

**PARLIAMENTARY
GOVERNMENT CONSIDERED
WITH REFERENCE TO A REFORM
OF PARLIAMENT; AN ESSAY**

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Parliamentary government considered with reference to a reform of Parliament; an essay by Earl Grey

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EARL GREY

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CONSIDERED WITH REFERENCE TO

A REFORM OF PARLIAMENT.

An Essay.

BY

EARL GREY.

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PREFACE.



THE following Essay was begun, and great part of it written, a considerable time ago, and without any view to its publication. I have determined to finish and to publish it, because there seems to be no doubt that the subject to which it relates is about to occupy the serious attention of Parliament and of the Country. Her Majesty's Speech from the Throne, on the 3rd of December, has given ground for expecting that some measure of Parliamentary Reform will be proposed by the Government in the Session of 1858.

Though I entertain no doubt that a further Reform of Parliament is needed, I regret that it is to be attempted immediately, and, as I believe, prematurely. Upon considering the various schemes for the improvement of the Representation of the People which

have been proposed, and the manner in which the Reform Bills laid upon the table of the House of Commons by Lord John Russell, in the years 1852 and 1854, were received, I am led to the conclusion that no partial measure is likely to be carried, or, if carried, to prove beneficial to the Nation. Assuming that the existing constitution of the House of Commons cannot remain unaltered, I am persuaded that the best and safest course will be to attempt a complete revision of our Representative System, rather than the introduction of minor changes founded upon no fixed principle, and arbitrary in their character and extent. But the Country is not at present prepared for so large a measure as would be found necessary if a complete revision of our Representation were determined upon; nor could any Ministry now hope to carry such a plan, even if it were able to prepare one, without further inquiry. More discussion out-of-doors is wanted, before this most difficult subject can be considered ripe for being dealt with by Parliament.

The principles and practical working of the Constitution, as it stands, require to be carefully studied, and its real defects to be ascertained, in order that the

objects to which measures of reform should be directed may be determined, and a sound judgment formed as to the means of effecting them.

These pages are intended as a contribution to that preliminary inquiry, which I believe to be necessary before any plan of Parliamentary Reform can be either drawn up, or considered with advantage. But in expressing my opinion that further inquiry and discussion ought to precede an attempt to legislate upon a subject of such vital interest, I must guard myself against being supposed to make this suggestion with any view of getting rid of a troublesome question for an indefinite time. Far from entertaining such a feeling, while I deprecate precipitation in dealing with this subject, I consider it to be one of which as prompt a settlement as is consistent with due deliberation is indispensable for the welfare, if not for the safety, of the Nation. I recognize the necessity, and even the urgent necessity, of amending our Constitution; but I hold that it would be most unwise to risk its destruction by haste and rashness in attempting to improve it, since, with all its faults, it has been the means of securing to this Country a larger measure of true freedom, and of good go-

vernment, than any other nation upon earth has enjoyed.

I have only to add, that I greatly regret having been compelled, in the course of my argument, to express in strong terms my unfavourable opinion of the Government of the United States of America; and I am anxious to explain, that this opinion applies to the Government only, and not to the People of those States. For that People I feel very sincere goodwill and high admiration, though I am not blind to the fact that, like every other Nation, they have their own peculiar faults.

December, 1857.

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND RESULTS OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT.

Subject of this Essay.—Nature of Parliamentary Government.—It virtually unites the Executive and Legislative Powers.—But subject to limitations.—How this system of Government differs from the ancient Government of England.—The last was suited to the state of Society at the time.—The present system has grown gradually out of it.—This has worked well on the whole.—Evidence of its having done so in the prosperity and progress of the Nation.—And in its moral improvement.—Parliamentary Government is peculiar to this Country.—No other instance of its having continued long in successful operation Page 1

CHAPTER II.

ADVANTAGES OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT.

Parliamentary Government provides for the harmonious action of the different Powers of the State.—Advantage of this.—Especially in Financial arrangements.—Representative Assemblies, where there is no individual responsibility, prone to error in questions of Money.—Experience of the United States and British Colonies.—Ministerial responsibility has a corrective tendency.—Useful also in

general Legislation.—Parliament controls the Executive Government without directly interfering with it.—Brings Opinion to bear on foreign Policy.—Contests for power rendered less injurious by Parliamentary Government.—Evils arising from these contests in despotisms.—In pure democracy.—Under Parliamentary Government contests for Power still contests for the favour of the People.—But their effects not the same as when rulers are directly elected.—Parliamentary Government provides a safe mode of transferring power to new hands.—Such transfers necessary.—Murder of the Emperor Paul.—Revolution averted by the fall of Walpole.—Conferring power for a limited term does not answer equally well.—Presidents of the United States have sometimes lost the confidence of the People.—Evils also from Presidential elections.—From President's want of authority towards the close of his term of office.—Parliamentary Government not subject to these inconveniences.—Favourable to the selection of fit men to govern the Nation.—Higher qualities necessary to obtain the post of a Parliamentary leader than to become the Minister of a despotism.—Or the President of a Republic.—Parliamentary debates help to raise the standard of political morality.—And to enlighten the Nation . . . Page 16

CHAPTER III.

EVILS AND DANGERS OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT.

Tendency of Parliamentary Government to encourage corruption.—Comparison with other free Governments.—Bribery of Members of Parliament.—Formerly common.—Gradually discontinued.—Systematic corruption not thereby got rid of.—Diminished by Reform of Parliament.—But favour still an instrument of Government.—How brought to bear on the House of Commons.—All Administrations have partly depended on corrupt influence.—But none entirely.—On great occasions it loses its power.—Spirit of faction excited by distribution of patronage to party in power.—Difficulty of bringing fittest men to act together as Ministers under Parliamentary Government.—Suggestions that Ministers should be separately responsible.—No real need for this.—It would be inconsistent with the system of Government by Party.—Parliamentary Government leads to good measures being opposed and bad ones