

**THE ENGLISH
DEMOCRACY; ITS
PROMISES AND PERILS**

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The English democracy; its promises and perils by Arnold White

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ARNOLD WHITE

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THE ENGLISH DEMOCRACY

ITS PROMISES AND PERILS

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Lincoln Hall.

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ITS PROMISES AND PERILS

BY

ARNOLD WHITE

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PREFACE

POLITICAL power in the United Kingdom belongs to that portion of the population which contributes less than one-fourth of the total Imperial and local revenues, while the remainder contribute over three-fourths of the revenue, supply eleven-twelfths of the men who govern the Empire, and draw ninety-nine per cent. of the prizes of public life. Virtually a Republic with an hereditary President, Great Britain lacks a written Constitution embodying the fundamental principles of liberty, life, and ownership. The only existing safe-guard against despotism—other than the racial common sense of the English people—is a fragment of feudalism that has floated down from the Middle Ages to the edge of the Twentieth Century, in the shape of an hereditary House, invested with legal power to oppose the will of an omnipotent, but never unanimous, proletariat.

English democracy, having made goods and machinery for foreign nations during fifty years, acceded to power in time to discover that former customers have become its strongest rivals; that in the lifetime of one man the mouths to be fed in Great Britain have increased from under eleven to nearly thirty-five millions; that the Free Trade arranged in the interests of Capital that is polyglot, mobile, and cosmopolitan, is not necessarily to the

advantage of labourers chained to the spot by language, family, and circumstance. Politically omnipotent, the poorer classes in this country are directly responsible abroad for two hundred and ninety million inhabitants of a distant Empire: a burden never borne by Imperial Rome in her prime, or by Russia to-day; while at home democracy is horror-stricken by the spectre of want sitting permanently at the doorstep of innumerable homes.

While the avenues of subsistence are closing in every direction; with the soil of the Colonial Empire, won by British blood and treasure, shut to the British proletariat; our rulers are intent on achieving constitutional change in the shape of an incongruous system of lunar legislatures, that shall revolve without collision round the central planet of an Imperial Parliament. Although these changes are neither sought by the masses, nor calculated to feed the hungry or clothe the naked, the renewal of civil war is brought by them within the range of practical politics. Already on the edge of a precipice, statesmen continue to discuss without a smile new methods of voting, representation, and rating, as though there were virtue in such simples. All things are in the crucible. Opinions and principles, held by our fathers as settled forever, have lost all weight in losing the sanction of morality or religion. The decay of faith has raised physical comfort to the godhead, and while destroying the motive for resignation in trouble, has replaced belief in religion and duty, by an abiding sense of injustice against those who enjoy the good things of this life, and have leisure and imagination to cultivate the impression that beyond the grave their special destiny is to inherit eternal joy.

The Church of England, torn with intestine strife, like other owners of property, is the object of ungovernable greed, and the secular spirit of an ideal acknowledging neither God nor master, is ceasing to hold in reverence a priesthood it no longer dreads. Neither reward nor punishment beyond the grave retains its ancient power to deter men from evil, and to impel them towards good citizenship.

A new social morality has accompanied the introduction of a new political economy. The socialism of Christ, which consisted in sharing with others, is replaced by attempts to legalise spoliation; and moral sanction is claimed for these efforts by spiritual leaders who, having lost control over the masses in the domain of theology, seek to recover influence over them in the dust and passion of party politics.

Such are some of the conflicting currents through which English democracy is passing. Racial common sense; the lives and examples of men who still prefer character to notoriety; the increasing influence of good women; the infusion of Jewish mind and thrift; and the gradual recovery of reasoned conviction that the main lessons of our English Bible are true, and cannot be ignored with impunity by men or nations, are among the more hopeful elements in the prospect now opening before us.

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ENGLISH DEMOCRACY.

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CHAPTER I.

LOOKING BACK.

13/8/84

THE inhumanity of man to man, and the selfishness of the governing classes, are no new incidents in the history of our country. When the King governed, Englishmen were subjected to a series of oppressive and grinding exactions, from which relief was obtained only by first reducing and then destroying the kingly power. Nor was the transfer of authority from the Crown to the men of family who controlled the destinies of this country for the period between the Revolution and the first Reform Bill, marked by any increase in the altruism previously displayed by the ruling caste. The present generation has half forgotten the history of the Corn Laws, and