

THE PEOPLE'S LAW

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The People's Law by William Jennings Bryan

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WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

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By

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

"The People's Law" is an address by Mr. Bryan that was delivered by invitation before the Constitutional Convention at Columbus, Ohio, on March 12, 1912.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION: I am sensible of the great honor you do me in inviting me to address you. You are entrusted with a work of great importance, the preparation of a constitution which may without impropriety be termed "The People's Law." Other matters they give into the hands of representatives chosen to legislate on general subjects and they permit the representatives to act according to their judgment, but in the case of a constitution they select agents for a particular purpose—agents chosen with more than usual

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care—agents in whom they repose the highest confidence—and then, so delicate is the task and so binding is the instrument prepared, that they insist upon its submission to the sovereign voters for ratification before it is invested with the sanctity of the law. I know not how to manifest my appreciation of the privilege that you extend to me of advising in this capacity, except to submit for your consideration some suggestions which may be helpful to you in the discharge of the solemn duty imposed upon you by the people of the State of Ohio.

CONSTITUTIONS

The preparation of the constitution of a great State is a serious undertaking and those who are engaged in it bear a grave responsibility. The burden has been lightened as, with

CONSTITUTIONS

the advance of years, it has been made easier to amend constitutions. The written constitution has become an American institution, and its hold upon the people is not likely to be shaken; its claim to confidence is jeopardized, however, when one generation attempts to fetter the freedom of succeeding generations by provisions that prevent a majority from amending their constitution.

Our Federal Constitution illustrates the limit to which a constitution may go in restraining the public will and in compelling a majority to submit to the rule of the minority. To amend the Federal Constitution a resolution must pass both Houses of Congress by a two-thirds vote, and the amendment submitted must then be ratified by three-fourths of the States.