

It must all be very simple, because, theoretically, it is all such work as the humblest voter could, if necessary, either perform or direct. In the United States the theory is now freely advanced that the President does not need to be a man of any special ability; if he only does what the people tell him he will be clever enough. In this country I imagine that the only ability that is distinctly recognized as necessary is the ability to outwit opponents in the political field.

We seem here to be face to face with a paradox. On the one hand government is committed to the people; and it is so far assumed that they are capable of performing the political duties thus devolved on them. On the other hand it is a matter of certainty that the majority of the voters are not very good judges either of the larger questions of politics, or of the details of administration. They are very mediocre judges of what constitutes their own interest in many matters. A nation may want to hold silver in unlimited quantities at par with gold in some arbitrarily chosen ratio; but it does not follow from their wanting it that the thing is feasible, or that the bare attempt to carry it into effect would not be fraught with disaster. A nation may want a high tariff, or government ownership of railways and telegraphs, or a system of old age pensions, or compulsory arbitration, or an elective judiciary, or a strict prohibitory liquor law; or it may hanker after a foreign war, or experience a sudden yearning for a vigorous policy of colonial expansion; but it would be fatuous to imagine that any one of these measures would be secure from failure because it had been demanded by a popular majority. Mr. Frederic Harrison says that "Very plain men know who wish them well, and the sort of thing that will bring them good." To the first half of this statement I am ready to give a general assent; but in regard to the latter half I am far from certain. All depends upon the complexity of the question under consideration, and many of the questions of politics are most complex.

What, then, is the solution of the paradox? The solution seems to me to lie here: the suffrage is not a privilege, but a trust, and universal suffrage does not signify that all men are equally and fully capable of grappling with political questions of whatever order, but that all have an interest in the wise decision of such questions. The art of government is not any men's trade or mystery; it presents an inexhaustible problem in the solution of which we may all co-operate. The fact that a certain section of society may cast a majority of votes does not confer upon them any special competence in dealing with political issues. It may give them power, but as Horace says:

*"Vis consili expers mole ruit sua."*

It is too narrow a view to take of the suffrage to regard it merely as a means of protection for each member of the community. Without questioning the maxim that taxation without representation is tyranny, we cannot consider it as summing up the whole philosophy of the suffrage. The late Mr. Lowe (Lord Sherbrooke) talked most mischievously when he insisted, as he did, upon the necessity of "educating our