

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

OF late there has been a tendency to speak of the "processes of democracy." We venture to give the reason for this. Is it not probably the result of a consciousness that simple "democracy" has been enlarged into a connotation it did not originally bear? Somehow the word as dwelt upon in history books and in popular imagination has extended beyond *demos-kratos*—rule of the people—the original Greek form. Upon democracy, as thus defined, has become engrafted a concept of perfection of human ideals, whereas this supplementary feature is gratuitous. To be sure, fallibility is conceded to be a characteristic of our several selves, yet by and large we have been disposed to believe that we might be objectively democratized into the social embodiment of all that is good. In a heretofore relatively carefree world, democracy has been as carefreely supposed to be the sum and substance of eternal truths.

DEMOS-KRATOS—rule of the people—has within it all the potentialities of either despotic or beneficent government. Indeed, reflection tells us it is not so much the laws of government that make a people good, bad or indifferent, but these latter that make a government good, bad or indifferent. The kind of rule a people get, generally speaking, is what they deserve, if not what they desire; which is another way of saying that a government's qualities must be predicated on the degree of intelligence and morality of its constituents. Yet, as with so many other phenomena of political discussion, their proper sequence is frequently lost sight of through the habit of reversing cause and effect, and of ascribing substance to form. In short, democracy, by a process of wishful thinking, became thought of as the end in itself rather than as an instrument to project the true end of freedom and justice.

QUITE salutary, then, is the current mode of referring to the "processes" of democracy. This very redundancy of expression may clarify the term to the man on the street so that it may come to be understood as a functional, human endeavor rather than the final incarnation of all the virtues. Seen in such light, is it not an inaccuracy to say that "democracy has never been tried?" Does not this venerable overstatement contain the naive assertion that Utopia has not yet dawned? Democracy is by definition a subject of constant trial—and error. And to err is human.

BUT whether democracy be an organic process or an established code of ultimate, immutable principles, it has

always stood in favor with the masses as an institution peculiarly considerate of their happiness. That this fact of necessity must result in certain leveling tendencies cannot be denied. Historically, however, the idea of "leveling" is not in good repute. It has become necessary to compose the differences, so to speak, by placing emphasis on the idea of *equity* rather than *equality*, the former being more easily identified with *justice*. (The French Revolution did make something of a mockery of equality!) It is probably through such *modus operandi* that our distinctions of privilege have been rationalized and found not unacceptable. Yet a day may come, sooner than we expect, when democracy will exercise a different judgment in such matters. Events do have a way of happening so as to bring about a change for the better or the worse.

WARS, for instance, are not always unmixed evils. The present conflict in particular gives signs of a leveling *up* for some people, especially in India. In our own country we are witnessing leveling processes, as evidenced by military conscription, rationing, and other measures. In all these things we can discern the will—the rule—of the people. Nor should set-backs like the defeat of the anti-poll tax bill discourage us. The surprising thing is not its defeat, which we believe is only temporary, but the length of time during which America evaded the issue. We are, of course, indebted to the war for pushing this bill before the Congress, just as it has also brought immigration and other leveling issues for legislative attention. For example, we now recognize the value to us of a neighboring country's manpower. By inviting Mexican workers to harvest our crops, we have confessed that foreign labor is not the untouchable thing it used to be. We are confident that these and other measures, so helpful to the war's needs and so potent for bringing about good will among men, will find post-war acceptance. Given time and circumstances, Georgeists, too, may look forward to securing recognition and putting into effect sound economic laws.

DESPITE their shortcomings, are not democratic peoples the only ones possessing the right and the power to perfect their government and to realize their ideals? For the resolution of any doubts as to the processes of democracy we have only to reflect, if odious comparisons be in order, upon the fanatical processes of our enemies. Verily, let Democracy praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.