

ELEMENTARY POLITICS

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Elementary Politics by Thomas Raleigh

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THOMAS RALEIGH

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POLITICS**

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BY

THOMAS RALEIGH

FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD

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PREFACE.

It has been truly said that if men would only define the terms which they use in argument, most controversies would end before they begin.

In the following pages I have attempted to define the terms which are commonly used in political argument. These terms are derived from history, from morals, from economic science, and from law. Some elementary knowledge of these sciences is necessary to the practical politician, just as an elementary knowledge of physical science is necessary to the mariner.

This book is not meant to be a compendium of information—nor is it meant to be a summary of orthodox political doctrine. My object is not to satisfy but to stimulate inquiry; not to form my reader's opinions, but to induce him to form opinions of his own.

Oxford, 1886.

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

In preparing this edition, I have corrected and supplemented some passages which were not sufficiently clear; and at the close of each chapter I have added references to those political and historical works which are most likely to be accessible and useful to the English reader.

Oxford, March, 1889.

PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION.

In this edition I have modified a few statements which now seem to me defective or erroneous, and I have added some supplementary paragraphs.

Oxford, June, 1905.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY.

THE first question we have to ask about society is the question how it was originally formed. Why do men live together in communities, and when did they first begin to do so?

Man is a very gregarious animal. He is easily affected by sympathy and the desire for sympathy. He prefers company to solitude. He admires and imitates others, and he likes to be admired and imitated.

Even if these social impulses were weaker than they are, man would be compelled by necessity to live a social life. No creature is more helpless, or less able to make a living, than a solitary man.

Seeing that society exists by nature and necessity, we are prepared to find that it has existed since men made their first appearance on this planet. Such is, in fact, the testimony of history. Here and there an individual or a family has subsisted apart from the rest of the human race. But the general rule is that men live, and always have lived, in social groups.

Theory of a Social Contract.

The foregoing account of society is directly at variance with a theory which has played a considerable part in European and American politics. In

the 17th and 18th centuries, speculation on political subjects took a free course, and the teaching of history was not sufficiently regarded. Instead of piecing together such evidence as we have of the state of primitive man, ingenious writers sat down and proved, much to their own satisfaction, that society might or must have originated in a particular way. The chief result of their meditations was the theory of a Social Contract, which may be briefly stated thus :—

‘In the beginning, men lived in solitude or in small family groups. Man was by nature good ; his wants were few and easily supplied ; he needed no government and feared no oppression. In course of time, men began to form larger groups. They then entered into a contract, whereby each was to receive the protection of all, and was in return to submit himself to the general will in matters of general importance. As soon as this contract was formed, selfish men began to take advantage of it to engross wealth and power to themselves. They also invented false doctrines in religion and politics to justify their encroachments. Such was the origin of luxury, poverty, kingcraft, priestcraft, and all the evils which afflict civilised humanity. And these abuses will never be redressed until we return to nature and restore to man the rights he possessed before society was formed.’

This theory looks very attractive, when it is set forth by a master of style like Rousseau ; but it is contradicted at every point by facts. Man is not naturally good, any more than he is totally depraved. He is a being of mixed impulses, who requires discipline and education to make him definitely good. The supposed

golden age, when men lived in peace and plenty, is a mere fiction,—the early history of mankind is a record of conflict and hardship. As for the Social Contract, there is not a scrap of evidence to show that any such transaction ever took place. Indeed, we know that it cannot have taken place as alleged; for the very notion of a binding agreement is strange to the mind of primitive man.

In spite of its unhistorical character, this theory has been widely received, especially among liberal politicians. People of a reforming turn of mind are pleased to be told that the abuses of which they complain are due to unjust laws, and that these laws are based on a mere convention which may be altered or annulled. Believers in popular government like to derive the authority of States from a compact to which all subjects were once parties; although, in point of fact, no government was ever founded on the free consent of all the people governed.

There is also something attractive in the use which this theory makes of the word 'nature.' Many men have regarded nature as a sort of deity, a 'power not ourselves which makes for righteousness'; an abstraction which makes no great demand on our faith, and yet a reality which we may reverence and obey. Transfer to 'Nature' the qualities of justice and goodness which belonged to God, and you have the creed of eighteenth-century liberalism. In like manner, 'human nature' is often appealed to, as if it were a high authority on moral and social questions.

It is well to remember that these phrases are not exact enough for careful reasoners. Strictly speaking,

nature is only the aggregate of existing things and forces, some of which make for righteousness, and others not. Human nature is not the nature of men as they ought to be, but of men as they are; the term is wide enough to include all the impulses, good and bad, which make up the character of human beings in the mass.

The Social Contract theory is examined in Maine's *Ancient Law*, especially chap. ix, and in J. Morley's *Rousseau*. Many modern writers discuss the origin of society in terms of the doctrine of evolution; see, for example, Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. Herbert Spencer, in his *Principles of Sociology* and other works, treats society as an organism, of which individuals are the parts. In applying the idea of evolution to society, it is well to observe that there is a point in the development of man at which he becomes a self-conscious being, capable of summing up his own experience and of forming ideals which determine the course of his future evolution. When the individual members of society reach this point, society itself becomes consciously progressive.