and the artistic function in the State has disappeared. Much of the ritual is still maintained, but it is only ritual. And of course the great conclusive test of the whole affair is the decline of taste.

In an Aristocracy, while it still has vigour, the Aristocratic organism recognizes and selects (though itself is not for the most part creative) true creative power around it. It

recognizes above all *proportion and order* in creative power. It has an instinct against chaos in the arts.

When what remains of a governing class seeks only novelty and even absurdity, or, what is worse still, a mere label, in its appraisal of creative power, it is a proof that the Aristocratic spirit has declined.

The disintegration of the class that should govern is to be seen in another fashion: the substitution of simple, crude, obvious, and few passions for a subtle congeries of appetites.

Consider, for instance, the passion for money. The necessity for wealth, position through wealth, the digestion of new wealth, all these are indeed native to the governing class of an Aristocracy. But they are native only as part of a much larger whole. Wealth thus sought in a strong governing class is subject to many qualifications, and the desire for it is balanced against many other desires. When the attitude towards wealth becomes at once a principal thing *and an isolated thing* it is a proof, and a cause of, disintegration in a governing class; for instance, when wealth is divorced from manners, or is accepted or sought for at the expense of a grave loss of dignity.

And what is true of the appetite for wealth



is true of many other things, the appetite for physical enjoyment, the appetite for change, the appetite for new sensation (an appetite born of fatigue and accompanying not strength, but weakness).

The processes of a governing class in an Aristocratic State are deliberate and tenacious. The isolated processes which occur in its disintegration are rapid and at random.

Lastly, we note in the decline of an Aristocratic spirit within the governing organism of an Aristocracy an over-consciousness, or self-praise. An organism still active works outwards: considers its material rather than itself; is absorbed in its task. But as any organism loses activity, that is, loses its own vital principle, it begins to look inward and to make itself the subject of its own apprehension.

All these marks of decay are clearly apparent in the society around us.

Separated from these marks of decay attaching to the governing body itself are the marks of decay apparent in its relation to the governed. The remaining inheritors of the old Aristocratic position would deny with indignation that they are to-day separated from the mass of Englishmen. They would point with justice to their close relations

with their tenants on the great landed estates, to the public work upon which they engage, and to their still national character, in spite of their now irretrievable mixture with international finance and consequent degradation of blood. But they forget the change in numerical proportion that has come about within the memory of living Englishmen. There is not one of them that really knows the popular life of a great town; or, if he knows it (as a rare exception), he never knows it from within. Most of the gentry are still at ease among the same sort of rural men as surrounded their fathers. They are not only not at ease among, they are quite alien to, the new millions of the towns. They cannot mix with them in such a fashion that the difference would seem one of degree rather than of quality. They cannot even tell you what these masses are thinking or saying. They are surprised at each new expression of that world. It is foreign to them.

What has happened might almost be compared to the results of an invasion, though the invasion has come up from within and has crossed no frontier. There has for many years been a large majority of Englishmen (it is to-day an immense majority—perhaps nearly nine-tenths, certainly much more than

three-fourths of the whole national body), which is no longer reflected in the habits of the governing class, which can no longer say of any existing class: "This is what I would be were I more fortunate. This is myself upon a larger stage."

But it is of the very essence of Aristocracy that such a spirit should be really present. A governing body alien to that which it governs, no longer what I have called "representative" of the mass, is the governing body of an Aristocracy no longer. It fails in the first essential of such an organ.

Pathetically enough—the failure having finally come about—qualities equally essential to an Aristocratic governing body, and certainly still retained in full vigour, are quoted as though they were in themselves sufficient. For instance, courage is thus quoted. And courage has not declined in them at all. The rules of conduct conformable to an older and similar society are still largely observed, and many other lesser elements in character are still clearly apparent.

But these are only half the business, and the half that counts least. The other half, a mixing among, understanding of, appreciation for, and in general *communion* with the governed mass, is gone; and with it there

has disappeared in what used to be the governing organism of an Aristocratic State—the House of Commons—the vital principle of such an organism.

Thus did the Aristocratic spirit in those who govern disappear. It has clearly disappeared from the House of Commons. It has disappeared from the governing class in general, of which the House of Commons was the organ and the product, since its institution in the seventeenth century. That Aristocratic spirit has disappeared through an abandonment of principle, and, accompanying this, by the disintegration of what was once a strong and solid body.

Its disappearance may be tested by the attitude of what was once the governing class towards the arts and towards letters, towards its own self, and, above all, towards the masses which it has ceased to represent, with which it has ceased to be in communion, and which it has ceased to know.

There remains to be examined the second half of the process, the loss among the governed of an appetite for Aristocratic government.

## VIII

THE ARISTOCRATIC SPIRIT  
IS DISAPPEARING ALSO  
FROM THE GOVERNED



## VIII

### THE ARISTOCRATIC SPIRIT IS DISAPPEARING ALSO FROM THE GOVERNED.

I SAID in the last two sections that the peculiar characters which should mark the governing class of an Aristocratic State had recently failed, and that the instrument by which such a class works, its central assembly—in this country the House of Commons—had failed with it. The first necessity of an Aristocratic State—to wit, a governing class that can and does play a special part—is no longer appalled or weaponed for such a part.

But there is another factor equally essential to the Aristocratic State, and that is the appetite of the governed for government by the revered few. And this also has failed. England is ceasing to be an Aristocratic State, not only because, nor even perhaps chiefly because, the governing organism has lost its old character, but more because the desire for such an organism has largely dis-

appeared, and is further disappearing in the mass of the governed.

The tests of this now nearly accomplished process are many. The first to note and the most obvious, is the inability of the mass to distinguish the old type of command—where it still survives. Neither the accent nor the gesture, the gesture of a gentleman, is recognized as a special thing. The great urban mass sees distinction of wealth, and sees that only. It has indeed no opportunity for seeing more. You may still hear the old saw commonly repeated, that the populace distinguishes readily between what is called good and ill breeding in those who still propose to govern. The new urban populace does nothing of the kind. Outside traditional rural society, that appreciation, for what it was worth, is gone. It has gone to a great extent among the wealthy, who could and should have cherished it. It is gone altogether in the masses. It is not reflected in their literature, or in the drama that they follow, and, a far better test, it is not reflected in their daily habits. It was so within living memory; within living memory they “knew a gentleman”—but it is so no longer.

But this is, as I say, a superficial and an



obvious test ; there is another more profound. The political objects which, though somewhat confusedly, are none the less strongly sought by the bulk of the urban population, have no relation to the governing class. The whole of that society—the great majority of our fellow-citizens—have faced round, as it were. Their attention is no longer fixed upon a type which they once felt suitable to a vague, not unpopular, exercise of control. It has turned in a totally different direction.

The working people of the towns now consider at the best certain political principles, at the worst mere daily need. The interest of those governed is for the most part either a concern for subsistence and security (imperative needs which a past neglect of their condition by the rich has bred), or it is a concern for the realization of certain political formulæ, these also for the most part of an economic character. To put it in concrete terms, the question of wages or of the rights and privileges of trade organizations, the question of prices, or the demand for the “nationalization” of this or that, are the whole content of popular thought in the cities.

That this phase may pass is probable.

That the demagogue or the honest popular leader, or even the hero or the bureaucrat, or (for such an apparition is very possible) the religious innovator—that some human figure should take the place of these impersonal phrases, and these mere demands for physical sustenance, is probable enough. My point is that the co-operation, the organization of many human beings regarded as one governing class is no longer a thing within the vision of the governed. The gentry no longer means anything to them. What may be left of such a class they merge in a general vision of excessive, unjust, and indeed malignant wealth.

It is remarkable that in the stage through which at present we are passing no positive direction is replacing this negation of the old Aristocratic direction. The man who talks of modern popular feeling in the English town as “democratic”<sup>1</sup> is either applying

<sup>1</sup> Democracy (as distinguished from mere egalitarian feeling with which Monarchy is also compatible) means a political arrangement of society in which the *whole people govern*. Its necessary material condition is some possibility for the *initiative* of the whole people to express itself: e.g. by a meeting of all citizens. Its necessary moral condition is an active desire on the part of a determining majority of citizens to exercise such an initiative constantly: “No republic without republicans.”

that word to something quite different, or he is merely repeating the word without considering what he is saying, or he is suffering from an illusion.

There is as yet no trace of any democratic or even of any egalitarian spirit at work in our towns. But very clearly to be perceived there, is a void: the old organization of government by a commanding and an accepted class has gone for ever. Nothing has yet taken its place.

It is remarkable that expressions belonging to nations very different from the English are more familiar to our urban masses to-day than what used to be the old national expressions of political thought. For instance: there is more in common between the phrases used in the industrial quarrels of the great towns abroad, especially in the New World, and those used in our great towns to-day, than there is between either and the expressions of the immediate past. Describe in the papers a great strike anywhere abroad, and our townsmen understand its motives, follow its phrases, feel a personal sympathy

The test of the Democratic temper is a popular craving to possess public initiative, and the test of Democratic government is the exercise of that initiative. Chance consultation by vote has nothing to do with Democracy.

with its success or defeat. Describe in the same pages an election of thirty years ago, the "Liberalism" of the rich Whigs working for votes against the "Conservatism" of the rich Tories, and they would not understand you. Recall to them the old enthusiasm for a once popular Parliamentary leader—and it means nothing to the town workmen: they have now nothing but a tedious contempt for your Parliamentarian.

The one great link between the present and the past in this connection is the link of popular patriotism. *That* has not yet declined. The names of the great national heroes, half legendary, still have their full effect. Pride in national achievement, the determination to maintain national greatness—all this part of the Aristocratic legacy is still strong in the masses. But its Aristocratic quality has disappeared. The conception that such a State was necessarily led by *gentlemen* no longer exists in the myriads of our great towns.

The thing need not be laboured: it is patent to all. The second great factor in Aristocracy, the desire of the bulk for Aristocratic government, is as clean gone, for good or ill, as a lost religion.

With its passing and the passing at the

same time of the Aristocratic class belonging to it, the whole nature of the State has suffered transformation. And therefore it is that the central instrument which was apt to the old state of affairs, the little oligarchy that mirrored the greater oligarchy, the House of Commons, labours under greater and greater difficulty, functions with less and less regularity, loses daily a further portion of its moral authority, and moves before our eyes towards that place where institutions lie buried after their souls have left them. The House of Commons is going down into a sort of tomb, wherein survives like a skeleton the ritual alone of what was once living movement and the names alone of what were once actual things.

I have said that the causes of so great a change were of less practical importance than its recognition. It is far more important for us to see and admit what has happened than to discuss why it has happened. It is much more important to find out that your rudder *has* dropped off your boat in the deep sea than to discover *how* it dropped off. Yet it may be of service to mention causes briefly before we proceed to the chances of the future.

Two main causes are clear enough: the first, the industrial system; the second, the

French Revolution. Each has supplemented the other. The French Revolution arising in a society utterly unlike that of this country, already egalitarian, based upon a different religion and upon a different national temperament, not only enunciated, but planted by force of arms in Europe an egalitarian theory which has profoundly affected the whole world. It has affected it as a theory, but affected it also by the reaction of the institutions which the Revolution everywhere created. And though Britain felt these effects but partially, and felt them late, she could not but receive, however partially and however late, a mood which has spread throughout Europe. It was a mood solvent of Aristocratic government.

No one sufficiently acquainted with the intensely national temper of rural England (and England was mainly rural at the time of the revolutionary wars) will believe that a foreign revolution could alone destroy the Aristocratic character of the English State. It might have somewhat weakened or modified that character. It would neither have weakened nor modified it in any great degree. Great Britain might to this day, had it remained in the main agricultural, present the exceptional spectacle of a singular Aristocratic

State in the midst of an Egalitarian Europe. But there came in a more potent influence—the very rapid development of the great towns, due in its turn to the industrial system which the eighteenth century had originated, but which not till the nineteenth, and even the late nineteenth, was apparent in its full effect.

Even so late as the Crimean War something like half the population of this country was living under conditions other than those of the great industrial towns. Where it was not actually agricultural in employment, it was still gathered in market towns and country centres, or was largely connected with the country interests. Thirty years later, in the early 'eighties, it was still true that the majority of the population—and the large majority—though by that time urban, was still country bred. Most men and women then living had been born in the old rural conditions consonant with the old Aristocratic spirit.

It was our own generation that saw the great change. To-day the vast majority of the younger men and women, probably the large majority of the middle-aged, and a large minority even of the old, have been born and have lived their whole lives in,

have received their whole experience from, those vast aggregates of industrial wage-earning townfolk, moulded by the creation of the industrial machine.

It is a portentous change! No other country has seen the like. The future historian will (if he writes with knowledge) see in it one of the capital revolutions of European history, though it is a revolution confined to this island.

These great masses have been born and have lived their lives utterly divorced from the remnants and even the tradition of the old Aristocratic organism. London may preserve some trace of it, at least in some few districts out of its huge amorphous population of seven millions. But the industrial towns of the midlands of the North which now give the tone to the whole country have lost it altogether.

The new wealthy class which might have imitated the squires of an older time, and which at first were largely assimilated into the governing class, do not live with their workmen. They fled the towns. They established colonies, as it were ("residential" is the strange term for them!) of luxurious houses standing miles away from the workshops (commonly to the westward), and the



proletariat lived, grew, formed (or half formed) its political desires, nourished its bitterness, apart.

No social condition more directly contrary to that of aristocracy can be imagined. And this is the immediate as well as the major cause of the phenomena we are studying. *This it is, the substitution of the new great towns for the old country sides as the determining body of society which has transformed the political condition of England and of the Lowlands of Scotland.*

It was not, indeed, anything material that transformed them. It was not coal or machinery: it was a spirit; the religion and philosophy of Industrial Capitalism. But the outward effects of that religion acted as I have said. The great mass of the populace was left with no bands attaching it any longer to the form of the Aristocratic State. . . .

There you have the final condemnation to death of Aristocracy as a principle in this country, and with it a corresponding condemnation to death of the House of Commons. Side by side with the loss of the Aristocratic spirit in those who should have governed there has gone the loss of any desire for, and even the mere knowledge of, Aristocratic government in the mass who are governed.

It is this loss of the desire for Aristocratic government on the part of the mass which has left the House to-day bereft of moral authority. Even though the House of Commons were to become as clean as it is now corrupt, as nice as it is now nasty, as noble as it is now mean and petty, or as dignified as it is now vulgar and contemptible, this factor alone, the loss of the popular desire to be ruled by a few, would be fatal to its continued power.

What remains to be considered? It remains to be considered what may supplant the organ of government which has now clearly lost control. It remains to be considered what may fall heir to the dying House of Commons.

And this inquiry, as I said at the outset, is divided into two questions: The first, whether by some reformation the House of Commons can be restored, in another shape, to vigour; the second—supposing it cannot be restored—what institution or group of institutions may exercise in its place the sovereign authority which it used to boast. The first of these propositions is itself twofold. There are those who say that the House of Commons, as we know it, could still be restored to authority and vigour by some

internal or external *reform*. There are others who see well enough that it is now impossible to have such reform, but who hope that perhaps under the same *name*, "House of Commons," a new assembly, or assemblies, national and respected, could be grafted on to or developed out of the old.

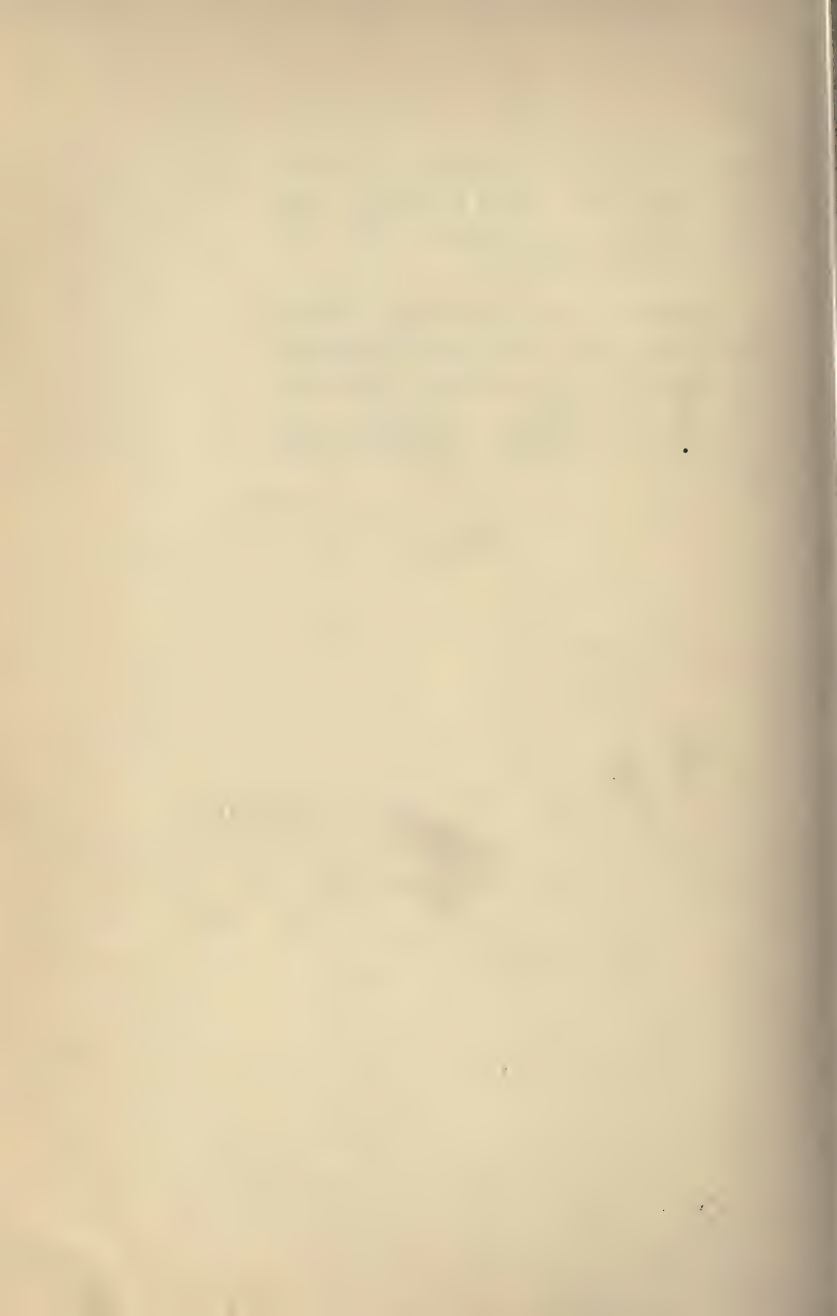
I propose next to examine both these suppositions, and to begin with the idea that the House of Commons might, while still retaining its historic character, establish itself once more by some internal or external reform as the strong governing authority of the State.



## IX

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**T**HE idea that the House of Commons can be raised to something of its old position by a mechanical restoration from within—some new trick of voting, or some change of procedure—is the first that occurs to the parliamentarian himself, and to the various dependents of Parliament in journalism and secretariats. The same man who has himself taken a notorious bribe, or played a part in some piece of blackmailing, naturally imagines that the fatal consequences of such things can be dodged by a new dressing up of that society in which he has been guilty, and which has permitted, screened, and even rewarded his guilt. Such men live by intrigue

and will believe to the end that a shift must succeed.

Hence the plea for "giving greater power to the private Member," and "cutting down time in Committee," and all the rest of it. They are like the remedies commonly suggested for saving a club that is going under after a series of card-scandals. We all know the proposals made in such cases: "Let us lower the subscription," "Let us alter the rules," etc.—and we know their futility.

In the mouths of the chief culprits these schemes for the internal reform of Parliament are the tricks of a delinquent who is still a little uneasy about the ultimate consequences of his delinquency, and at the same time hopes to divert men's thoughts about him to a side issue. Even when the parliamentarians who thus talk have not themselves touched money or taken shares, or taken part profits in some piece of blackmail, or done any one of the hundred things which have degraded Parliament in our time, the proposers are out of court because they have tolerated such things. It is no excuse in a Member of Parliament who is personally honest to plead his personal honesty in defence of the House of Commons as a whole. On the contrary, his very honesty, *coupled with*



*his silence*, damns the place. If he has not exposed the vile things that now go on there, if he continues to associate familiarly with the actors of them, if he continues to base what he calls his "career" upon a toleration of corruption, then his plea for a merely mechanical reform of the House of Commons is just as insincere as that of his more typical and more guilty colleagues.

I have known not a few of these men. They make a sort of parade of their honesty. Many of my readers will also, I think, be able to call examples to mind.

The attitude of such politicians would seem to be: "See what an exceptional person I must be! I am in the House of Commons. I meet familiarly and treat as equals the worst offenders—and yet I never touch or offer money myself! Only last night I dined with the man who worked the Indian silver affair, and I receive to-night the man who tried to ruin my country neighbour by perjury. What is more extraordinary, my own son has taken shares in the last little ramp—and yet here am I unscathed! Surely so singular an exception merits particular respect! Surely *my* scheme for making things better will be listened to in a very different spirit from the same scheme put forward by

my colleague and friend the notorious perjurer, by the beneficiary of the Indian silver affair, or even by my own son with his sad little peccadillo of the shares."

They deceive themselves. These men are tarred with the same brush as their bolder companions, and the public no longer takes them seriously. Their self-satisfaction is wholly their own. Newspapers, the few millionaire proprietors of which work in and in with professional politics, will quote them and will flatter them. In the official press these exceptional men are perpetually being cited as in some way specially remarkable for their honesty and integrity—as though qualities common to every decent man were at Westminster shining exceptions! But this newspaper game does not really work. It sometimes secures a patient hearing and the absence of laughter for some parliamentarian who has—perhaps justly—this reputation for standing personally apart from the financial tricks of his colleagues. But no permanent effect is produced.

The public mind naturally returns to the contemplation of the House of Commons as a whole, and that contemplation is not pleasing. It thinks of the man in question, however personally honest, as a *politician*, and that

title has now acquired a significance which it cannot shake off.

There is, of course, one possible act which might theoretically be accomplished from within the House of Commons, and which, were it done, would save that body. The House of Commons might, of its own free will, expose and punish its own members. I say the thing is theoretically possible. It does not involve a contradiction in terms. But it does involve a contradiction in all that we know of human habits. It involves such a corporate act of penance as certainly no corporate body would be capable of.

In the same way one might say that a decaying Monarchy, such as that of the Bourbons in the eighteenth century, might again have become a healthy governing organism had it found the power to shake off the habits of decline it had acquired. But we know very well that while such a thing is a theoretical possibility, it is, in practice, impossible.

Dying institutions do not restore themselves. The House of Commons will not expose, punish, and reform itself. If we take a concrete case we shall see this.

Suppose a Continental crook to come over here, put on to the job by his colleagues in this country, and to intrigue for a valuable

monopoly to be given him secretly through the corruption of public men. He distributes his shares in the new venture, and also his direct money bribes, he forms his ring, and the thing goes through. Those admitted on the ground floor make their fortunes, and a new specimen of that familiar flower, the Westminster scandal, blooms in all its luxuriance.

Now suppose that by some accident this particular scandal happens to be exposed (most of them are kept dark, or at any rate are kept from the knowledge of the general public). Suppose that private spite, the anger of some one who has been defrauded of his share of the loot, or even the honest indignation of some one who knows too much about the affair, gets the better of the press boycott, and that a knowledge of the nastiness spreads from the few that are in the know to the middle-class public at large.

There you clearly have an opportunity for reform, and for what I have called an act of penance. It would have without doubt a very powerful effect—were it morally possible. Such opportunities have been increasingly frequent in the last few years.

A group of private members might move for an inquiry. The Chair might actually support

such a motion. The Whips, upon whom it depends whether a matter can be debated in the House or not, grant facilities—and that though some of them, or their families, have already taken money or shares—for without this the ramp would hardly have gone through. The Cabinet (including those members involved) are also struck with remorse, and consent to appoint an *outside* Committee that there may be a reasonable chance of a just verdict. They try to find men (it would be very difficult!) who have nothing to hope from the politicians for themselves or their families. They admit as their judges men whom not only popular report, but their very accusers agree to be fairly free from “pressure.” This tribunal (let us suppose) would hear evidence on oath, and in a place where a large public might attend. It would have the power to summon any witness under heavy penalties. Add to so much miracle the further miracle of an open press—no boycott of the points at issue, no suppression or distortion of anything said before this tribunal, an open challenge to be admitted against the appointment of any unworthy member to it. Lastly, greatest miracle of all, let us suppose the presence of a real sanction, that is of an exemplary punishment.

It would not be enough to make the evil-doers disgorge: you would have to frighten their would-be imitators in the future by inflicting long terms of imprisonment and very heavy fines impartially on all the politicians caught in the net, and to reserve an especially severe sentence for the ministers involved.

After such a purge the whole system now prevailing at Westminster would be shaken. The repetition of the dose, even on a minor occasion, if not too much time were allowed to elapse, the bringing up of similar cases from the past, and their trial, would add to the effect. It is theoretically conceivable that the House of Commons, having acted thus, would get a new lease of respect, and therefore of power. It might (in part) revive its moral authority. But who on earth believes that such things will ever be done by the authority of the culprits themselves?

Though miracles certainly happen, yet the rarest of all miracles is a moral miracle of this kind. A rotten institution reforming itself, and not only reforming itself but being aided in its reformation by all its own corrupt members, servants, parasites, and masters, is a thing that history has never seen. History has seen plenty of men raised into the air,

many walking on the water, and a few raised from the dead. But it has never seen an institution in the last stages of decay and still possessing a nominal power, using that power to chastise and to reform itself.

Even were such a miracle to take place in time (not under the pressure of advancing revolution, or in the terror of invasion) there would still remain the truth that an oligarchy cannot long continue to govern in a country which has lost the appetite for Aristocracy. Really, one only has to state the conditions of reform from within to see that they are impossible.

There remains the possibility of reform through the adjustment of external machinery. This is apparently more possible, and it has many supporters.

The idea is that, while still keeping the House of Commons in the form we know, authority might be returned to it by some new method of representation.

It is an error. Of a hundred schemes let us take one typical of many, and, on the whole, the most practical: Proportional Representation. Let there be large areas containing from ten to twenty-five members each. Let it be thus possible that the separate interests of minorities shall be represented.

What would be the effect upon the House of Commons of such a reform? It would probably give at first a slightly added interest to the debates. Sections of vital opinion which are now quite indifferent to Parliament would for a moment try to make themselves heard there. But the interest could not last. No matter what scheme of voting you had, the organ formed by it would still be an oligarchy, and an oligarchy not working as an Aristocracy is at once ridiculous and odious. It would still be a mere chance clique of men, who, even if the whole body of them were renewed at frequent intervals, would be working together hour after hour and day after day, would be filled with the "one of us" feeling, and would fall back into the old rut. The same tempters to corruption would arise and would be yielded to. The same immunity from the criminal law would again be permitted. The same loss of respect would follow.

Heroic measures have been suggested. The Levellers of the seventeenth century proposed that representatives be elected for two years, and that no one be allowed to sit in any House who had sat in any previous one. But such measures are not only heroic, they are fantastic. The only difference would be



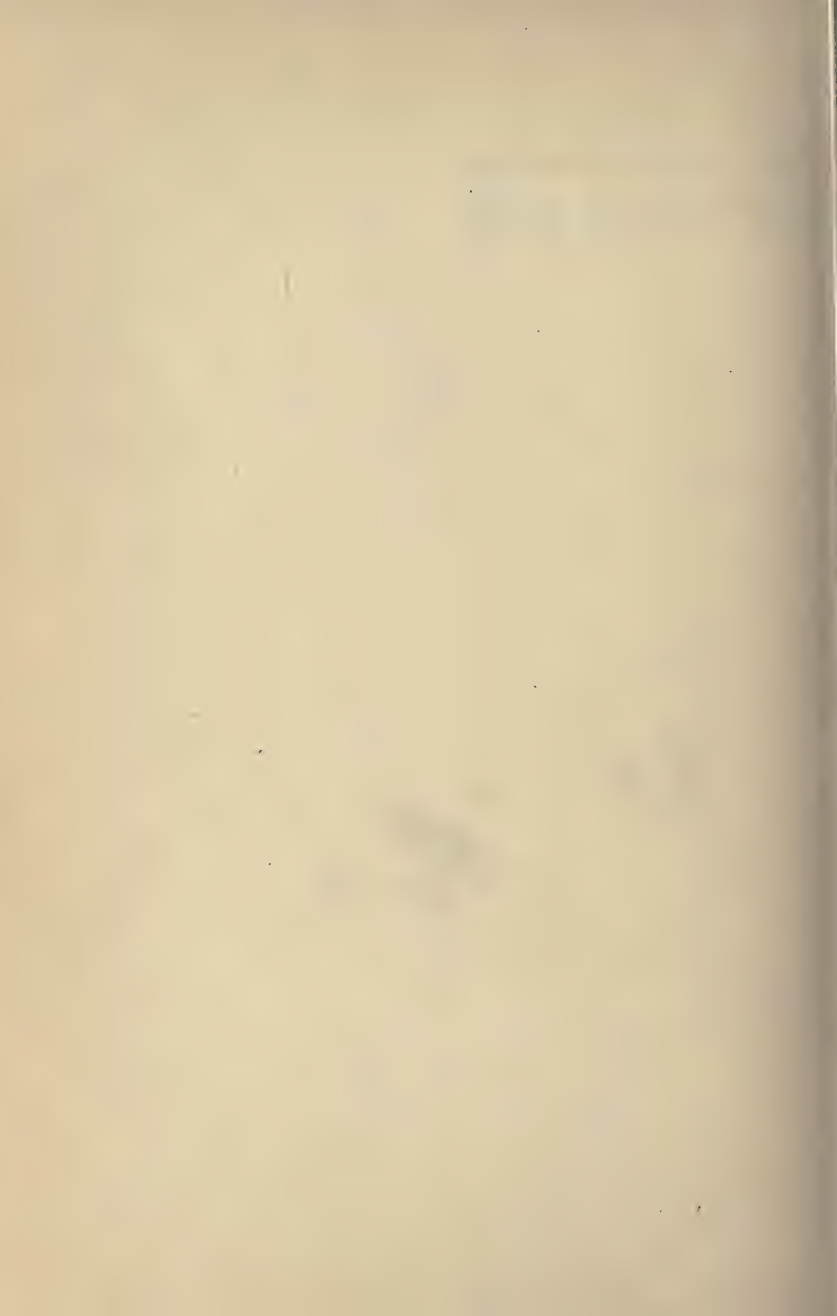
that you would not have even an oligarchy, but a series of ephemeral bodies with no authority at all. The right of recall? It would hardly be exercised. The Referendum? That might be exercised; but it would mean the destruction of that which is essential to the House of Commons, to wit, Sovereign Power. The freeing of the Judicature from appointment by, and connection with, the professional politicians? That again would be the destruction of their Sovereignty; for the naming of judges, and power over the Courts of Justice are the very essentials of Sovereignty. No sovereign can permit the chance of a fundamental verdict being given against his own authority, and the first sign of approaching failure in sovereignty is the presence of a conflict between that which is still supposed to govern and its Courts of Justice.

No, a permanent reform from within, or from without, is impossible. We must not expect it, and it is waste of effort to seek for it.



X

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS  
IS NOT TO BE SAVED  
BY A PLAY UPON WORDS



## X

### THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IS NOT TO BE SAVED BY A PLAY UPON WORDS.

**T**HE reform of the House of Commons from within is hopeless. You have never yet got in history a thoroughly corrupt governing organ reforming and restoring itself. The thing would seem to be as impossible in the body politic as in the physical body of man.

We have further seen that mechanical reform from without—that is, changes in the method of election and so forth—could not eliminate the fatal weakness of a modern Parliament, which is that it is an Oligarchy no longer Aristocratic.

Even the most important reform of all—I mean the separation of the Courts of Law from the Parliament by stripping parliamentarians and their relatives and connections of the private protection they now enjoy from what are still parliamentary judges—

does not meet our case. It would only mean the destruction of supreme power in the House of Commons: the reduction of it to the level of a French Chamber or American Congress. Its *Sovereignty* would be gone. Real power would pass to some permanent executive, or to local bodies, or to the great trades and professions of the State, or to some other national function—it would have left the House of Commons.

There remains to be considered, however, a false remedy common to the false history of the last generation. This remedy is the remedy of substituting words for reality: of pretending to preserve an institution by preserving its name.

For instance, I can imagine some Don of the older universities (supposing him honest enough to admit the degradation into which the House of Commons has fallen) propounding as a medicine for it some process of "transition," that is, a verbal trick similar to that which affected the English Crown after the death of Queen Anne.

The English Crown (such a man would tell us) was "saved." "We still have a Monarchy," he would say, "for the title has survived."

But consider the real process. Henry VIII

just before the suppression of the monasteries was as powerful as are to-day all the great capitalist interests combined. He was as powerful as the head of the Hohenzollerns, together with the heads of the army and the professors of the German universities, were in Prussia before 1914. George I, at his accession, was less powerful than the Stock Exchange, even of that time, and far less than any three great English landlords in a clique. The English kingship, impoverished by the rise of the great landlords on the ruins of the abbeys, next defeated in battle by the new wealthy class, next taking a small salary, at last admittedly the creation of the landlords and merchants, perished with the last of the Reigning Stuarts. The coming of the first Hanoverian marked the very end of its long-paralysed life.

Yet (the advocates of such developments will tell us) "the Monarchy survived"!

In the same unreal way, by preserving the mere name and substituting a new power for the old power, the House of Commons might be "saved."

These lovers of verbiage, though now no more than a survival, are not yet negligible. When a man tells you that a country is tenacious of its institutions because it has

kept the mere names of these institutions while wholly destroying their essence, he is talking nonsense. But the instinct which makes him preserve some shred of authority is an institution deposed from full power, and to protect that authority with the dignity of the old name, so as to prevent the memory of it, at least, from dying out, is one native to an Aristocratic State. It is an act really and not only apparently *conservative*; not of institutions indeed, but of their mould. And the proof of this is that we still have with us a quantity of dead institutions—the Privy Council, for instance—the mere retention of the name of which, and of a few functions in which, are sufficient to serve for their resurrection, if it were thought useful to call them to life again.

Now, as this has been the trend of English public life since the Reformation, as there has been at work all that time an Aristocratic instinct for laying by on the shelf the dead institutions, and preserving them under a continuity of name, and as in one or two minor cases this has actually proved useful when it was required partially to restore to life these half-dead things, might not something of the same sort be admitted in the House of Commons and the Parliament?



There are two ways in which this trick of unreality might be played.

We might put up some quite new thing—with the old name "Parliament," or, better still, "King in Parliament," attached to it—and that new thing might be given such vigour and reality as to govern with real moral authority. We might keep that name attaching, for instance, to a real King with a subordinate council. Or, again, the mere name "House of Commons" might be retained attached to a dead function, while some new organ was given the reality of power.

We must distinguish between these two very different pieces of verbal trickery. Both are well-known and tried ways of keeping a name while you change the thing.

In the first case you take the name off one institution and put it on to another. The classic example in English history is the case of the Church of England. In the other case you preserve the name attached to the fossil of the thing, but you transfer its active principle (in the case of the House of Commons, Sovereignty) to another thing. The classic example of this second policy in English history is the change in the function of kingship, the old-established authority of which was taken away and given to the

Aristocratic rule of Parliament, while the name "King" and some few ritual trappings of the old kingly function were retained.<sup>1</sup>

In the first policy you call a new thing by an old name, and pretend you have the old thing still, because you have the old name. In the second policy you keep alive the mere name of a dead thing, and you pretend it is not dead because its name is alive.

The second policy need not detain us. To retain the name of the House of Commons and much of its ritual may well be a development of the future: such a survival of title and dead custom has no relation to Sovereignty.

It is not at all impossible that a foreigner visiting this country two hundred years hence might attend, as a curiosity, a quaint ceremony in which a few nominees (perhaps it would be in those days a sort of honour, like a Privy Councillorship to-day, to be one of them) would meet with a ritual carefully preserved, sign their names on a piece of paper before a man in a wig, take an oath, vote some annual resolution or other (the Army Act, let us say), and then go away again for a year. And it is even possible

<sup>1</sup> Battle Abbey and Westminster Abbey are good examples of the 1st and the 2nd methods. In either you will seek in vain for the abbot—but for different reasons.

that such a body might keep, as the Privy Councillors still keep, a few little archaic functions. For instance, one can imagine such a "House of Commons" formally electing a Speaker, and that official having real power in some other connection.<sup>1</sup>

But the essential point is that the institution thus fossilized would cease to be. Some institutions can be raised again from prolonged impotence to renewed power; but an Aristocracy never. It is the one political mood which is incapable of resurrection. Its existence depends upon a state of mind which, when it has passed, has passed for good and all.

The first policy—the policy of calling some quite new and vigorous thing by the old name of "Parliament," or, better, "King in Parliament"—is equally indifferent to our inquiry.

If the name "Parliament" were taken from the present moribund parliamentary oligarchy and applied to some quite different organ of government—vital, active, and authoritative—that change could not affect our

<sup>1</sup> A parallel to this is the ceremony of the King to-day bestowing an O.B.E. or a Garter. The gift or commodity really proceeds from the politicians, but the ceremony endures as though the gift came from the King.

thesis. The decay of the House of Commons being completed, and the necessary disappearance of the *thing* we call Parliament having taken place, the preservation of the name would not matter a farthing to those who are concerned with the realities of government and constitution.

If it please the antiquarian or the patriot to call a strong and active Monarchy, aided by, but superior to, advisory trade, professional, and regional councils, "the King in Parliament," there is no harm done. But Sovereignty, the essential of the old House of Commons, will have changed its seat. A New Thing will be called by an old name. That is all.

I have given the parallel of the English Church. The Reformation, as all sane men will agree, found England Catholic, and left it Protestant. The words "bishop," "priest," "English Church" were retained. It did not affect that major result. The most that it did was to give a few antiquarians in our own days a ground for logomachy. The fundamental, political, and national fact was that England, which used to be Catholic, became Protestant, and its new National Church was the expression of that change.

In the same way, if you continue to apply

the term "House of Commons" to some quite new institution with a new theory of life and a new basis of authority and a new spirit altogether, you have, in spite of your retention of the name, quite superseded the thing.

Let me expand my example. Supposing the trades councils and supplementary councils of the professions, religious bodies, etc., were to achieve an accepted and real place in the State, were to become that which was at once respected and representative, working under a restored and powerful monarchical centre. Supposing such a system were further supplemented by regional councils working beside the councils of common trade, professional, and religious interests. That might be a successful revolution. One can conceive that in such a system the whole accumulation of councils beneath the Crown might be called the "House of Commons." Supposing membership of these councils to carry with it the title of "M.P." Supposing some general moderator of them all—or the Monarch himself—were still to be called "the Speaker." We should have a mere preservation of name and nothing else preserved at all. So far as the present discussion is concerned we should have arrived at the destruction of

what is called the "House of Commons," just as surely as though the name itself had been obliterated and forgotten.

Or, to take another example, supposing the change should take the form of a strong despotic Monarchy (which is unfortunately the more probable event), and supposing the Monarch therein to be aided and supported by a council of his own nomination. One can well imagine that this council might still preserve the name "Parliament," and it might be divided into a "House of Commons" and a "House of Lords." One can even suppose, without too much departure from parallel instances in the past, that some sham ceremony of "election" might be maintained. Compare the ridiculous "election" to-day of a Bishop by his Chapter at the orders of some chance politician in power.

For instance, there might be some form whereby a man could not be called a Member of the House of Commons unless certain dummies (say half a dozen in number) had been previously summoned by an agent of the Government in some county town for the purpose of solemnly depositing each a piece of paper in a box.

But though all these forms should be retained, the thing we call the House of

Commons would obviously have disappeared. England from having been *Parliamentarian* would have become *Monarchical*. Just as England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from having been *Catholic* became *Protestant*; no mere continuity of name is of real interest in such a process.

We may sum up and say that no development upon either of these lines—the retention of the thing and its name coupled with the total loss of its vital principle, or the retention of the mere name transferred to a totally new organ—is of any moment to those who still desire to save parliamentary government. The retention of the thing deprived of power would not, as in the case of the English Monarchy, be serviceable for future use, because the thing could not be resurrected as a Monarchy can. It could only be resurrected with the resurrection of Aristocracy, and the resurrection of Aristocracy, once dead, is a thing unknown to history and impossible to man. While the retention of the name, and its application to an organ wholly new in function and spirit would be immaterial.

What then remains ?

Here is a national institution which has come to the last stages of decay, the Sover-

eignty of which is so shaken as to be beyond repair. Wherein for the future shall Sovereignty reside ?

That is the last part of our inquiry.

We must be very careful, as we approach it, to distinguish between two answers which so general a question provokes. These answers are commonly confused, and the confusion weakens political thought.

The first is the answer to the question in so far as it implies : " What *will* succeed the House of Commons ? "

The second is the answer to the question : " What *should* succeed the House of Commons ? "

As to the first of those answers one must say the only thing that can be said in any similar reply to any question upon the future. It is this. No one can foretell what particular development the future will see, but often one can foretell that it must necessarily see some one out of a small number of possible developments.

In this case there are but two developments possible : First, the long continuation, say, for a generation or more, of Parliamentary Sovereignty ; still declining in power, less and less respected, but still attached by routine and tradition to the House of Commons.



In that case we must look forward to a rapid national decline. For there is nothing so surely saps the corporate strength of a nation as the continued rule of a Prince who is despised.

The second alternative is the replacement of the perishing organ by the new organ of Monarchy in some form: the establishment, or rather the growth, of a respected and strong power for which a known and personal Magistrate—no matter what his term of office or his title—shall be responsible to the Commonwealth.

A third way out has occurred to several modern writers, and that is the replacement of one oligarchy by another. The elimination of the House of Commons as we know it and the substitution for that House of Commons of living Councils really representative of living interests: Councils of trades and professions, of religious bodies, of regions—even of sub-nationalities—but all this without a King; a mere renewal of committees, a mere exchange of nominally Sovereign assemblies.

The conception that these could in some corporate fashion exercise Sovereignty is erroneous. It is part of the general error that a delegated and conciliary Sovereign

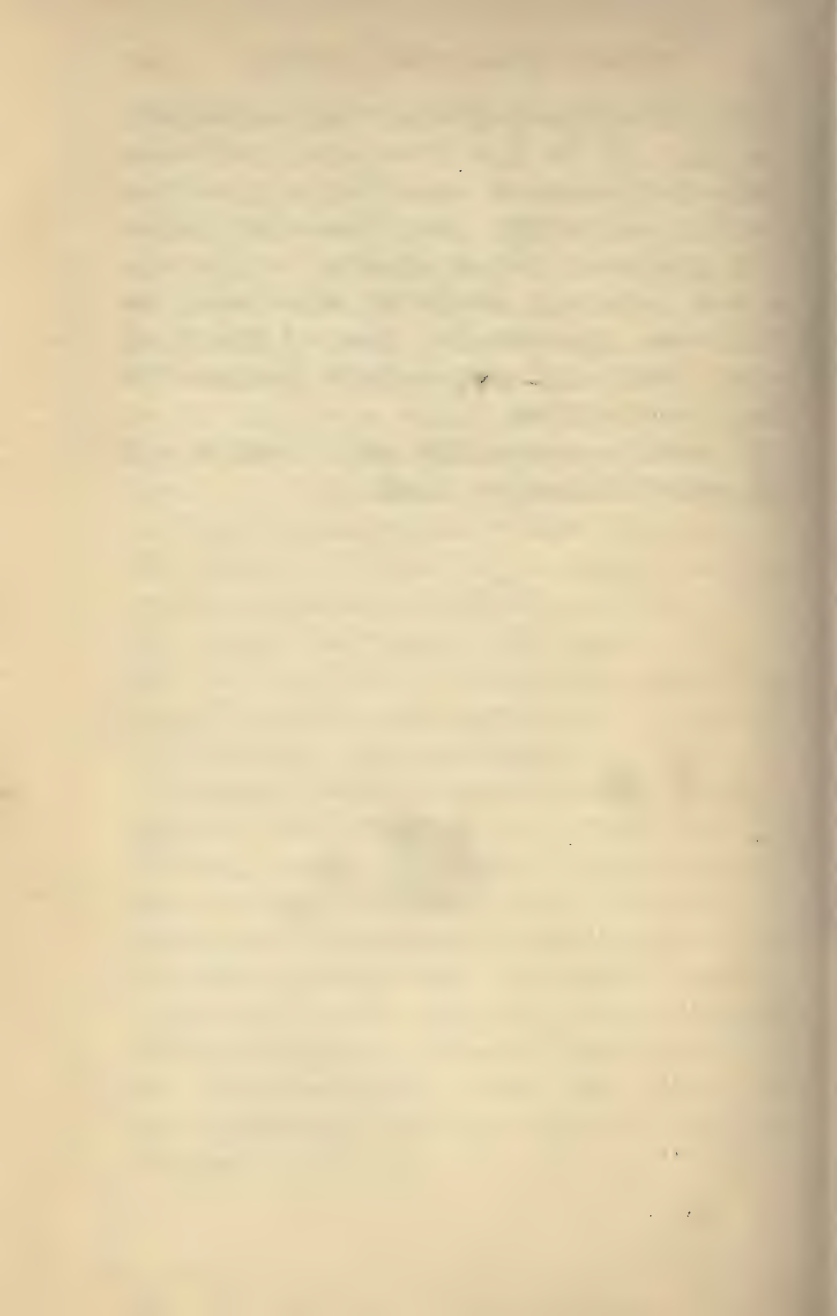
authority in a large state can be other than Aristocratic.

That idea is, I say, erroneous. But the conception that such councils may play a very great part in the national life, may advise, counsel, check, support, and nourish the central power, is not erroneous. Upon the contrary, such an arrangement is native to the European mind, and its resurrection among us is already apparent. More and more as Parliament breaks down sundry voluntary organizations of this kind, notably the Council of Trades Unions, begin spontaneously to assume a secondary authority; but they need a link and a moderator, and they can have no claim to sovereign power, for they are neither the people nor a summary of the people, but committees.

We must conclude that, of possible developments in the future, there are two main and diverging roads: the one of decline through the attempted maintenance of Parliamentary Sovereignty, the vigour in which and respect for which is past saving; the other, Monarchy—Monarchy which may well be strengthened by the recognition of such Councils as those just described, but which may also (and more probably, I fear), be unchecked by such chambers.

As to the second answer, what *should* take the place of the lost Sovereignty of Parliament, that answer is deducible at once from the first. Monarchy, and Monarchy preferably supported and invigorated by Councils of real interests, *should* be substituted for Parliament, because the good of the State is our object, and only on such lines can the State avoid decline.

It remains to consider such Councils and the term "Monarchy" itself.



THE COUNCILS



## XI

### THE COUNCILS

THE decline of the House of Commons leaves room for only one fundamental institution, and that institution is Monarchy.

But subsidiary to the Monarchy there should and, let us hope, may be supporting Councils representing *real* interests, and therefore vital ; that is, clothed with real authority because they would speak for real desires, and would stand for what men really did and thought. A cotton-spinner does not work and think as a citizen of the South-East Manchester division : he works and thinks as a cotton-spinner.

Whether these subsidiary bodies will be permanent or not is a question of the utmost gravity and is insoluble ; but just at the present moment they are clearly necessary. They are actually in process of formation as professional guilds, or are already formed as Trades Unions. They are demanded by the spirit and produced by the necessities of our

time. They are also consonant with the great Christian past of Europe, for, with us at least, of the West, despotic power has never been native. The central governing thing has usually had to rely upon, as well as to control, Councils.

But such Councils would require for their survival a continuance of active citizenship, a personal interest in public affairs to be felt by the greater part of the subjects of the restored Crown ; and whether that interest will be maintained, or whether it will suffer rapidly from fatigue, and so fail, depends upon the political vitality of the commonwealth, upon the presence or absence of foreign peril, and more than all upon men's religious attitude, which is in process of very rapid change. For the moment, I say, they are necessary. Therefore we must study them before proceeding to the more necessary restoration of a Monarchy which must be actively paramount over all.

We have before our eyes one set of such institutions long in existence growing rapidly to power. These are the Trades Unions.

Their increasing power consists to-day in two factors. First, there is the discipline which they have developed as independent



bodies, until lately unrecognized by the State, and even now only very partially recognized. They have as yet no charter. In practice a man cannot drive an engine upon the railways or even unload ships in a dock unless he belongs to a Trade Union. But the State has not yet confirmed that monopoly. It has arisen, as all institutions have arisen in the past, spontaneously. It is not yet formally ratified.

The second factor in the power of the Trades Unions flows from the nature of modern economic activity, and especially from that one peculiarly modern point, the new rapidity in communications, in the transport of ideas and things. The rapidity in the transport of ideas and things has made both possible and necessary the power of the Trades Unions.

There is a third element: the interdependence of functions into which modern economic activity has fallen. But this last point is accidental. It is not necessary and it may disappear.

Supposing, for instance, an instrument by which an individual unaided, save by a cheap and easily produced machine, could transport himself more readily from place to place than he now can through the vast complex of a railway system. Or supposing an instru-

ment whereby an individual could communicate with another individual over great distances without the interposition of the vast complex of our present telephonic and telegraphic systems, and our State post. Then it is clear that the economic interdependence which now allows one of several great Trades Unions to dictate to the whole community would disappear.

We had an example of this on a small scale during the railway strike. The internal combustion engine deprived the strikers of much of their power. Twenty years ago a railway strike would have paralysed the community at once. To-day there is such a large number of men who can drive a motor and such a large number of individual motors and of individual free drivers, that the old absolute power of the railway-men has been greatly modified. The fact that that power was used too late, and that the great railway strikes only began *after* the moment when they might have been omnipotent, is parallel to what we see throughout history; the interesting fact that sections of men, and individuals, hardly ever appreciate their power until it is too late to use it fully.

But the other two factors remain. The discipline of the Trades Unions, produced by

a reaction against Capitalism, and their power to arm vast organizations acting at one moment and as one man, has, through the achieved rapidity of transport in ideas and things, come to stay.

Trades Unions now take a part in government; and a much more vital and real part than the House of Commons. The decline of the House of Commons did indeed precede their power and make it possible. But the House of Commons having morally gone to pieces, the Trades Unions are rapidly taking its place. The negotiations which really matter now are not those which are conducted through the arrangement of votes at Westminster. They are those conducted between the executive of the whole nation—a chance clique of parliamentarians who have appointed themselves to office—and the spokesmen of the Unions. Of the two negotiators it is the latter who have the whip hand.

But these Trades Union Councils, with their separate particularist executives, are not the only subsidiary bodies to be considered. The professional bodies have not yet come fully into play: they will shortly do so.

Five of them appear to be already crossing the threshold between private and public power: the legal, the medical, the educa-

tional guilds, the domestic police, and the national armed forces.

To take them in the order of their strength.

The Legal Guild has for centuries been ratified and chartered. It has had the fullest possible power, compatible with being a subsidiary body in the State, for nearly three hundred years. And that power has grown immeasurably during the last hundred years. The modern administration of law is at once so complex, so ubiquitous, and so arbitrary, that this power cannot be challenged: at any rate, it could only be challenged or controlled by a strong Monarch. Legal decisions must be pronounced or the commonwealth could not continue. Once pronounced they must be obeyed, or the commonwealth could not continue. Even a Code, established to diminish the arbitrary power of the Legal Guild, would, under modern circumstances, be so complex that the private citizen could with difficulty deal with it. And even against a code the Legal Guild—at any rate until a strong Monarchy arises to control it—will fight successfully; for a great part of the power of this Guild consists in the arbitrary character of legal decisions. The power of the Legal Guild is further enhanced by the vast economic interests it controls. It is

“worth while”—eminently worth while—for its beneficiaries to maintain it; and we see every day men of mediocre parts obtaining through their membership of that Guild sums out of the taxes which would never be assigned as salaries to their individual abilities.

It is true that for a long time past, and still at the present moment, the connection between the lawyers and the House of Commons was, and is, so close that they are indistinguishable. But it is an error to imagine that this connection is necessary, or that the present break up of the Commons weakens the lawyers. Though the House of Commons should disappear to-morrow, the Legal Guild would remain. It is the first and the strongest of the professional councils of which I speak.

The second, the Medical Guild, has been chartered for a long time past. It has only recently attained to a novel power. The capitalist determination to enregiment the proletariat found ready to hand the Doctors' Guild. It obtained an alliance with that Guild (not without a good deal of difficulty and secret financial negotiation) in the recent Insurance Act, which is the great watershed of modern economic life in this country. That Act confirmed new powers in this Guild. Those powers are still mainly passive, but

they will become active. You will have the children of the proletariat ticketed and numbered by doctors, recommended for particular employment by doctors, and their whole lives passed under medical supervision. The excuse of national health will be put forward. A special department will be created in connection with it, and this subsidiary guild-power, like that of the lawyers, will take its place among the active determining organs of national government.

Third in order comes the Teaching Profession, especially in its popular elements. That again is a creation of the capitalist necessity for enregimenting and controlling the proletariat. Every day it becomes something less and less dependent upon local feeling, and more and more dependent upon a national centre. Every day it becomes a more separate body demanding a recognition of its own and formulating its own laws. Its power lags behind that of the other two corporations we have mentioned, but it goes forward rapidly. It is already conscious of its strength and is bound to exercise it.

There will be a double process. With the internal autonomy of these State servants, the teachers, and with their internal organization as it quickly develops, there will go

further recognition, a further tendency to a charter, all the processes which we see at work in any one of the other departments. It will work in and in with the medical control and the legal control; and, as in the case of the medical, a false excuse shall be put forward to lubricate the transition. The motive alleged will be the advantage to the commonwealth of greater instruction. The real motive will be the determination of capitalist power to maintain itself: a determination which will compromise with the great Trades Unions to the progressive extinction—until reaction shall take place—of family and local control. Family control over education has, in the case of the proletariat, virtually disappeared. Local control will follow it. There will come a certain reaction in both cases, for there are limits to tyranny over the family, and, with the increasing incompetence of the House of Commons, regional power, whether conciliary or nominated, will grow; but in spite of these modifications we may look to the appearance of the Educational Guild side by side with the Legal and the Medical.

There remains what may be called the two combatant Guilds: those of the Domestic Police and of the Armed Forces. The first

of these is still embryonic. It has twice in recent years made an attempt at ratification and a charter, and it has failed. But it cannot permanently fail. The Domestic Police cannot permanently remain without a measure of corporate life. The capitalist system needs its support immediately, uninterruptedly, and acutely. The least halt in its function would bring capitalism to the ground at once, and therefore a compromise with it is certain to be effected. It will be ratified, and it will take its place with the others: though its autonomous powers will necessarily be very much less.

Lastly, you have the combatant forces used for external purposes, and now also largely used in aid of the domestic police. Here there has, as yet, been only a faint appearance of autonomy, and of that subsidiary power, of which we speak, replacing the old sovereignty of the House of Commons. The Curragh affair is an example. In the nature of things an armed force to be used against foreign aggression, or for the purpose of foreign expansion, must be more directly connected with the national executive, and more subservient to it than any other body in the State. In the nature of things its discipline must be from above. But it does



not follow that the general movement of our time which, for the moment at least, urges men to combine into professional associations, will or could be permanently excluded from affecting the armed forces of the Crown: especially their *leaders*.

What form of recognition the charter will take we cannot tell. It will certainly not have the powerful autonomous character that may develop in the other associations, for the nature of the function quite forbids such a thing. But what may be called the prætorian character of the armed forces must develop. That word "Prætorian"—that metaphor rather—has two elements. The Prætorian Guard is not only the guard of Cæsar, but also in part the master of Cæsar. It has hitherto been merged in the strong unity of Aristocratic government, but with the disappearance of Aristocracy it will differentiate and stand somewhat apart.

All these subsidiary functions in the State, side by side with the most powerful of all, the Trades Unions, step in to take the place of what was once the central Aristocratic organ of English Government, the House of Commons.

But there is one character in which they do not fill the void. There is one over-

whelming function denied to them—and that is the function of *Sovereignty*. That such very large and numerous Councils should co-ordinate themselves as a mass, and assume a supreme power, is a fantastic idea. Such Councils are not only large in composition and numerous separately; they also are of their nature partial, as well as subsidiary.

That many Councils, each of many delegates, can permanently exercise *Sovereignty*—indeed that any *large* body not Aristocratic can conceivably exercise permanent *Sovereignty*—is an idea in the moon. Though it is an idea commonly entertained, it is an idea divorced from reality. Differing and parallel social functions do not combine themselves. There is no republic of such things. They can only be arranged in common, and (what is essential) controlled, by something external and superior to them. National unity, without which the power of each would disappear, must be imposed and preserved from above.

There is but one organ by which such control can be exercised in a large commonwealth, apart from an aristocratic Committee (such as the House of Commons was in its prime), and that organ is the Monarch. Monarchy, wherever the cement of Aristocracy is lacking, is the keystone of an arch.

If national strength and unity are to be preserved, then the very devolution of power, the very increase in local autonomy, both regional and professional, connotes a correspondingly increasing central power of control.

Of all the various functions once exercised here in England by the House of Commons, the Aristocratic organ of what was then an Aristocratic State, the fundamental function was *Sovereignty*. It was as a *Sovereign* Assembly that Parliament, while it still had moral authority, governed England. Now that it has lost that authority something must take its place, and the only "something" conceivable is a King.



XII

THE MONARCH



## XII

### THE MONARCH

I SAY that the moderator of the large Aristocratic State which has lost the Aristocratic spirit is necessarily the Monarch.

I do not mean by the word "Monarch" a man or a woman living in a large house, nor do I mean a man or woman dressed up in a particular fashion. I do not mean a man whose power in government, great or small, proceeds by constitutional right from his own father. I do not mean a man whose power in government, great or small, continues from the moment he assumes it till his death. Lastly, I most certainly do not mean a man who is put up as a revered symbol, or as a machine for signing documents, and denied all real power.

I mean any man or woman or child, but normally an adult man, in possession of his faculties, who is responsible ultimately to the commonwealth for the general conduct

and preservation of the commonwealth at any one moment.

It is clear that such a man, to exercise rule at all, must exercise it for some considerable period. It may be precariously for four years, or it may be more stably for seven. It is perhaps better for life. But at any rate the *term* is not material to the definition. The definition of Monarchy is that there is one real and attainable human head ultimately responsible in any moment for the fate of society. Who prevents an Englishman to-day from getting a glass of beer when he wants it? Fifty years ago the answer would have been clear—"The Governing Class" (only no governing class would have been so tyrannical). Who *to-day*? You cannot answer. It is anonymous. A lot of (unknown) rich men got richer through it. That is all you can say, and that sort of thing cannot last. Well, under *Monarchy* the answer would be clear. "Who stopped your beer?" "King John."

"Why can this man perjure himself unpunished in an attempt to rifle the public treasure? Why is he not punished? Who will punish him?" To-day there is no answer. But there should be an answer. "King Edward."

Such answers are the curb to tyranny and the terror of evildoers.



Remember that there are two great divisions in the communities of men—the Egalitarian and the Aristocratic: States where men feel equal, and States where one rank is revered.

Remember that the Aristocratic is much the rarer type, and that the excellence which it betrays—especially its internal strength and its external power of expansion—are exceptions. The normal human community is Egalitarian.

Now of Egalitarian States, that is of States founded upon a conviction that men are equal (a mysterious, a religious dogma), there are two forms: the actively Democratic, when citizens take part in their own government, and the Monarchic; and the former (and nobler) seems incompatible with very great numbers, or a very great extent of territory.

You may indeed have the most complete autonomy in each locality. You may have, in a State of the largest sort, that which is the chief end of Democracy, to wit, government by consent and laws consonant with the General Will. But the act of government, the machine that drives it, can hardly (in a very large community) be the mass of the people, save in quite exceptional moments of extreme enthusiasm or necessity.

But in what was once an Aristocratic State the necessity for Monarchy (when Aristocracy has disappeared) has a second foundation. This foundation is the fact, demonstrable from all history, that Aristocratic States *never* acquire the Democratic spirit. When the masses in such a State have lost their desire to be ruled by a special class (and that is the loss of the Aristocratic spirit), the old feelings are not replaced by any new desire in the masses to govern themselves. They are sometimes replaced by a little envy, more often by forgetfulness; but out of nothing you can make nothing, and out of citizens who have always been passive of their nature, and whose passivity was the very cause of Aristocracy among them, you will never get the Democratic spirit of corporate initiative, and of what is essential to the functioning of Democratic institutions, a permanent, individual interest in public affairs.

To those who have been long the citizens of an Aristocratic State, the Democratic spirit seems foolish, or anarchic, or at any rate irritating and disturbing. To make men trained under the Aristocratic temper into Democrats you must take them right away from their old surroundings, and throw them into conditions (such as those of the Colonies)

where there is no conceivable alternative to Democracy.

For a small body of men thrown upon their own resources, without traditions and with no set of men among them for whom they have a religious regard, must inevitably begin with a Democratic machinery. There is no other to hand.

At any rate, whatever may be true of these distant and immature experiments, the *old* Aristocratic State in process of change never has, and I presume never can, become a Democracy.

Nor is there any sign of such a process in England to-day. There are many signs that Aristocracy is in the last stages of dying, or is actually dead, in England to-day, but there are no signs of a corporate public opinion taking on activity and controlling public services. In other words, there are no signs of Democracy in modern England: and we shall wait for them in vain.

The humbug of attempting to reconcile Parliaments and Democracy has obviously broken down. The statement that Parliaments are, or can be, democratic is a lie; and you cannot build upon a lie. Parliaments *if they are Sovereign*, are oligarchies; narrow and highly professional oligarchies at that.

They can only work, therefore, when they are Aristocratic and act in an Aristocratic community. But once this sham is exposed (and all over civilization its exposure is now thorough), there remains no instrument of government consonant with the conception of strict national unity and greatness combined, save Monarchy. There is no conceivable form wherein, normally, as a regular day-to-day matter millions of men scattered over great distances can administer their own affairs. The moment they trust to councils they fall into oligarchy, and oligarchy without Aristocracy is intolerable to man.

But apart from this negative way of looking at it—apart from the proof that there is no alternative—consider the positive functions of the Monarch and see how necessary they are to any great State, but especially to such a State as ours during and after its present transformation.

The leading function of the Monarch is to protect the weak man against the strong, and therefore to prevent the accumulation of wealth in a few hands, the corruption of the Courts of Justice and of the sources of public opinion.

It may be asked how an Aristocracy can do those things.

Well, it does not do them excellently, and indeed one of the causes of the decline of Aristocracy is the accumulation of such corruptions. Nevertheless an Aristocracy, while it still exists, does have a moderating effect. Its spirit is against the very rapid, and above all against the precarious and ephemeral, acquisition of wealth. Its governing body feels itself representative of the mass. It is the strong conservator of tradition, and it is especially jealous of the reputation of its Courts of Justice. It maintains them pure.

A Democracy also, where it is active and real, can do all these things. You may see every one of these functions at work in a Swiss Canton, for instance. There you may see tribunals which dread public opinion, judges who are afraid of giving false judgments, laws which forbid too great an inequality of wealth, and the absence of any vast or sudden profits acquired through the cunning of one against the simplicity of many.

But where very great numbers are concerned all these functions are atrophied if you attempt to make them Democratic in their working; and in the absence of an Aristocratic spirit there is nothing but a Monarch to exercise them. You must have

one man sufficiently removed from temptation by his own absolute position and vested with sufficient powers, able to act with sufficient rapidity. That one man is a concrete object. He can be got at by the people. He can be blamed or praised. He knows that he is responsible. He cannot shift his burden on to some anonymous and intangible culprit. And that, in itself, apart from the natural indifference and therefore impartiality of one who is above bribery and above blackmail, through his control of national wealth and power, is a vast force in favour of just government.

You often hear to-day what is, under our immediate circumstances, a true complaint, I mean the complaint that such and such an abuse is "inevitable" (in happier circumstances it would be a very silly one).

People go about with long faces saying that the detestable demagogic Press does infinite harm, but "What are you to do?" Or they mourn that a great Trust is destroying a number of small businesses, but that there is no conceivable way of stopping the process. Or they complain that you "cannot prevent" politicians from continually taking bribes, because those politicians have the power of preventing their own selves from being prose-

cuted for taking those bribes. Or, again, you hear indignation against justice being subservient to chance politicians, protecting their villainies and those of their relatives. But that indignation is always accompanied by a sort of hopeless feeling: "What can we do? The Courts of Justice to-day are a part of the Parliamentary system. Their officers are mere politicians like the rest. It works in a circle. We cannot escape." . . . And so on.

But the answer to all this is that these growing evils (and they have almost reached that limit after which a State breaks down) are *not* inevitable and are *not* necessary—save under an anonymous system.

Imagine Edward I, or Napoleon, or Alfonso of Castile, at the head of the State to-day. Or, if you prefer men less respectable (but equally conspicuous as an example of the Monarch), imagine even the tawdry Marcus Aurelius, the weak Nero, or the half-mad Otto the Third. . . . There is no lack of examples; the normal history of mankind furnishes you with Monarchy everywhere. It is only our exceptional time of transition which lacks the institution for a moment.

I say, imagine any of these men, not through their character, but through the powers

granted them by the constitutions of their times, placed at the head of the modern State. What do you think would happen to the corrupt judges, to the politicians who take bribes, to the great trusts that destroy a man's livelihood, to the secret financiers boasting that they control the State? Their blood would turn to water!

Fancy Mr. Justice So-and-So sending in a report to Nero that Nero's butler, who had swindled the Imperial fortune out of millions, was an honest man without a word to be said against him. Or fancy Mr. Justice the Other solemnly condemning to prison for criminal libel the honest man who would have denounced to Napoleon the treason of one of his agents. The Monarch makes short work of all that sort of thing.

But you will tell me that it is a mere shifting of evils. True, the politician, on or off the bench, the financier, the demagogic newspaper controller, cannot impudently defy the commonwealth when it is summed up in the Monarch. He gets short shrift, and the fear of God is put into him. But on the other hand the Monarch, through a perversion of *his* will, can put the greatest imbeciles or the greatest criminals into power, can oppress abominably . . . and so forth.



This is perfectly true, and history abounds in examples. Most of the evils from which this country suffers to-day find their ultimate seed in the perverted will of one monarch who had real power four hundred years ago.<sup>1</sup> It is also true that the stupidity of a monarch can do more harm even than his wickedness: witness that part of President Wilson's recent vagaries, which were not done in mere obedience to his financiers, but proceeded from his own monarchical brain.

Nevertheless the balance is heavily in favour of Monarchy. It is less stable, less homogeneous, less powerful in its foreign relations than Aristocracy. When it decays the consequent crash is greater, and there attaches to it the permanent danger of civil disturbance, as there does to all Egalitarian systems. There attaches to it also an almost permanent machinery of repression.

But in the great mass of executive acts Monarchy works properly in a society of great numbers because it is *responsible*. An

<sup>1</sup> It is true that the enormity of those evils is much more due to the breakdown of the Monarchy through his own action; for Henry VIII's economic ruin of the Church would have done far less harm to England had it not paved the way for the new great landlords, and therefore for Capitalism.

Oligarchy that is not Aristocratic—a Parliament, for instance—is never really responsible. You cannot grasp it. You cannot attack it. You can hardly define it. Each individual in such an amorphous executive does harm with impunity because he can always say that it was not he that did it, but some other or some group of others. He and the judicial system form also necessarily all one clique. No parliamentarian, since Aristocracy failed in England, has gone to prison for a bribe taken or given.

Finally there is this most cogent argument for Monarchy, contained in my original definition: the force of things.

Of a great State, many millions in number and spread over great areas, you can say with certainty that it *must*, if Aristocracy declines, produce Monarchy, or, alternatively, cease to be what it was, and weaken itself into quarrelling sections, or into a vaguer organism ill-defined and careless of its unity—especially careless of the external relations of that unity.

You cannot prophesy that an Aristocratic State in decay will necessarily become a Monarchy. Venice did not, Holland did not, Carthage did not. But you can prophesy that it will *either* become a Monarchy or decline.

I would, to conclude, beg my readers not to be misled in the argument by the effect of oddity, of the unusual, which appears in it.

The conception of a Monarch appears, just at this moment, almost grotesque in modern England. The memory of Monarchy has almost disappeared. There is no apparent foreign example.\*

The Englishman at the present moment, I say, cannot conceive Monarchy in the concrete. He can only think of it as a theory, or judge it from examples in the remote past, that is, working in a society which he does not visualize and can hardly understand.

But such an unfamiliarity is no argument against the probability or advisability of the thing. At any period in the history of any nation about to change, a true statement of its future would sound incredible. Had you told an Englishman at the time of Waterloo

\* Save, of course, the partial Monarchical principle in the United States, where the institution appears not only in national affairs, but in all the large cities, and wherever the Egalitarian doctrine is confronted with the problem of great numbers. The Egalitarian doctrine it is which produces the Mayor of the American city, the Governor of the American State, and the President of the American Republic in action: all Monarchs, if ever there were such!

what England would be to-day he would not have believed you. Had you told a Frenchman of the middle of the nineteenth century what the parliamentary Republic would be with its base politicians, its consequent disasters abroad, and the necessity of saving the State through the soldiers—who more than any other citizens detested the Parliamentary Régime—he would not have believed you.

Had you told any German of sixty years ago what the Prussian experiment would lead to in our time—vast expansion, then ignominious ruin—he would not have believed you. It would have seemed mere moonshine, because it was so far removed from his immediate and recent experience. So with Monarchy in England to-day.

Nevertheless it remains true that Monarchy, or, alternatively, dissolution, must come in the nature of things.

It was said some little while ago that having got rid of Monarchy in the form of an hereditary Monarch, we had, since the early eighteenth century, replaced it by a Monarchy in another form—the monarchy of that politician who was for the moment co-opted Prime Minister. The judgment is facile and false. The series of Prime Ministers which began with Walpole and ended with Asquith

(all men of much the same type of classical culture, and all men dependent upon much the same system of a clique) had in common the fact that they were members of an oligarchy in a State which had very strongly at the beginning of the process, and still slightly adherent to it at the very end of it, the Aristocratic quality. They were members of an oligarchy subject to Aristocratic rules and to Aristocratic respect. They were honoured. They were chiefs; but Chiefs of committees: and Committee government is an Aristocratic thing.

Conceivably, in another condition of affairs—for instance, if England had been a Continental Power instead of an insular one—the Prime Minister might have developed into a new form of Monarch. As it is, with the decline of Aristocracy, the value of the Prime Ministership has disappeared. The Prime Minister does not govern to-day, and the office has ceased to be respected. For it was the product of Aristocracy, and in the absence of the Aristocratic spirit it has lost its essential. Our present Prime Minister is a puppet, and his successors, though they may be more reputable in private life, will be puppets too.

The Monarchy may not come, in which case the State as we have known it will

dissolve: it will either form part of a larger federation, to be controlled from abroad, or it will lose its own character from within. Especially will it lose its proud position before the world outside.

But if in the alternative Monarchy comes, it may come in any one of a thousand ways—through the unexpected development of a new institution, or of an old institution, or through the resurrection of a dead institution.

It may come (and that would be the best way, because the most continuous) through the return to power of what is now the Hereditary House. Or it may come through an elective machinery. Or it may come through the accidental popularity of one man in some important crisis of the commonwealth: or in any other way.

But come Monarchy must, if the greatness and the homogeneity of the nation are to be maintained; and these the English will not readily or easily abandon.

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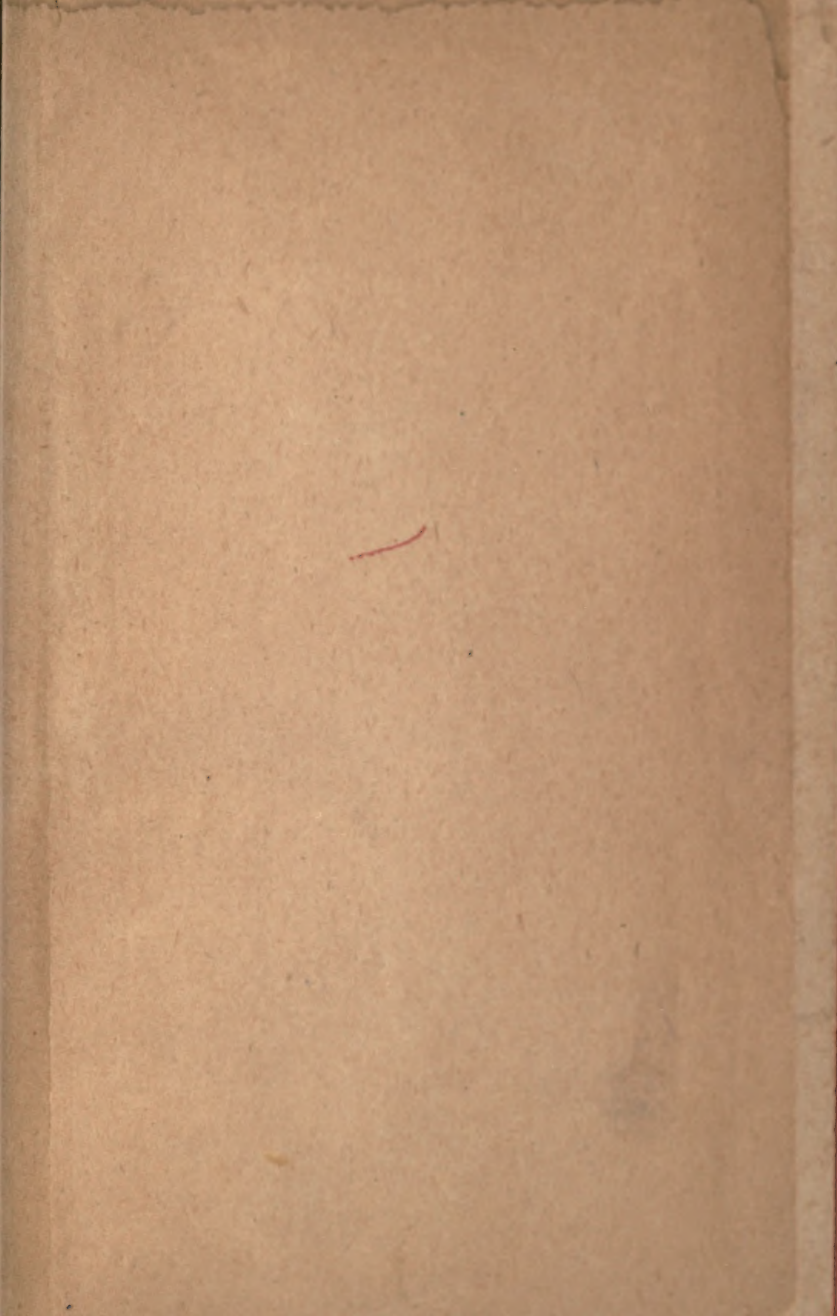
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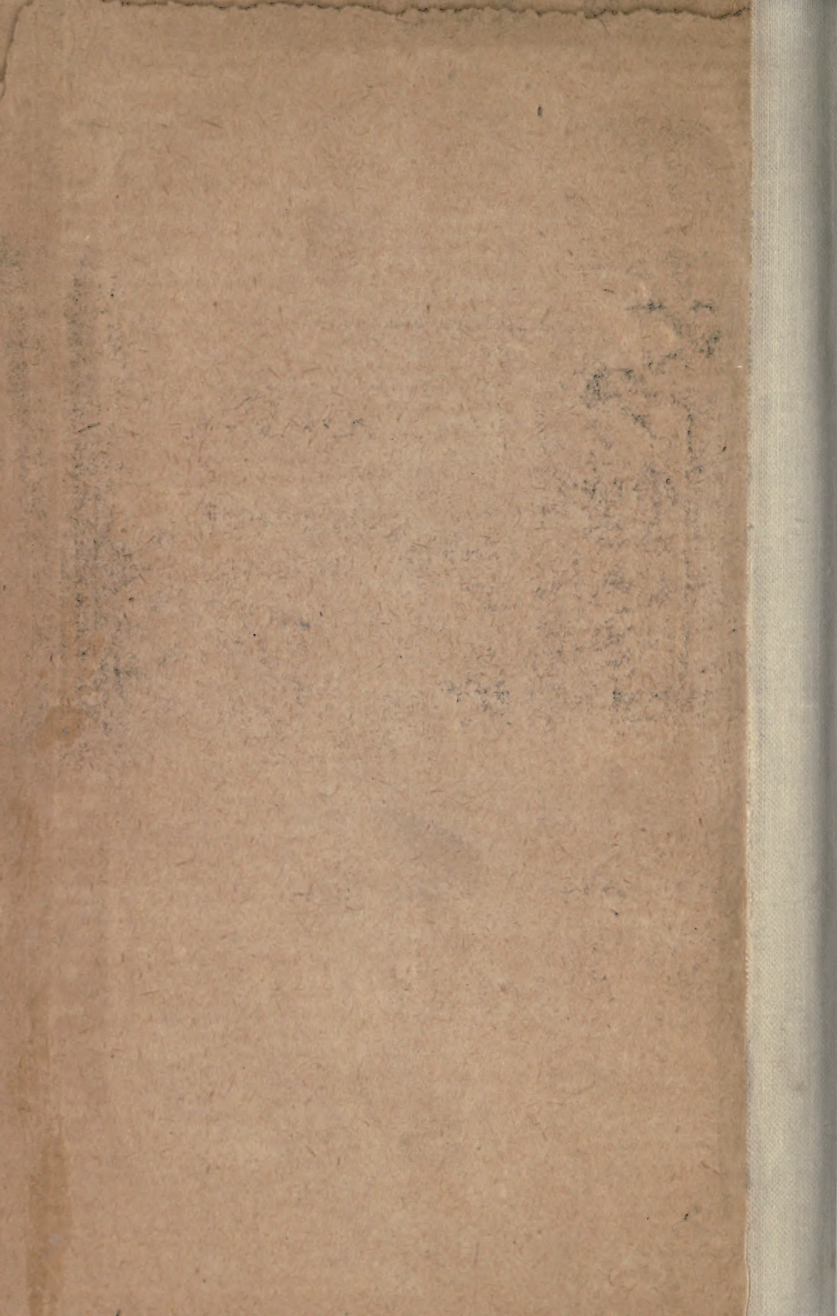
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