

The general utility of the commons, as a means of raising money, kept them in existence until, by 1399, they had claimed and exercised, but by no means secured, all the powers which we understand by the liberties of the nation. But the kings were always restive and had devised means by which laws could be evaded and money raised without applying to their faithful commons. At this juncture, too, the leadership of the nation passed away from the baronage. The power of the barons was destroyed by the War of the Roses. At the same time the force of the mediæval church was exhausted. The elements of a new national life were as yet in the germ. The only force left, around which the national consciousness could find a rallying point, was the power of the crown. Fortunately for the steady growth of the nation, the Tudor despots preserved the forms of liberty, and preferred to throw the form of legality over their arbitrary proceedings. But the union of temporal and spiritual supremacy in one hand was a critical moment: a moment which was prolonged by threatened danger from without. With the overthrow of Spanish power by the defeat of the Armada and the rise of Holland, England awoke as it were from a dreadful nightmare and found that her sleep, disturbed though it had been, had given her a giant's strength. The Stuarts atoned for the sins of the Tudors.

The leadership of the nation passed into the hands of the commons. The Reformation had made of England a new nation. The nobility, the natural leaders of the nation, from whose feeble grasp the sceptre was falling, was attached to the cause of Reform by the gift of church lands. Henceforth the struggle for political freedom was combined with that for religious freedom. Puritanism led the forces in the strife: was for a time victorious, and then failed—necessarily failed, just as the Hildebrandine theory had failed—as a political force. But henceforward Puritanism formed the basis of all that is best in the British character: a living influence moulding social and political life.

Justice and humanity are the marks of the modern democracy, at least of the Anglo-Saxon type. It has other more questionable marks, lest we should boast ourselves of perfection.