

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY.

By far the most remarkable political phenomenon of the day is, unquestionably, the rapid growth of democracy. The triumphant demand of the people of Belgium for universal suffrage, the wonderful spread of socialism in Germany, the strong movement just now commenced in Austria for an extension of the suffrage, the rapid strides which England is making towards a complete system of local self-government and a "one-man, one-vote" franchise, the astonishing development of the farmers' movement in the United States and Canada—what are all these recent events which occur to us at the moment, and many kindred ones which might easily be enumerated, but so many indications that the time is near when—for weal or woe—the sceptre of authority in national life will be in the hands of the masses, who will make and unmake constitutions and governments at will. The certainty of this result arises from the fact that the great change which is taking place over a large part of the civilized world is in its very nature such that it gains momentum as it proceeds. Every step taken in the direction of an extended franchise makes the next step easier, especially when constitutional methods are followed. So long as the voting power is in the hands of the few the constitutional right to extend it to others remains with that few, and they are naturally cautious and conservative in regard to parting with any portion of their prerogative. Other classes, stronger numerically, and more disposed to hand down the privilege, appear as we descend in the scale. Hence it is pretty safe to predict that once the process of widening the field of electoral privilege has been begun, no stopping place can be found either in logic or in practice, until the sea-level of universal suffrage shall have been reached. After that—what? The millennium or—the deluge?

What will be the ultimate results of the coming universal suffrage in, let us say, Anglo-Saxon countries, no one can foretell. The experiment has been tried longer and more thoroughly in the United States than in any other country in modern times. That the results have been and still are startling enough in some respects, must be confessed by all who know anything of the political life of that country. But it must be borne in mind that the conditions under which the experiment has hitherto been carried on in the United States are in many respects peculiar. The influx of millions of the lowest and most ignorant classes from all parts of the world has greatly complicated the question. Very many of these immigrants, as is well known, have been utterly unused to the working of free institutions and, consequently, constituted about as unpromising material as can well be conceived with which to try the universal suffrage experiment. And yet it

is, perhaps, not too much to say that in the United States the lowest level of political immorality seems to have been reached, and that there are very hopeful indications of an upward tendency. The gradual weakening of the "machine" in national politics, the rise and influence of the "mugwumps," the gradual extinction of the "spoils" system in the civil service, and such incidents as the recent sentencing of a wealthy "boss" to a long term of imprisonment for an electioneering fraud, may be referred to in illustration of our meaning. The rapid growth of the spirit of independence of party in Canada may be instanced as an indication of the same hopeful kind here, though we have not yet reached the universal suffrage stage.

In France, it must be confessed, the evidences that popular government is working mightily in the interests of either stability or righteousness are not so clear as one could wish. In Germany, and especially in Austria, where there is still a large infusion of absolutism in legislation and administration, it will be wonderful if the triumph of democracy is achieved without revolutions, though it is possible that these may be bloodless. The mention of revolutions suggests that it is always possible that the hand on the dial-plate of popular enfranchisement may be turned backward, and the era of personal government restored by the strong hand of some political or military genius. Failing this and supposing the forces of Socialism to become triumphant, as they are quite likely to do in the near future in Germany, conjecture loses itself in the vain effort to forecast the result. Universal military drill has made Germany an army of warriors. A generation under socialistic auspices would transform the national character whether for better or for worse. It is possible that the warrior instinct, transmitted through so many centuries, might survive, though even that may be doubted. With the disappearance of personal and dynastic jealousies and ambitions, the chief incentive to war would probably vanish, even if international trade-unionism fails to give it its deathblow.

Though Great Britain has already advanced far on the high road to democracy, the forces of the latter are still far from having free play in the Mother Country. There are not wanting indications that a crisis is approaching. It would not be surprising should hereditary prerogative soon feel called upon to make its final stand. In any case one tries in vain to forecast the end. Redistribution or nationalization of the land would probably be one of the firstfruits of triumphant democracy. That in itself would work so tremendous a change and would bring so many others in its train, that the England of old would hardly be longer recognizable. Whether history would repeat itself, and the era of national decline date from the completed political and social revolution; whether some great internal

convulsion would introduce a new era of military or dynastic rule; or whether the forces of radicalism will prove equal to the task of maintaining a stable self-government, based on principles of justice, integrity, and equal rights, may be known in the early part of the twentieth century. It must be admitted that the rapid spread of education and intelligence among the masses imports into the problem a new condition which goes far to render the past history worthless as a guide to the future. What seems now certain is that the democratic movement has attained a momentum which assures its triumph at no distant day. The wisdom and moderation and courage of those who have been so long the ruling classes may retard, or their blindness or obstinacy may hasten the consummation, but it seems well-nigh impossible that anything can avert the final issue.

We did not approach the question with the hope of being able to throw any light upon it. But it is useless to shut our eyes to the tendencies of the changes which are constantly going on before them, and there can be no harm in thinking or speculating with reference to what the end is likely to be. Perhaps the most obvious fact in connection with the democratic movement, apart from its socialistic aspects, is that it is a continual procession from one intermediate goal to another, without any ultimate resting-place in view. If it has a ruling general principle, it is that of death to privilege in every form and the concentration of all rule in the people, in such manner that everyone shall count one, without distinction of position or sex. But there is little evidence that the masses, or even those who are their leaders and mouth-pieces for the time being, look so far ahead as that, or have their eyes fixed on anything beyond the immediate change or "reform" which is for the moment uppermost in their minds. Possibly this is, in such a matter, a source of strength rather than of weakness. Too comprehensive or far-seeing a habit sometimes puzzles the will, and hinders the purpose from taking the name of action.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS.

The subject of religious instruction in the schools, to which an article in these columns was recently devoted, is confessedly difficult, and as confessedly persistent; it will not down, and the existence of our public schools, in efficiency at least, must depend upon some definite settlement of the question whether we will it or not, for the religious element in man's nature forms so essential a part thereof that any system of education which ignores it cannot stand. You may throw nature out with a fork, as Horace wrote nearly two thousand years since, but constantly will she return. A non-religious society is a monstrosity, so the establishment of a non-religious school is a violation of the very instincts of humanity. We may go further and say that the very object for which public schools are instituted