

The Aristocracy of Democracy

By F. W. MOORE.

THE word "aristocracy," as most people know, is derived from two Greek roots—*aristos*, the best, and *kratos*, power. The term "democracy" differs from this inasmuch as the first part of the word comes from *demos*, the people.

We may take it for granted that government by an aristocracy means, and has meant for the period of almost six thousand years which we will now discuss, a government by those people who are best calculated to be willing to contribute to an effort to bring about an endless duration to the current organization of society—an organization, that at least financially, has been developed compatibly with their own interests.

We venture to say that this ideal of a governing body could only obtain in a metaphorical society of the blind, where the one-eyed were appointed kings; but, where it does prevail, and it prevails almost universally, it is responsible for much hardship, since an attempt to prolong the life of any organization in whose constitution there have developed signs of decrepitude, must, in the long run prove a sure means of hastening its death.

It is only when the current organizations become sufficiently plastic to enable them to undergo a kaleidoscopic transformation compatible with the ever-changing needs of society that we shall know that the moulding of them is in the hands of such an enlightened democracy.

Such a democracy could give free rein to that industrial evolution that operates in the interests of society whenever society allows it to do so; but, it stands to reason that a misinformed society, drunk with the metaphorical wine of propaganda, must get rid of its delusions before it can be sufficiently sane to grant its permission.

In order to show why society has not allowed it to do so for scores of centuries we shall take a glance down the long vista of the ages where we shall behold countless generations of thoughtless men under the leadership of those who ought to have known better, masked in the tinselled costumes of warrior moths, and brainlessly flying century after century into the destructive flames of greed and glory. Such, indeed, were the activities of the Mesopotamian peoples, who for forty centuries B.C. were wont to deluge the land with one another's blood. In reference to this Mr. Wells, in his "Outline of History" at page 141, has the following to say: "After four thousand years the warriors and conquerors were still going to and fro over this growing thing that they did not understand."—(Civilization.)

If we analyze the rule of the "best," as it materialized during those four thousand years, we shall find that participation in acts of bloodshed, rapine and plunder was the characteristic function of the bandit war-lords of those days, even as it is of the hireling variety of to-day. Thus they spent their time century after century promoting mental stagnation, undoing what had been done, and doing many things that should never have been done in their successful attempts to take from other people wealth, the equivalent of which they could have produced themselves with less energy than was expended on their campaigns; and so they kept the world poor, and prevented the race taking the next step in a higher development.

At the end of each campaign, if we judge by the campaigns of the last few centuries, the aristocrats had wealth, the plebian had the poverty, the distress, and the burden of grief and bereavement for which the only emollient known to man was "that one touch of nature that made the whole world kin."

Thus was the apparently eternal tragedy enacted in many countries. During the latter part of the period, when the inhabitants of Mesopotamia were playing such havoc with each other, the Romans had successfully emerged from the long night of comparative freedom known as savagery. The old tribal organizations were still in vogue when the city was founded in 753 B.C., and for a couple of hundred years, approximately, the affairs of men were regulated in accordance with the ideals of two divergent systems; in one case the individual as a member of a tribe owed loyalty to a chief; in the other as a citizen in possession of certain lands he naturally came under the jurisdiction of the magistrate, so that for a couple of centuries at least we see a tribal, overlapping an embryo political system. (See the chapter on the subject in "Morgan's Ancient Society") and as the tribal system gave way it could not fail to leave a deep impression on the newer organization. Its democratic chiefs who could be deposed, under certain conditions, by the will of the people, now took on the character of kings—a character in which for a long time they retained their reputation for democracy, and to this fact we may attribute the following statement on page 432 in Osborne Ward's "Ancient Lowly." He is referring to the long political struggle between the plebs and the consuls—the two officers who were installed in the republic instead of the old-time kings after the overthrow of the monarchy in 510 B.C.

"It had been the kings that upheld the labor unions. The consuls from the very first had endeavored to suppress them. These magnates were the natural enemies of the working class; the kings their natural friends."

We might add that he probably refers to the Latin kings. "At first there were Latin kings in Rome, then it would seem the city fell into the hands of the Etruscan rulers, whose tyrannous conduct led at last to their expulsion, and Rome became a Latin-speaking republic." "Outline of History," page 383.

Not only did it become a republic, but it developed in short order all the usual vices and shortcomings of a republic. Its achievements in the way of chicanery were amazing. "The Roman voters, at the time to which we refer, were organized to an extent that makes the Tammany machine of New York seem artless and honest." They were organized in clubs, "and the rising politician working his way to office went first to the usurers and then with the borrowed money to these clubs. If the outside voters were moved enough by any question to swarm into the city, it was always possible to put off the voting by declaring the omens unfavorable. If they came in unarmed they could be intimidated; if they brought in arms, then the cry was raised that there was a plot to overthrow the republic, and a massacre would be organized. . . . The senate and the rich equestrians were vulgar and greedy spirits hostile and contemptuous towards the poor mob, and the populace was ignorant, unstaple, and at least greedy. . . . they do but demonstrate how clever and cunning men may be, how subtle in contention, how brilliant in pretence, and how utterly wanting in wisdom and grace of spirit. 'A shambling, hairy brutish, but probably very cunning creature with a big brain behind; so someone described Homo Neanderthalensis.'"

"To this day we must use similar terms to describe the soul of the politician. The statesman has still to oust the politician from his lairs and weapon heaps. History has still to become a record of human dignity."—Wells' Outline of History, pages 426 and 427.

That was government by the Roman aristocracy. Would not government by the Roman-anthropoid be a more appropriate expression? Can we wonder that so monstrous a political abortion had within it the seeds of self destruction? "Under such condi-

tions," says Wells in his Outline on page 447, "there was no choice between chaos and a return to royalty, to the acceptance of some chosen individual as the one unifying will in the state;" and thus, beginning about 27 B.C. and for eighteen centuries thereafter the accepted rulers of the world, of whom so much was expected, were, according to the light thrown on their character by history, on the whole of an ornamental rather than of a useful type. Was it any wonder then that men in the eighteenth century after Christ grew tired of the imperfections of royal government, and once more commenced a series of experiments, the continuation of which, economic conditions will obviously demand of future decades—experiments of which the first were improved reconstructions of the ancient republic. They were born equal. Notwithstanding this, it is said that their supreme and other high courts of justice are so superior to the circumstances that gave them birth, that they keep in stock, in their metaphorical warehouses graded brands of pseudo-justice which they dispense to suit the exigencies of particular cases. There is, for instance, a special concoction to be administered in cases of emergency to each of the following classes: labour unions, manufacturers associations, wealthy men, paupers, common or garden assassins and thrill-killers.

It is, however, not to be understood that because of this result of republican genius we are disposed to blame that portion of the world that has not yet thrown off its monarchical swaddling clothes for cultivating its aesthetic taste; but we do find fault with it for filling the annals of European activities with biographies of these people, worthy though some of them have been, and then presenting the results to our schools and colleges as histories of the several nations. Nothing could be more conducive to ignorance as to the meaning of history than this, since the real regulator of the actions of men is embodied in the economic necessity to do, in the main, what is profitable.

It is to the economic and industrial experience of the past that we must turn for guidance if we would consciously aid in the development of better conditions in the future.

Our salvation lies not in the abstruse knowledge of our would-be advisors, but in the sound common sense of the average man—a common sense founded on a knowledge of the economic foundations of society. When the average man understands the meaning of that he will also know the cause and cure of nearly all his troubles, including that of war. He will know how to organize a government sufficiently plastic to enable it to undergo a kaleidoscopic transformation compatible with the ever-changing needs of society.

Nobody can deny that nations of such men would be the very best specimens of the race to direct the affairs of humanity; and being the very best the appropriate nature of the term aristocracy in describing them will be recognized. They would also be "the people," and therefore a democracy; or in other words they would be the aristocracy of democracy. Quod erat demonstrandum.

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