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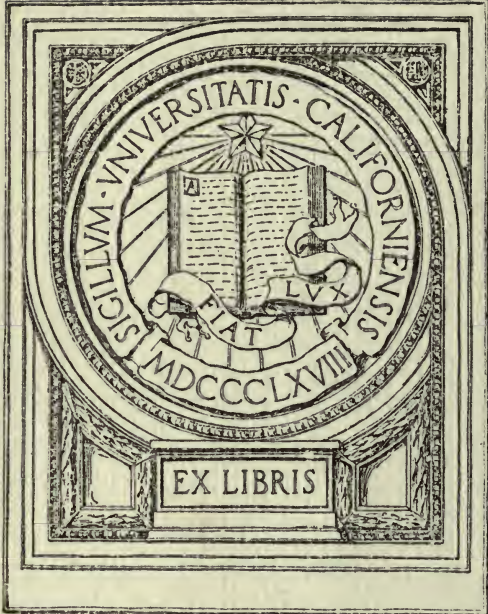
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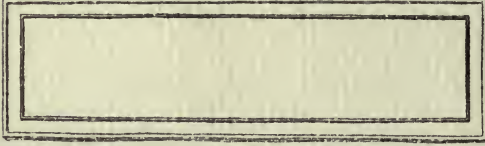


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A PLEA FOR
PARLIAMENTARY
GOVERNMENT

BY

EDWARD MELLAND



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“The main object of good government should
be to obtain independent voters.”

CHARLES JAMES FOX.



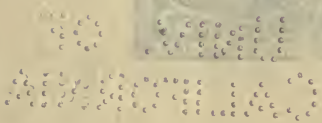
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FOR THE
PARLIAMENTARY
GOVERNMENT

EDWARD MERRIAM

First published in 1919



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A PLEA FOR PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

THE end of the great War and the determination of the belligerent countries so to arrange matters that a repetition of the world-tragedy need not be feared, make very necessary and at the same time offer a unique opportunity for a thorough overhaul of political ideas and ideals in the chief European nations. This is as much the case in England as anywhere, if only because our system of government has suffered so great a war-change during the last four years. The British Constitution may indeed be said to be in the melting-pot, so entirely have Coalition Governments, the changes in the Cabinet system and the withdrawal of the old safeguards of the liberty of the person, of the Press, and of free speech, altered the political aspect of the country.

The passing of the great Representation of the People Bill, moreover, with its admission of women to the suffrage and its immense increase of male voters, makes even more essential an honest stocktaking of our political views and aspirations, and imposes on us the necessity of considering and deciding in what manner and for what ends we intend to be governed for the future.

We do not, as a people, take kindly to the study of political principles. This national trait may be partly due to our insular position through the centuries, preventing us taking much notice of the social and political struggles of Continental nations. It is also, perhaps, a sign of mental laziness—a reluctance to go down to first principles in any subject. This shows itself in a

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general dislike of change, in a suspicion of any cut-and-dried schemes of reform, and in a widespread belief that you "cannot improve human nature by Act of Parliament." As to this last plea, it must be remembered that human nature is extraordinarily adaptable and that Acts of Parliament can, and do in many ways, provide an environment which may either cramp and crush its better instincts or may enable it freely and fully to develop its highest qualities. Lord Morley, in his Essay on Burke, says that, "He is everywhere conscious of the mastery of laws, institutions, and government over the character and happiness of men," and the teachings of psychology and of history, both ancient and modern, undoubtedly confirm Burke's judgement.

The first step is to decide on the general nature of the government we desire. Do we, for instance, prefer the leading principles of Autocracy, Plutocracy, Bureaucracy, or Democracy? Are we wishing to preserve the monopolies and privileges of certain classes and "interests"? Do we believe it is a good thing, for the individual or for the community, that some men and some classes should be in a position to dominate over and to dictate to their fellow-citizens? If so, we must look to Autocracy, Oligarchy, or Bureaucracy, for our ideal. If, on the other hand, we consider that every individual has the right to the control and free development of his or her own life; that every man should be an end in himself and not merely a means to some one else's end; and that all government in civilized countries should be by the people and for the people, well then we must insist on a Democracy.

The following pages are written from the point of view of a democrat, and their object is to show what sort of political machinery is necessary in order to make a pure Democracy possible and effective in this country. No machine can fairly be expected to turn out work for which it is not adapted, and to look for democratic results from our old Two-Party System would be about as reasonable as to hope for personal liberty and independence under military law.

This system is in a curious position just at present,

owing to the collapse of one of the two old, historic Parties, a fact which emphasises the uniqueness of the opportunity of getting rid of it altogether. The extraordinary incidents of December 1918 are still fresh in our memories, but the real causes of the collapse of the Liberal Party go much farther back than that. The two chief ones are: firstly, that they have kept their excellent principles too much for "window-dressing," even when the voice of the people was with them. Incidents such as keeping the Taxation of Land Values on their programme and then "turning it down" as soon as they had the opportunity of trying to carry it through, have been far too common. And the plain man can see but little difference between not keeping to your principles and not having any. There is, of course, some excuse for the Party managers, who are loth to offend any section of the Party, and more especially their wealthy supporters, for it is their business to watch over and nurse the Party funds, and anything to "keep the Party together" is their motto.

But the second cause of the collapse is still more serious.

The great struggle, in England as elsewhere, is, has been for some time and will be for an indefinite future, between those who consider the rights of Property more sacred and more important than the rights of Man, and those who think the reverse; and the Liberal Party has never dared to declare itself on either side. The left wing has inclined one way and the right wing the other, but all the heroic efforts made to keep the Party together have only succeeded in breaking it up. For this is no artificial question, such as Party politicians love, but a vital division on fundamental principles, where no sitting on the fence for an indefinite time is possible.

Of late the Liberal Party has inclined more and more to the Property side of the dividing-line. But there it comes in contact with the Conservatives, who have always stood for Property; and the inevitable result has happened. A majority of the Liberal Party have joined the Conservatives in what is now only a Coalition but may soon become a Coalescence, when the nice point is

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settled as to who shall be the heirs of the vast funds in the hands of the old Party machine. If the Radical wing which remains outside the Coalition were to join with Labour and the Co-operative movement and with other democratic forces and form a strong Democratic Party, the old Two-Party System might revive for a time. At present the conditions are chaotic. The disgraceful General Election of 1918, when Party organisation was definitely used to prevent the country being faithfully represented in the House of Commons, has hastened the natural evolution of the Party System towards Autocracy (a development prophesied by an acute observer more than a generation ago); and it is not surprising that the first action of the Government, after the assembling of Parliament, was to deprive the Commons of part of what was left to them of their ancient rights, even in the direction of their control of finance—once their most sacred duty.

The "Tied House" could not object very strenuously, for most of its members were pledged in advance to follow their leader wherever he might see fit to lead them. They were to take their instructions from the Prime Minister and not from their constituents, who, evidently, in voting as they did, had failed to remember those famous words of Burke's, that "an indiscriminate support to Ministers is totally corrupt; it destroys the very end of government as a control, and is a general previous sanction to misgovernment."

But Party Government, quite irrespective of these latest developments, is fundamentally unsound and hopelessly incompatible with democracy. It is no more right that a country should be governed by any one Party than that it should be governed by a single class. There is a more excellent way, and the object of this brief and rather elementary essay is to assist electors to clear their minds of convention and cant, and to incite them to think out these important matters which concern us all so nearly.

It may be objected that to oppose the Party System in this Year of Grace, 1919, is a work of supererogation; that it has been condemned with such vigour

in all quarters that it may now be considered dead and damned beyond all fear of resurrection. It is true that the Press, from the Conservative organs to those of Socialistic views, has poured abuse upon it with wonderful unanimity, and that politicians have vied with each other in denouncing it, although with almost equal unanimity, they have omitted to suggest any practical alternative. But it would be a dangerous mistake to suppose that this system will disappear without any further trouble on our part. Great political and social institutions of long standing do not expire so easily. A large number of our old party politicians will do their best to revive the *status quo ante bellum*, whether from reverence for institutions and customs under which their whole political life has been spent, or, in some cases, from mere affection for the "game of Ins and Outs" and its openings for skilful scheming and for the success of personal ambitions. Most of the general public, too, quite expect to see politics return more or less into its old grooves, if only because they lack the necessary imagination or knowledge to realise any alternative. But the chief lions in the path of reform are not the conservatism of our old politicians, nor the apathy of the man in the street, but the vested interests that have gradually gathered round the Party System. The official Party machines, for instance, with their enormous funds and their widespread powers and patronage, will fight in every possible way against their extinction.

It may be worth mentioning that both the opponents and apologists of Party Government show a strange ignorance as to what are its vital features. For some years, for instance, attacks were chiefly concentrated on the scandalous sale of honours, which helps so materially to fill the great Party chests. This iniquity was talked about as if it were the real core of the Party System, whereas it is no essential part of it at all. If it ceased to-morrow, funds could doubtless be provided in some other manner—less easy and convenient, possibly, but certainly more reputable. More recently the Press has been talking of the latest developments having "abolished

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Party Government," when the simple truth is that, while some of its redeeming features have been obliterated, its worst points have been gravely accentuated.

On the other side the favourite argument has been that the tendency to combine into parties is "inherent in human nature"—that you "cannot abolish parties," and so on. This only shows what a mistake it is to call different things by the same name. Burke defined a Party as "a body of men united for promoting, by their joint endeavours, the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed." Such parties are, of course, necessary for carrying any social or political reform. But when the reform is carried, or abandoned, the Party breaks up and a new combination is made with a different object in view. These natural parties have, however, very little in common with the great official Parties necessary for working the Two-Party System of Government. These must be comparatively stable and permanent bodies, held together by "Party loyalty" rather than by principle. Whatever the programme of the Party may be, each member must vote in support of every detail of it, whatever his own views on the matter may be; or else he will be considered a "traitor" and quite unworthy of political confidence. Party loyalty has, indeed, come to be looked on, at all events by Party managers, as the first qualification for a politician.

It would take too long to trace the history and development of Party Government in this country in detail, interesting and instructive though that history is. But a brief sketch, all that is necessary, will now be attempted. This will be followed by a description of Parliamentary Government—the democratic alternative to the Party system—and then by a short discussion of objections that may be raised to the proposed reform.

PARTY GOVERNMENT

THE British Constitution is not, in the main, a matter of Statute Law. It has grown through the centuries, along with the growth of the nation, and the Party System, under which we have all lived and moved and had our national being, is one of its later developments.

Its origin may be said to be due to George I, who, owing his crown to the Whigs, insisted that they should have a monopoly of office. He took little interest in English politics, and, not understanding the English tongue, absented himself from the meetings of his Council, where the custom grew up for the First Lord of the Treasury to take the chair. This was the first step in the gradual transference of power from the King to the representatives of the people. The King could not easily change his Ministers, for he would not call in the Tories, whom he looked on as his natural enemies, and the Whigs had only to be firm and close their ranks to enable them to dictate to the King who his counsellors should be. It is mainly to Robert Walpole, whose tact and judgement, aided by less reputable means, kept him in power for twenty years, that we owe the acceptance of the new idea that Ministers must look to a majority of the House of Commons and not to the pleasure of the King for their attainment of and continuance in office. This quiet transference of the real governing power from the King to the representatives of the people was a great advance, from the democratic point of view, an advance that was only achieved in France by means of terrible revolutions, and has only been brought about in Germany by a still more terrible war. It might, however, have been effected without the creation of the Party System

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of Government. As Professor Seeley pointed out in his *Introduction to Political Science*:—

We must distinguish between the development which has given so much power to the representative assembly and the other which has given so much power to the Minister. You must consider also that he wields this power in accordance with the rules of the Party System. These things are wholly distinct. Parliament might have gained supreme power and yet the Minister might not have taken the place of the Crown. And again, these things might have happened without the establishment of that strict Party System which we see.

The next step in the evolution of the system was the formation of a recognised Opposition. This was in the reign of George II, and was due to the brilliant brain of Pulteney. As Mr. Justin McCarthy says:—

With Pulteney and his tactics began the party organisation which, inside the House of Commons and outside, works unceasingly with tongue and pen, with open antagonism and underhand intrigue, with all the various social as well as political influences—the pamphlet, the Press, the petticoat, even the pulpit—to discredit everything done by the men in office, to turn public opinion against them, and, if possible, to overthrow them. . . . Inside the House he made it his business to form a party which should assail the Ministry on all points, lie in wait to find occasion for attacking it, attack it rightly or wrongly, attack it even at the risk of exposing national weakness or bringing on national danger, keep attacking it always.

And similar tactics have been, as Mr. McCarthy goes on to say, “unquestionably the policy of all our more modern English Parties.” An organised opposition may now be said to be part of the British Constitution—“His Majesty’s Opposition,” as the Gilbertian phrase goes. In Canada the Leader of the Opposition is actually paid a special salary for his services.

The developments of the next two reigns were chiefly in the direction of increasing the power of the Ministry at the expense of the Crown. George III struggled against this tendency, and William IV, in 1834, even attempted to dismiss his Ministry in order to send for Sir Robert Peel; but this the newly reformed Parliament would not brook and the attempt was not repeated.

Party Government meantime had become firmly established, and politicians and people had come to look on it as of the natural order of things. But even in the early Victorian period it was still something very different from the system to which we have been accustomed. Legislative power, for instance, was still to a large extent in the hands of the House. Measures of first importance were sometimes introduced by ordinary members without reference to the Government of the day. This is now considered unconstitutional, and the time allowed to "private members" (as they are absurdly called) is rapidly approaching the vanishing point. In short, the Cabinet, having deprived the King of his power, now proceeded to rob the Commons of theirs, and on these lines the system has continued to grow and develop, until the Party caucus, the Party strong-box, and the crack of the Party whip bid fair to destroy representative institutions altogether and to reduce honourable members to the status of voting automatons.

Nothing has conduced so much to this result as the introduction into our political life of the Caucus. This instrument of scientific organisation was imported from the United States to Birmingham in the sixties by Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Schnadhorst, and late in the seventies it was adopted by the Liberal Party. The sweeping victory of 1880 soon followed, and although it was mainly due to other causes, it confirmed the professional politicians' affection for their new instrument, and the Conservative Party soon adopted the same methods in self-defence. It is unnecessary to describe in detail how these Party machines work, selecting candidates for constituencies, first making them pronounce the Party shibboleth (turning down even a Lord Robert Cecil because he will not say "Tariff Reform"), telling the elector for whom he is to vote, and, later on, telling the member how *he* is to vote. "Vote as you are told or keep out of politics" is the motto of the Caucus. One may even see instructions sent down from the Central Office to the local organisations as to resolutions they are requested to have passed and returned to Headquarters. Could anything be more undemocratic?

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Large sums of money are spent in helping selected candidates to fight elections, and it is often contended that this is a great benefit, as without such assistance only rich men could become Members of Parliament. But the reply to that is obvious. If the State paid, as it should do, all necessary expenses of Elections and strictly limited other expenses to a very small sum, then poor men could get into Parliament here as easily as they do, say, in New Zealand. The objections to the argument are equally obvious. On the principle of "who pays the piper may call the tune," these assisted members feel bound in honour to vote, or abstain from voting, as their Party machines tell them. No wonder Proportional Representation was so strongly attacked and finally defeated in the House of Commons by both the great Party machines, for they saw in it a scheme to reduce their influence enormously by the substitution of independent members for Party hacks.

As to the dubious methods by which the machines obtain their funds, the sale of honours and titles, after the exposure in the House of Lords, is now admitted to be a disgraceful fact. When funds are low, an emissary from Headquarters will approach wealthy men and suggest that a baronetcy, or even something higher, could be arranged, at stated prices. Surely travelling in honours (to use a business phrase) is the deepest depth. No wonder that repeated demands for the publication of audited accounts of these Party funds have always been sternly refused by both parties.

From the point of view of the Prime Minister, however, the Caucus is a most useful institution. It relieves him of the greater part of his most arduous duty, that is, the task of "keeping the Party together." It is not natural for mankind to divide themselves as the Party System requires them to be divided. It is difficult to make the majority of men join Parties of principle, on real issues. To make them take sides in artificial and permanent Parties is impossible—by fair means, at least. Party strife, with its accompanying tendency to look on politics as a game, has always been a failing of the "classes" rather than the "masses."

As Sir Henry Maine said long since (in his *Popular Government*) :—

Party disputes were originally the occupation of aristocracies which joined in them because they loved the sport for its own sake ; and the rest of the community followed one side or the other as its clients. Nowadays Party has become a force acting with vast energy on multitudinous democracies, and a number of artificial contrivances have been invented for facilitating and stimulating its action. Yet, in a democracy, the fragment of political power falling to each man's share is so extremely small that it would be hardly possible, with all the aid of the Caucus, the stump and the campaign newspaper, to rouse the interests of thousands or millions of men, if Party was not coupled with another political force. This, to speak plainly, is corruption.

Experience teaches us that this statement is the simple truth. Wherever you find Party Government there you find corruption of one sort or another. Even in its early days the intimate relation between the Party System and corruption was quite apparent to clear-sighted men. The great Alexander Hamilton, though a warm admirer of the British Constitution, admitted that the system was corrupt, and even expressed his belief that when the corruption came to an end the Constitution would fall to pieces—meaning that this form of government could not be carried on without the purchase of support by the Party in power. Robert Walpole (who, by his force of character, first made the rôle of Prime Minister a definite and recognised position) resorted to wholesale and unabashed bribery, and so remained in power for some twenty years. He not only gave large sums of money to members, but showered sinecures and good positions in the Civil Service on them and on their friends and relations. And this practice has been carried on ever since—in a greater or less degree, according to the consciences and necessities of Prime Ministers. It is true that the exigencies of the great War have revived the number of "place-men" in the House to something like their old proportions ; but, on the whole, we manage these matters much more scientifically than our forefathers could do.

The Party Whip—*alias* the "Patronage Secretary to

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the Treasury"—attends to the business, and the Party funds and organisation generally are used to ensure the return of members who will not require any further outlay—of men, that is, who can be trusted to "vote straight." The ideal, of course, is Mr. W. S. Gilbert's man, who

Always voted at his Party's call,
And never thought of thinking for himself at all.

They try to make this sort of thing respectable by calling it "Party loyalty." "We do not call it lying," said Thackeray; "we call it voting for our Party."

Much might be said about bribery and corruption as applied by Party managers to different districts, to special trades and "interests," and even to large classes of the community, by promises of special legislation or administration in their favour; but this evil is so generally recognised that it need not be emphasised. It has often been argued, by opponents of any wide extension of the suffrage, that the admission of millions of new voters only means a vast increase in the field of competition between the rival Parties, which, outbidding each other recklessly for the support of the new masses of clients, must bring about a national debauch that could only end in national collapse. But all this argument goes to show is that the Party System is hopelessly incompatible with Democracy. Instead of being an argument against a wide suffrage it merely condemns a system of government which is so intrinsically rotten that it cannot exist without continuous and widespread bribery and corruption.

Corruption, however, is not the only means employed in the fine art of keeping the Party together. The following true story, for instance, is very characteristic of the workings of the Party System. In 1878 the great Lord Derby (as one may call him, to distinguish him from others of the name) severed himself from the Disraeli Government in consequence of the Premier's "Jingo" policy, by which he drove England to the

verge of war with Russia. In April 1879, in a private letter, Lord Derby wrote:—

I do not believe that Lord Beaconsfield ever wished for a war, or that he cared really to alter materially the conditions of the San Stefano arrangement. But without a diplomatic success—no matter how short-lived—his Ministry would have been in great danger, and he preferred the risk of war to that of personal failure. . . . Perhaps it is impossible to be for thirty years a party leader without coming to consider that *keeping the party together* is the one result for which everything else must be risked. At any rate, I am sure that has been the object of the proceedings of 1878; and as a party move they seem to have answered. But I cannot think them safe or wise in a national point of view.

When one considers the disastrous consequences that have followed from the upsetting of the treaty of San Stefano, what a lurid light is thrown by this simple narrative on the effects of the Party System on foreign policy.

Its effects on national administration and legislation are equally disastrous. In order to consider the causes of these effects it may be convenient to set down the main features of our Two-Party System in its later developments.

1. The Prime Minister, who is himself selected by the Caucus of the Party that has a majority in the House of Commons, appoints all the other members of the Government, of course from his own side of the House only. This effectually prevents the Government from representing the House, and still more the country, at all adequately or fairly. As, moreover, he can dismiss any of his colleagues at his pleasure, it inevitably tends to make them feel that their devotion and loyalty are due to him rather than to the House.

2. The Prime Minister has also the right of resigning office, when he sees fit, not only for himself but for the whole Government. He can also recommend a dissolution of Parliament. These rights give him far too much power, not only over the Executive but also over the House. Threats of resignation and dissolution have often carried measures against the wishes of a majority of the Party in power, who consent rather than accept

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the worse alternatives of seeing their enemies, the Opposition, invited to take office, or of facing the risks and expense of a general election.

3. The theory of the "unity of the Cabinet" prevents the House having any control over individual Ministers. They can shelter behind their colleagues, and so far from being "responsible to the House" they are not even "ejectable" so long as their chief stands by them. So the House may be, and often is, obliged to put up with a Minister who is incompetent or distrusted because it does not want to bring about the fall of the whole Government. This "unity of the Cabinet" idea may have had its uses when it was necessary to prevent the King from dismissing a Minister whom he disliked, but those days are past, and no protection from the representatives of the people should be permitted in a country aspiring to democratic institutions. Similarly with the silence and secrecy in which meetings of the Cabinet are shrouded—no records being kept as to the voting of individual Ministers, nor even as to the business transacted. Secrecy may be an element of strength in a Bureaucracy, but a frank publicity better suits a Democracy. The secretary of the Executive should keep full minutes of meetings, including a record of the voting, which could be referred to when necessary.

4. The monopoly of all legislation of importance by the Government, and the obligation on their part to resign in the event of an adverse vote on any of their measures, may be considered together. The words of Blackstone are still true that:—

Whenever the power of making and that of enforcing the laws are united together, there can be no public liberty. . . . Where the legislative and executive authority are in distinct hands, the former will take care not to entrust the latter with so large a power as may tend to the subversion of its own independence, and therewith of the liberty of the subject. (*Commentaries*, Book I, Chap. II.)

This evil is aggravated in various ways when, as has been the case for many years, the life of the Government

depends mainly on its success with its legislative measures. Administration, which should be its real business, must then take a secondary place. When Ministers have to spend most of their time fighting for their lives in the House, attending Cabinet meetings and generally working to "keep the Party together," they cannot possibly obtain a good grasp of the details of their Departments and keep them under proper control. One result of this is that England has long been practically a Bureaucracy—governed, that is, by the permanent heads of Departments—and it must continue so to be governed until the Party System is definitely abolished. Professor Ramsay Muir did not exaggerate when he wrote in 1912:—

Our bureaucracy directs, practically without control, nine-tenths of the work of administration; it is mainly responsible for the character and the growing amount of our national expenditure; it directly wields immense legislative powers, under the terms of statutes, and is indirectly responsible for a large proportion of the Parliamentary legislative output. (*Peers and Bureaucrats.*)

The alarming extent to which Bureaucracy and Legislation by Order in Council have increased during the War is too notorious to need emphasising.

The necessity for successful legislation makes it obligatory that each Government should have a "Policy." Whether the country needs it or not the Party always does. No Party can hope to succeed without a live policy—"a good fighting programme" it is called—for which an artificial enthusiasm can be excited throughout the country. For the basis of the Party System is the fallacious idea that there must always be some "question" before the public of sufficient importance to keep two opposing Parties compact and distinct.

The "Policy Measures" are therefore decided upon with great care. They are discussed in Cabinet Meetings, an ordeal from which a Bill often emerges robbed of any consistency it might have had if it had been the work of one man, and sometimes in such a form that its originator is really indifferent as to its future fate. The key of the situation is with the Premier. Weak Ministers

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will sacrifice their own principles at the bidding of any small but irreconcilable faction of their Party. Strong ones will decide on the outlines and even on the details of their measures and then force them on the House with almost as little regard for the feelings of their followers as they have for those of the Opposition. As John Morley long since pointed out:—

On the one hand a leader is lavishly panegyrised for his high-mindedness in suffering himself to be driven into his convictions by his Party. On the other, a Party is extolled for its political tact in suffering itself to be forced out of its convictions by its leader. It is hard to decide which is the more discreditable and demoralising sight. (*Compromise.*)

The nature of the legislation proposed would not, however, be of so much moment if every measure were sure of an honest discussion on its merits by Parliament. But this is rarely, if ever, the case. And it must continue to be rarely the case so long as the downfall of a Ministry, with its widespreading consequences, is hanging on the result of the debate. A member who would dare to disregard the crack of the Party whip and to speak and vote on a mere consideration of the right and the wrong of the matter would be looked on with indignation, if not contempt, by other public men. He would be considered a traitor and "quite unreliable," and would be carefully avoided by the great Party machines when they were making up their lists of candidates.

This is Party discipline. Such a hopeless perversion of morality can only be explained by the fact that even the best of men cannot serve two masters—either one's Party or one's country must be the first consideration. There is no use saying that this evil is an "abuse" of Party Government. It is an integral part of the system. It is inevitable, as the late Lord Salisbury admitted in a speech in Glasgow, in 1891, when he said:—

The evil of which we have to complain arises from this—that each member of the House of Commons has at the same time to perform two different duties. When you are voting here for a measure for the City of Glasgow, you only think whether the measure is a good one or a bad one, according to your judgement, and you

give your votes, whatever they may be. But when you are in the House of Commons voting for a measure, do you also think, "How will this affect my principal object, to turn out the Government to which I object, if I pass this Bill and give the Government the credit of passing a useful measure which may confirm them in their seats? I had better oppose this Bill; I had better vote for any amendment which may throw out the Bill, or I had better make a long speech which will occupy the time in which the Bill would otherwise pass." That double object pursues, and necessarily must pursue, all Party men, to whatever side they belong, but it has a most disastrous effect upon legislation.

It must not be forgotten also that the evolution of "His Majesty's Opposition" has progressed *pari passu* with that of His Majesty's Government. Until the change of feeling brought about by the War, the constant practice of the Opposition had been to attempt to discredit the Government and to hold it up to scorn and contempt and obloquy in the eyes of the people, and incidentally in the eyes of the whole world. The obstruction of legislation also—for "the business of an Opposition is to oppose"—had been reduced to a fine art. In spite of Closure Acts and of rules placing the conduct of debates entirely in the hands of the Government, reasonable progress was frequently impossible, and a "first-class measure" would often take six months or even a year to fight its way through Parliament, and even then be not more than half-discussed. This disgraceful state of things—culminating in the "Massacre of the Innocents" at the end of each Session—is one of the causes that has brought Parliament into contempt. It has seriously been used as an argument in favour of "Home Rule all round," the press of work, as it is called, being so great that, without devolution to minor Parliaments, no headway can be made with the business of the country. Lord Salisbury was quite aware of the cause of the futility of Parliament in respect to legislation, as may be seen by his comparison of the work of Municipal Councils and of the House of Commons. In his Glasgow speech, already mentioned, he said:—

The laws which the Municipalities pass are quickly dispatched, carefully considered, conceived in a workmanlike shape, and effect the results for which they were designed. The laws that Parlia-

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ment passes are only passed after infinite and heart-rending delay. They appear in a crude and mutilated form. Every salient point is rubbed down in order to enable them to pass through the narrow channel that is open to them, and the result at the end is that they have been so well arranged and so well conceived that an amending Act is necessary next year.

The absence of the Two-Party System from our municipal councils has made the management of our great cities the admiration and envy of the rest of the world. Instead of spending their time and energy in trying to turn the Mayor and Chairmen of Committees out of office, the Councillors get on with the work which they were elected to carry out. It is only in our highest elected Court that the classes play their favourite game of "Ins and Outs." Our humbler representative institutions are still sane and sound.

Beyond the spheres of Administration and Legislation there are other grave objections to the Two-Party System. There is the dangerous situation that arises when a third party comes on the scene, strong enough to hold the balance of power between the two official Parties and clever enough to make use of its position by giving support in exchange for concessions. The Irish Party and the Labour Party have both, at different times, figured in this rôle.

But worst of all, perhaps, is the general demoralisation so inseparable from the System. First, it affects the politicians, with their idolisation of Party loyalty and their unscrupulous detraction of their opponents; then the Party Press with its mendacious virulence, and finally the people. The argument will force itself upon even the dullest mind that if malice, intrigue, and lying are practised by the foremost men in the country on the most important matters, there can be no harm in insignificant folk employing such tools in the minor matters of everyday life. And so it comes about, to use the words of John Morley, "that the coarsest political standard is undoubtedly and finally applied over the whole realm of human thought."

A century ago England was governed by a few noble families—Tories and Whigs—and Party spirit was bad

enough then. It is immeasurably more deadly to the public welfare now that practically the whole nation has been drawn into the political sphere. And when we note the sinister developments of the Party System since those days—all tending towards the enfeebling of representative institutions and the substitution of Oligarchy and Bureaucracy—it is quite obvious to all whose ideal is a true and honest Democracy, that the Party System of Government must be destroyed, root and branch. As Dr. Sanford Fleming—the well-known Canadian statesman—said many years ago:—

Our ancestors succeeded in overthrowing many theories which were destructive of the liberty of the subject and the well-being of the nation. We shall be unworthy of our ancestry if, on our part, we hesitate to grapple with the theory of Party supremacy and injustice, however strongly entrenched by prejudice and interest.

PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

REPRESENTATIVE institutions generally, and the House of Commons in particular, are now on their trial in this country. There is a great political division between those who would like to weaken the power of the House still further—to make it even more futile and impotent than it is—and those who believe in the government of the people by the people for the people, whose ideal, in short, is Democracy. This contest has been going on quietly for a long time, and the gains, whichever side of the House might be in office, have all been at the expense of the people's representatives. And the House itself has shown an astonishing ignorance of what was happening and lack of foresight as to what was about to happen in regard to its great duties, its privileges, and its rights. Its members certainly cannot plead "Not Guilty" at least to "contributory negligence."

When the "Front Benches" agreed that foreign policy must be withdrawn from the sphere of Party politics, their simple method of achieving that result was to withdraw it from the purview of the House altogether. To what extent this action contributed to the bringing on of the great War we shall never know.

But the ideal of the Conservative Party goes much farther than this. Why should internal politics also not be taken out of the hands of Parliament? Why permit any interference with the power of the Government? Of course, such a policy has never been openly avowed; but it has been worked for very persistently and effectively. And the present Lord High Chancellor of England (then the Right Hon. F. E. Smith) came very near to open avowal in an article published in *Pearson's Magazine* some years before the War. After discussing

the Party System, and of course approving of the removal of foreign politics from the control of the House, he arrives at the conclusion that "The immediate object of moderate men of all parties ought to be constantly to increase the range and scope of subjects vital to the State which are withdrawn from the field of partisan controversy in its more immoderate phases." It is no doubt true that the Party System is incompatible with honest discussion and calm control of the affairs of the nation ; but it is possible for a remedy to be worse than the disease. The real question before the country is how can we put fresh life into Parliament, not by withdrawing all political matters from its control but by taking away from it the deadly Party System which hampers and paralyses it at every turn.

The true antithesis to Party Government is Parliamentary Government, and this is the only pathway to Democracy. This end can be achieved quite easily as soon as the people come to understand that, without machinery suited to the purpose, their will can always be thwarted by the rulers of the country, and their " democratic institutions," so-called, must remain a mockery.

In order to place Parliamentary Government on a firm basis and to make the will of the people supreme, there are three main essentials—a democratic House of Commons, an elected Executive, and Parliamentary control of the Government Departments.

1. The first necessity is the election of a House of Commons as perfectly representative of the nation as possible. This can only be effected by the method of Proportional Representation. It is equally unnecessary, at this time of day, to explain or to justify this mode of election. The excellent publications of the Proportional Representation Society (besides books such as H. G. Wells's *In the Fourth Year*), innumerable speeches by some of our best public men, and the experience of other countries where the system is at work, will satisfy any honest inquirer that, of all known methods, this is the best for ensuring that the House shall be, as nearly as possible, the nation in miniature.

As to the question of the suffrage our present standard

may suffice ; though, personally, I should prefer to see perfect equality between the sexes and an age limit of twenty-five to seventy-five. Young people now are no older at twenty-five than they were at twenty-one when the present limit was fixed. They began *la vie sérieuse* much earlier in those days, and their heads were not filled with football and "the pictures." As to the other limit of seventy-five, not only should half a century of voting suffice for any one, but also it is fairly obvious that, as a general rule (with many brilliant exceptions) old people are too much out of sympathy with the hopes and ideals of the time for their votes to be of any value to the country. They look backward rather than forward. But this is only a personal opinion, and the subject is not of first-rate importance.

Similarly, the position of the Upper House need not delay us at the present moment. Whatever reforms in its constitution may be decided upon, it may be taken for granted that it will not be allowed to block or thwart the "People's Chamber" to any serious extent.

2. The second great essential in our democratic scheme is that, having secured a House of Commons as representative of the people as possible, we must then try to obtain a Government as representative of the House as possible. What sense is there in trying to secure a House as representative of the nation as possible, and then choosing all the members of the Government from one side of the House only? It would be as reasonable to find out whether the Liberal or the Conservative Party had a majority of the electors in the country on its side, and then only allow the election of members from that Party.

At the first meeting of the House after each General Election, members should be called on to nominate and vote for the necessary Ministers for the different Departments. These separate elections should be carried out by Proportional Representation, and by ballot. The elected Ministers at their first meeting would choose their own chairman, who would thus become Prime Minister. This Executive would remain in office for the life of that Parliament, say five years. No legislative failure

would cause any resignations from office. If the Minister of Education brought in a great Bill to reform the education of the country, and the House refused to pass it, he would simply continue the administration of his Department on the old lines. It should be possible for the House, by formal vote of censure, say for some flagrant dereliction of duty, to bring about the resignation of an individual Minister. This, however, is a contingency that would hardly ever occur, and when it did, the colleagues of the Minister dismissed would not be affected. The House would at once elect his successor.

The advantages of this system over the present method are many and obvious. The loyalty of Ministers would then naturally be towards the House rather than to their chief, while his loyalty would be to his colleagues rather than to his Caucus.

The "unity of the Cabinet" and the "collective responsibility" farce would be destroyed at once. It would no longer be necessary, in order to get rid of an incompetent Foreign Minister, to quarrel with the Premier and perhaps have to turn out an ideal Home Secretary or Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Ministers could then be chosen for their administrative ability, their honesty and energy, instead of, as they so often are at present, for their powers of dialectic, their pachydermatous indifference to abuse, or for personal and family reasons.

But the greatest benefit of all will be that Ministers will then have leisure to attend to their real business. Instead of spending their time in political intrigues, in "keeping the Party together," in threshing out the details of legislation and in making fighting speeches in the House, they will then be able to master the details of the work of their Departments; and this will seem worth while to them when they know their responsibility will last at least five years. This will be a deadly blow to Bureaucracy: more especially if we follow the example of Switzerland and re-elect Ministers who have served their country well, as long as they are willing to remain in office. In spite of the keenness of parties in Switzerland there is no Party Government there, and it is an

extremely rare event for a Minister, willing to stand again, not to be re-elected. It might be as well also to follow the example of Switzerland in another particular. As soon as their Ministers are elected by the House, supplementary elections are held in their constituencies, for a "Federal Councillor" cannot be a deputy as well. Surely this is a sensible provision, for the constituents of a Member of the Government should be the whole nation and not the inhabitants of any particular district.

3. We must come now to our third essential change—Departmental Committees of the House. Without these the control of the people over their Government will not be complete and Bureaucracy will not be absolutely dead. Burke's words are as true now as ever:—

The virtue, spirit and essence of a House of Commons consists in its being the express image of the feelings of the nation. . . . It was not instituted to be a control upon the people as, of late, it has been taught by a doctrine of the most pernicious tendency. It was designed as a control for the people.

At the beginning of each Parliament, after the election of Ministers, Standing Committees should be appointed—one for each of the great Departments of State. They should be drawn from each of the Parties in the House, as nearly as possible in proportion to their numerical strength, and each Party should select its own representatives. It has long been the custom in other countries to have a certain number of these Committees, more especially in reference to foreign affairs, and it is noteworthy that although, at the beginning of the War, it was decided in France to suspend them for a time, it was found necessary, within a very few months, to reappoint them. Requests made by members of our House of Commons for such a Committee for Foreign Affairs, even long before the War, have been steadily refused. Bureaucrats are by nature antagonistic to Parliamentary control, but it is, of course, essential to Democracy.

These Committees would keep themselves well informed as to the details of the work of their several Departments, and would have the right to obtain any

information they wanted at any time. They would be constantly in touch with the Minister in charge and would be of great assistance to him, acting as a link between him and the House. There is no doubt that their action would tend to promote efficiency, to do away with red-tape obscurantism and to reduce expenditure very considerably. Extravagance and a certain contempt for economy are the hall-marks of Government Departments, and, if for this reason alone, these Committees would be of inestimable value to the nation. On nice questions of policy also, whether as to the Budget or to colonial or foreign affairs, the Minister could often receive valuable assistance from his Committee, who, being all well-informed and more or less experts on the subject, could help him to thresh out the difficulties of the case. How much more sensible this would be than a similar discussion at a Cabinet meeting, where only one of those present is thoroughly familiar with the subject and where the main consideration at the back of each man's mind is the success of his Party and the bringing to naught the attacks of His Majesty's Opposition.

Each Committee should present to the House an annual report on the work of its Department, and, in addition, it should have the right, whenever it saw fit, to inform the House of any matter of importance of which it considered the House should take cognisance.

These, then, are the three great essentials for the construction of a Democratic machine which would make the people really, and not merely nominally, masters in their own house. It would avoid not only the evils of our own system but also the mistake of the American Constitution, which has gone to the other extreme in the separation of administration and legislation. The members of the Executive of the United States are nominated by the President and are therefore strictly a Party Government, but they are not allowed to be members of Congress. They have no control over the Legislature, but neither has the Legislature any control over them. The system advocated in these pages is more on the lines of that of Switzerland, which, be it noted, is not only the most honestly and successfully governed

country in Europe, but also the only purely democratic State in the world.

There are various minor matters that would have to be arranged after the three chief points are secured, but most of them would follow naturally from the principles already enunciated. If a Leader of the House is wanted to attend to the orderly business of the House, to arrange the debates and so on, one could be elected by the same method as the Ministers ; or it might suffice to enlarge the powers and duties of the Speaker, much of whose former occupation would be gone when Party fights and "scenes" became rarities.

The question of the Referendum and the initiative would certainly be brought forward. There would be no objection to these being introduced into the Constitution, provided they were hedged about with strict limitations which would ensure them being used very sparingly. Too frequent resource to the Referendum would tend to undermine the authority and prestige of Parliament, and that is much to be deprecated. The use of the Referendum was strongly advocated in this country in 1910, a Party that could not get its own way in the House thinking it might possibly succeed by this means. *The Times* even went so far as to say (December 2, 1910): "A silent revolt against the evils into which the Party System has drifted has been long in progress, and a way of escape from them is hailed with delight." But under Party Government, which implies the resignation of the Ministry if one of its "Policy Measures" is defeated, the Referendum would be worse than useless. Each popular vote would be like a miniature General Election. The Bill referred to the country would be looked on as a small matter compared with the possible defeat of the Government. Almost every one would give a strictly Party vote. You cannot get an honest vote on any question so long as the fate of a Government is trembling in the balance. The editor of the *Spectator* did not see "the slightest reason" why a Government should resign after a defeat on a Referendum. But even if a clause in the Act were to make such resignation unnecessary, surely a direct snub from the

people would be a more serious matter than an adverse vote from their representatives in the House. With what grace, or usefulness, could a Party Cabinet remain in office subject to the sneers of the Opposition that they did not represent the people's will? You cannot pick out little bits of the Cabinet system in that way. It must be abolished entirely before you can have honest voting, whether by Referendum or otherwise.

It is unnecessary to consider the small alterations that will be necessary in the forms and customs of Parliament. When members are made free they will quickly and easily arrange these details. And with this freedom will come a rise of status and a quickened sense of power and responsibility which will soon be appreciated by their constituents. The term "professional politician" should be one of the highest honour. It is the Party system, with its chicaneries and insincerities, that has made it one of derision and contempt. When members are their own masters—free, for instance, to discuss and determine the foreign policy of their own country, none daring to make them afraid—a marked improvement in the personnel of the House of Commons will follow. At present many men, with excellent qualifications, decline to face the trouble and expense of a contest for a seat in the House, more especially in our single-member constituencies, just to become "voting machines" if they get there.

CRITICISMS

MUCH more might be said as to the respective merits of Parliamentary and Party Government, but the foregoing sketch should be sufficient for all who are interested in politics to fill in the details for themselves. It remains to be considered what are the objections that can be raised to the system here proposed.

It must be remembered that what we are trying to construct is a method of government suitable for a Democracy. The Party system may suffice for a class Government which is chiefly concerned to "hold its own" and mark time. But all class Governments—whether of the wealthy classes, as in England, or of the poorest, as in Bolshevik Russia—are anathema to the true democrat. The main principle of the Party system, that "*Unless* a House is divided against itself it cannot stand," may suit the faction fights of the classes, but for the people, to whom politics is a serious matter, determining the whole tenour of their lives, it is foolishness—or worse.

The first objection usually raised is that the British Constitution, the growth of centuries, is sacred, and no impious hands must be laid on it. It is overlooked that the British Constitution is always changing and being changed, and that those are the innovators who would seek rigidly to resist further change. The real question is, shall we allow it to be altered by Party managers and dictators as they see fit and to their own advantage, or shall we reform it with our eyes open, deliberately and intelligently, so as to make it more in keeping with the aspirations of the people and with the extended suffrage? To this question there can be, for a democrat, only one answer.

It is often said, "If you don't have the Party system, then you will have the Group system, as in France, and that is much worse." The Group system is certainly the worse of the two in one respect. It lends itself to more intrigue and causes more frequent changes of Government. That is because the small groups often combine for no other purpose than to upset the Government of the day, which, having no security of tenure, lives, as does our own, with the sword of Damocles—an adverse vote of the House—continually hanging over its head. In some ways the Group system has advantages over the Two-Party system, but it is useless to discuss it because no one proposes that we should adopt that alternative, and it is certainly unnecessary to do so.

Another objection sometimes raised is: "Your plan would not give us a *strong* Government, and that is what a great country like England must have." Of course, if by a strong Government is meant an autocratic Government, then we need only allow the practical abolition of the House of Commons to proceed to its natural end. But an elected Executive, representing the whole nation and not merely a Party, would be a really strong Government, for it would have at its back the whole force of the will of the people, which is often notoriously not the case with Party Governments. It would also have some fixity of tenure, which is another great element of strength.

It may be argued that our prominent politicians might decline to accept office under the conditions mentioned, or that other Ministers might be elected with whom they would refuse to work. But, without stressing the fact that the House would not be likely to elect Ministers of very widely differing principles, it must be remembered that, under Parliamentary Government, we shall no longer require Ministers to be, even nominally, "all of one mind." What a new sense of freedom Ministers will then experience. Take an extreme case. Supposing a War Minister brings in a Bill to authorise Conscription and that an excellent Home Secretary happens to be a Pacifist. Under our present system he must either pretend to be in favour of the proposal or he must take

the extreme step of resigning from the Government altogether—two very unpleasant alternatives for a man of honour who is keen on serving his country to the best of his ability. But, under Parliamentary Government, he would be in no dilemma and there need be no loss of his services to the country. He would continue the work of his own Department while helping the House of Commons, by his speeches, to defeat the Conscription Bill. In no period of English history did the Executive display more harmony and energy than under Queen Elizabeth, yet the Ministers sitting at her Council-table were often bitter enemies. The Queen decided the policy, after hearing the advice of her Ministers, and they had to execute it, and did execute it, ably. The only difference now should be that the House should decide the policy. It was quite unnecessary, in the words of Professor Seeley, that the Prime Minister should have "taken the place of the Crown." In a Democracy this place should be taken by the people, through their representatives.

It has even been urged that it would be beneath the dignity of England to take any hints in government from a "second-rate country" like Switzerland, a country, moreover, where the conditions of life are so different from our own as to make any comparisons useless. But this is a frivolous objection unless it can be shown exactly in what manner these conditions make Parliamentary Government, which is so successful in Switzerland, so unsuitable for England. It is true the Swiss have, in their Cantons, a very thorough form of Local Government to which we cannot aspire; but that is not of great moment in this connection. Moreover, when we arrive at our Democratic Government in this country, it will not be long before the powers and responsibilities of our Municipal and County Councils, and also of our District and Parish Councils, will be greatly enlarged. For decentralisation is of the essence of democracy.

Why should the Party system—which some one has aptly defined as "Half the cleverest men in the country taking the utmost pains to prevent the other half from governing"—be thought good enough for Great Britain,

with its world-wide interests and responsibilities? What we need is the best system of government possible, with a stable and energetic Executive giving their whole time and attention to their duties—not leaving these to permanent officials while they themselves quarrel and fight over legislation in the House. For all in search of Democratic Government, as Emile de Laveleye points out, "Switzerland has shown us the way." Let us "take our goods where we can find them," as the French say. And where better could we look than to (in the words of Mr. Freeman¹):—

A land where the oldest institutions of our race—institutions which may be traced up to the earliest times of which history or legend give us any glimmering—still live on in their primeval freshness, . . . a land where an immemorial freedom, a freedom only less eternal than the rocks that guard it, puts to shame the boasted antiquity of Kingly dynasties, which, by its side, seem but as innovations of yesterday.

The present writer has been, for some thirty-five years, constantly on the look-out for objections to the method of Government here advocated, and these few and feeble arguments are all he has been able to discover.

In his search in the other direction—that is to say, for reasoned arguments in support of Party Government—he has been even more unfortunate. No doubt this is partly due to our habit of taking for granted the institutions among which we are brought up and to our slowness in noting when these institutions, while retaining the old names, have entirely changed their nature. Politicians have perhaps thought it unnecessary to defend an established method of government. In 1911, however, Mr. Balfour twice spoke in favour of Party Government. He made an eloquent speech, supported by Mr. Asquith, in reply to Lord Hugh Cecil, who had been attacking the system, and it is worth any one's while to turn to the pages of Hansard, for the 4th of April of that year, to see how little could be said in its favour by the ablest speaker in the House.

A less well-known occasion was at a luncheon to the

¹ *The Growth of the English Constitution.*

Colonial Premiers at the Constitutional Club, London, on the 17th of June, when Mr. Balfour is reported to have said:—

All their guests were themselves Party politicians, and all of them knew, as they knew, that free institutions and representative government could not be carried on—so far as human ingenuity had yet contrived—unless on the Party system. . . . They could no more have a Government without an Opposition than they could have an Opposition without a Government. . . . The time might come when government by consent would be carried on by some method at present wholly unknown and unsuspected, and when the political philosopher of the future might perhaps look to some remote community to find the relics of that Party system which was now the dominating method of government in every free community. That philosopher might look upon it as the relic of some ancient time and might say that in generations long gone by their semi-barbaric ancestors thought that national affairs could not be carried on without eternal discussions and debate, without all the friction, all the misrepresentation, all the occasional ill-will inevitable to Party conflicts, all the enormous waste of the brain, the character and the health with which God had endowed them. That was a future divided from them by an illimitable period.

The hon. gentleman had apparently never heard of the method of government in Switzerland ; nor did he pause to think of the representative government of our great cities, such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Glasgow. If there were any real merit in the principle of the Party system it would be as applicable to cities as to countries. In the United States they were more logical in the matter. They gave their cities the same system, and the resulting corruption and mismanagement in their government has been appalling.

Mr. Balfour's laborious trifling with the subject may have been excusable in 1911, but the great War has taught millions of men who used to take no serious interest in politics, that these matters are of vital importance to every one. This is no time for frivolous rhetoric on the part of our statesmen, nor yet for apathy on the part of the people. The whole scheme of politics is—

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,

unless and until all who love their fellow-men and their country, combine and work together to change the cant description of England, as "a democratic country," from being a heartless mockery to a plain statement of fact.

And to this end no half-measures are of any use. The Report of the Machinery of Government Committee (Cd. 9230) is a very able document, with many well-considered recommendations, but its whole aim seems to be to make the Bureaucracy more efficient. It says that "It is for Parliament to see that its own supremacy is not impaired," but it does not suggest how this can be done so long as the Ministers are the masters of the House. Some of the Reports of the Select Committee on National Expenditure are really valuable—the seventh and ninth for instance (H. C. 98 & 121, 1918). If carried into effect they would greatly increase the control of the House over Finance. But, under our present regime, there is no probability that these recommendations will ever emerge from the pigeon-holes to which they have been consigned.

None of these suggested reforms, however, really goes to the root of the evil. The Machinery of Government Committee, indeed, deliberately deprecate the idea of "disturbing the balance of authority between the Legislature and the Executive." And yet this is the one thing needed if ever we are to replace Party Government and Bureaucracy by Parliamentary Government and Democracy. The matter is urgent, and yet we need not expect any Party Ministry to bring in such a self-sacrificing measure as an Elected Executive Bill without extreme pressure from the people. This fact is my apology for this small attempt to guide public opinion in its search for some means by which the will of the people can become paramount and the House of Commons can achieve, both individually and collectively, liberty and freedom.

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