

## Democracy a Failure.

BY E. K. MARSHALL, M.A.

I have just been looking over a mass of government reports, commissions, and so on, which have been piling up in my study at an alarming rate during the last six years. I have not decided yet whether to burn them, or whether to keep them for future reference when I may need concrete evidence of the amount of red tape necessary, apparently, for us to do anything or find out anything in this land of ours.

Some of these reports are huge affairs, others are more modest. The "Report of the Royal Commission—Sir Charles Davidson"—consists of three volumes, totalling some 2,740 pages. One of the smaller ones, which I dug out of my collection, has 117 pages. And they all cost a lot of money to produce.

At the time the reports were made we were shocked at the profits that were being made. For example, needles bought for 25 cents a dozen and sold to the Department at 50 cents. But since then there has been such an orgy of profit-making that the findings of these earlier days seem tame compared with what we read about to-day. But, of course, men have been learning things since 1914.

I must confess that as I looked through report after report my heart became sad. Such ugly facts standing out as clear as day, of self-seeking and utter abandon, and this going on whilst we were in the midst of the most terrific struggle for national existence ever faced since the time of the Seven Years' War. It would appear as if our public officials would have to guard the public treasury with rifles in their hands in order to protect it from our own citizens. Many of us are forgetting these things, with the damaging deductions one must draw as to the public character of some of our public officials who held high office in those days, with the evidence of the greed of business men, who must have known they were stealing, and with the strange blindness of the general public, that is ourselves. And many of these men to-day are smiling serenely, waiting for us to forget these things. And as we are doubtless forgetting them, I ask myself: "Is Democracy a Failure?"

If the people are not more alert and thoughtful and do not insist on a permanent and radical change in political and commercial life and feel the need for it themselves, then

The dust on antique time will be unswept, And mountainous error be too highly heap'd

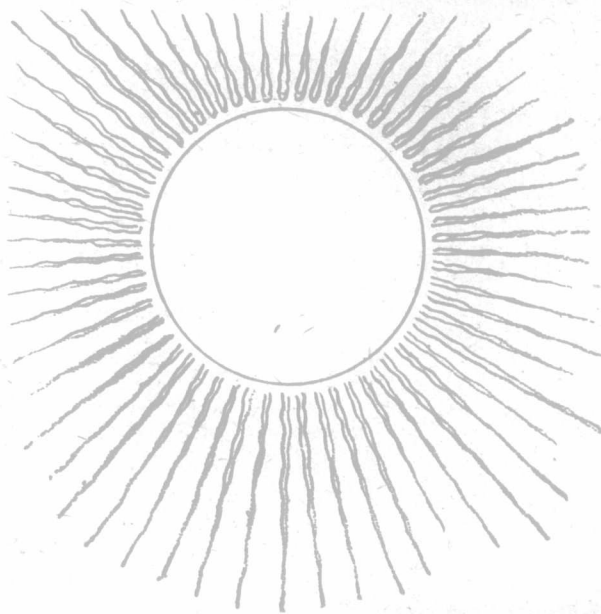
For truth to e'er-appear.

One time the average citizen shouts that "the mob is stupid; cannot decide important issues; do not use their reason; are only things of passion and prejudice;" but when his particular party gets in power, the same man is apt to shout: "Vox populi vox dei." Can we in the face of this sophistry and this appeal to passion, trust the common people? Can we in view of the gross abuses and equally gross carelessness of the past few years still say that Democracy is not a failure?

To be honest about it, Democracy is clearly only an experiment in achieving a higher type of civilization. It has not yet been tried in a thorough-going and consistent fashion, but always under some fettering constitutional or traditional reservation. Growing out of the past, it inevitably takes along with the good some of the bad and unfitted. Then, most of us are not even half-educated in its fundamental meaning. The really "free" people are those "fit to be free," and fitness can only be achieved under long and arduous discipline in the circumstances of being free. It follows of necessity, then, that there must be a certain amount of blundering, groping for the light and much misadventure.

There is this one can say about Democracy: with all its evils and perils, its opportunities for the unworthy to seize the reins of power, it is safer and wiser than any other alternative ever tried or suggested. A restricted ruling class has always in the end proved selfish and oppressive. The governed class invariably got the worst of it—socially, industrially and morally. No blunder of Democracy is in the same class with the astounding blunder made by the Prussian oligarchy

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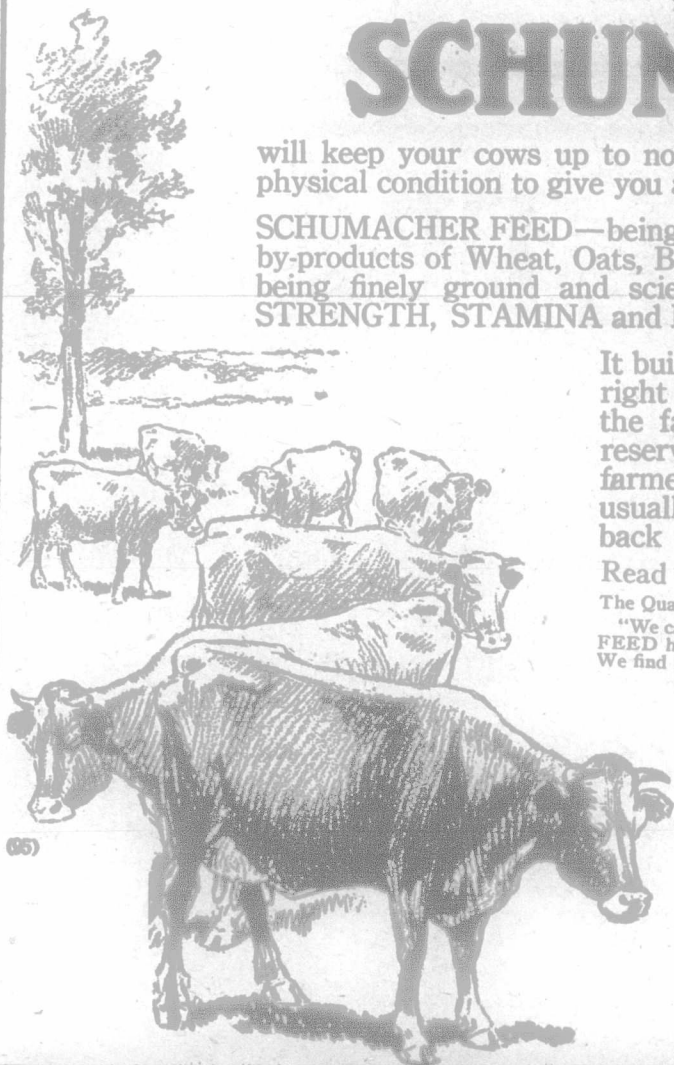
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