

**THE
COMMONWEALTH
RECONSTRUCTED**

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The Commonwealth reconstructed by Charles C. P. Clark

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CHARLES C. P. CLARK

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BY

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CHARLES C. P. CLARK, M. D.



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P R E F A C E .

MANY readers, I am well aware, will claim that the account of the present state of our politics that is contained in the following pages is partial and overdrawn. I shall admit the justice of the criticism, but only in the sense that the redeeming features of the situation are not equally presented with the condemnatory. But to do that did not belong to the purpose that I had in view in that description, which was to show that the condition of our political affairs is too shameful and calamitous to be willingly submitted to by an intelligent and virtuous people. In doing this no exaggeration has been practiced; and none was necessary.

The justice of my representation will be the more readily disputed because there seems, just now, to be a lull in the storm of our political afflictions, which sanguine and superficial observers readily take for a lasting change in the weather. But, while I am ready to believe that the public business is more honestly conducted to-day in the majority of our capitols and city halls than it was in 1870, I can see no ground for expecting that the amelioration will be permanent. Particular enormities may never be repeated, but the species is the native and inevitable product of our present political system, and will multiply in number and variety till the defects of that system are corrected. Moreover, no improvement whatever appears in the competency of the men who are put in charge of the public interests.

Nevertheless, the topic in the ensuing discussion where I have most failed to satisfy myself is this very matter of setting forth the existing state of public affairs. The sketch is not only scanty, but broken, unskilful and most incomplete. But I console myself with the reflection that, as no painter was ever yet able to spread upon the canvas the common brute landscape in all its variety of motion, form and color, so must literary art forever fail perfectly to portray the complex, ever changing and innumerable phenomena of political society. I comfort myself also with this, that intelligent readers will easily be able, by recollection and the conclusions of reasonable analogy, to fill out the picture.

OSWEGO, N. Y., *August 28, 1877.*

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

POLITICAL institutions are not the first necessity of mankind, nor the chief. Personal wants are earlier and more pressing than any that belong to the neighborhood. Compared with clothing, food and fire, roads, laws and punishments are an after-thought, and a convenience merely. So the sexual and family instincts, which draw after them so many activities, long antedate the demands of politics. But, while thus a secondary matter to the individual, civil government is the very cradle and anchorage of society, and alone makes possible the concord and coöperation that are essential to the progress of the species. Its importance increases with time. Of few and narrow offices at first, it has constantly augmented their number and scope, encroaching more and more upon individual autonomy, and more and more affecting the general welfare. When its operations extend, as they do now in this country, from the repair of a neighborhood highway to the building of a railroad across the continent, and from the education of childhood to the bloody conscription of war, its influence on human happiness outstrips hyperbole.

Compared with the philosophy of politics, therefore, all other philosophies—the analysis of mind or the classification of matter, the problems of religion or of morals, the weighing of atoms or of planets, chemistry, mechanics, æsthetics, history, or whatever other inquiry has ever occupied the attention of men—is of but mean account. To study on these while that remains