With a new introduction by

H. Lee Cheek, Jr.

The Limits of

PURE DEMOCRACY

W. H. Mallock

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H. Lee Cheek, Jr.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSACTION EDITION

To challenge the prevailing social and political orthodoxies of one's time and place often encourages recrimination and eventual neglect. Such has been the fate of William Hurrell Mallock (1849-1923), a seminal thinker of the late Victorian period and a figure who is deserving of greater scholarly attention. Mallock's increasing concern for the diminishing influence of personal restraint and ethical discrimination was at odds with Western society's ennobling of plebiscitary democracy and state control of the means of production. For Mallock, a steady concentration of political and economic power in national governments, increasing social and regional hostilities resulting from the quest for control, and the debasement of democratic rule, were ominous signs of the future that awaited the West.

MALLOCK: HIS LIFE AND TIMES

Born into a privileged family at Cheriton Bishop in Devonshire, England, Mallock was the oldest child of the Reverend William and Margaret Mallock. Both sides of Mallock's family included personages of great influence and intellect, and most of his immediate family were members of the agrarian gentry who were Tories in politics and ultra-High Anglicans as churchmen. In his *Memoirs of Life and Literature*, written in 1920, Mallock gives the only account of his upbringing, contained within a larger study of the social and political world he had inherited.[1] In almost every regard, Mallock accepted and affirmed the aristocratic view of social and political life, and this influence would permeate all of his writings.

Mallock's education began at home, under the private tutelage of the Reverend W. B. Philpot, a student of Matthew Arnold and a close friend of Tennyson. While under Philpot's pedagogical care, Mallock began to question his teacher's bent towards radicalism and innovation, themes the young student would continue to critique for the remainder of his life. In 1869, following in his father's footsteps, he entered Balliol College, Oxford, where he distinguished himself as a writer of some ability. From most accounts, he was not an accomplished student, preferring to write verse and occasionally meet with prominent literary figures, including Swinburne and Browning. Indeed, his writing was his salvation, and his diligent work bore fruit: in 1871, at Oxford, he won the Newdigate Prize for a poem he composed on the Isthmus of Suez.

During this period, Mallock began to create a series of outlines that would eventually become his most famous work, *The New Republic*, which, upon publication in 1877, brought great acclaim to the young writer.[2] A satirical novel, *The New Republic* was Mallock's first attempt to expunge the "disease" of liberalism and religious skepticism from civil discourse.[3] The publication of *The New Republic* provided Mallock with a literary reputation as a critic, and this work would remain his most popular novel, although many more novels would follow. The emphases of *The New Republic*, especially the problem of faith and the nature of truth, would form the first part of Mallock's literary corpus. He would spend the second part of his career as a man of letters addressing the prevailing social and political issues of his age, and *The Limits of Pure Democracy* serves as his last major—and most important—political critique.[4]

Mallock continued to write for various publications, composing a wide variety of works, including poetry, novels, theological works, and political treatises. He was a prolific author who produced over forty books and as many articles during his long career. As a result of his commentaries and the ardent nature of his own beliefs, Mallock also had many detractors, including George Bernard Shaw, J. A. Hobson, and T. H. Huxley. As he advanced in years, the appeal of Roman Catholicism for Mallock became profound, but he never became a convert. He died on April 2, 1923, in Wincanton, Somerset.

MALLOCK ON HUMAN NATURE AND THE MODERN PREDICAMENT

Over time, Mallock became apprehensive about what he perceived to be the decadence of modernity. The very nature of social and political life was being transformed by the perversion of democratic and socialist thought. Mallock feared the tradition that he had inherited was being replaced by a radically different view of human nature that included new, malleable institutional entailments as well. In describing the human predicament in this fashion, Mallock affirmed the Hebraic-Christian conception of human nature, viewing humanity as divided between the higher and lower ethical possibilities, and in need of personal and societal restraint as protection against the impulse of the moment. Mallock's theory of human nature also rejected social contractarian typologies devoted to promoting humankind's inert strength and virtue or ability to survive amidst isolation. Mallock contended that humankind's primary obligations lie in his community and an aristocratic ordering of society. Self-discipline and love of neighbor begin with the individual, and spread to the community, and then to society as a whole. In other words, human nature serves to define the limitations of society and politics for Mallock on one hand, while on the other it presupposes and defends the necessity of a properly constituted community for securing the moral and ethical results concomitant to society's perpetuation.

Mallock's view of society and politics affirmed humanity's situation between the earthly and the transcendent. The implicit role of the transcendent undergirds all of his writing, although his writings do not attempt to affirm a particular Christian worldview. If the fundamental religious tenets of Christianity were accepted, namely, immortality and the necessary vitality of belief, human freedom could be nourished and defended.[5]

Continuing to approach the fundamental questions of the human condition, Mallock undertook a comprehensive and demanding process of examination. Against the prevailing attitudes of most defenders of tradition during this period, Mallock refused to rely upon tradition alone; the practicality of everyday life for Mallock often coincided with the need for contemplation and reflection. Mallock assumed an empirical approach to politics, amassing data of various types, and basing his critiques upon the evidence collected. Amidst a long life, Mallock acknowledged the need for a serious study of the great principles of politics and the moral

life. Mallock was a lifelong defender of tradition, claiming that he "unconsciously assumed in effect, if not in so many words, that any revolt or protest against the established order was indeed an impertinence, but was otherwise of not great importance."[6]

MALLOCK AS CRITIC

The Limits of Pure Democracy is a defense of aristocratic political, social, and economic theory and practice. Mallock endorsed a properly constituted notion of popular rule, but the excesses of modern democratic thought were of great concern to him. The limitations of vague language pervaded most discussions about politics and economics, and Mallock feared such a lack of precision would undermine the political and economic order.[7] Without considering the diversity within the community itself, most theories of democracy assessed overall electoral outcome as the only indicator of preference, Mallock argued. Simple majorities were based upon electoral whims—Whitman's "divine average"—a radical majoritarian understanding of participation that eschews all considerations besides the act of voting itself.[8] Such a concept of popular government requires a unitary vision of politics and the state, and Mallock believed J. J. Rousseau and Abraham Lincoln—especially—Lincoln's "barren platitudes" found in his public addresses—were the most dangerous examples of such thinking.[9] Mass or "pure" democracy "reduces the units of influence [people] to their lowest common denomination."[10] In addition, Mallock rejected the argument made by advocates of pure or plebiscitarian democracy, that the apparatus of voting can resolve all conflict, even profound crises where no consensus of opinion exists. Mallock believed the "mechanical" limits of pure democracy were always present, and that simplification of voting procedures or enlarging the franchise did not lead to salutary ends. To truly understand the stronger interests or combinations of interests, and to assume this to be the sense of the community, the aristocratic element within the political order must be integrated with the regime.[11] Resulting from its simplicity and facility of construction, pure democracy possessed a troubling propensity for reporting cumulative electoral outcomes without regard for the natural divisions of authority.

The leveling influence of pure democracy in politics and industry presumes that humankind can participate in governing and

decision-making *en masse*, at every available opportunity, and with the necessary leverage to undertake any possible action. Mallock's fundamental criticism of such an understanding of democracy suggests that attaining a true majority under any circumstances is illusory at best, a "phantom objective," and utopian at worst.[12] The simple majority can only function effectively in a political world devoid of geographical and economic divisions and without competing claims upon authority. In fact, Mallock argued that this pure democracy could not sustain authentic popular rule, and was incompatible with a comprehensive appreciation of the concept. Secondly, if popular rule is predicated upon providing the citizenry with an expedient option to initiate whatever they desire, then popular rule itself must no longer be claimed as the primary achievement of modern political life. Individual and communal assertion and preference, after all, are often prominently associated with other political systems, especially modern authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that discourage true popular rule in any concrete form while professing to represent the actual sentiments of an oftentimes amorphous populace. As the twenty-first century commences, Mallock's insights provide a guide for understanding and responding to the crisis of a postmodern internationalism in politics and economics that promotes a vulgarized model of popular rule and corporate decision-making that merely consists of the collection of individual wills and sentiments without regard to the substantial and historical limitations of humankind.

Mallock further argued that the electoral and participatory attributes of genuine popular rule suffer as the result of pure democracy's tendency to identify the majority as whomever votes in a particular election while disregarding the range of responses necessary to adequately canvass the citizenry. Moreover, the leveling theories of political socialism associated with Karl Marx, the Webbs, and George Bernard Shaw, only denigrated the genius of enduring, aristocratic influence on the body politic, weakening the infrastructure in terms of its ability to govern.[13] Finally, Mallock noted, if the spirit of restraint that is so essential to the English constitutional and political tradition suffers a devaluation, the future prospects for the regime are diminished.

Restraint—societal and personal—encourages a tenor of resiliency within the political and economic order by imposing some limitations upon a temporally elected majority's ability to assert sovereign authority. Imbued with societal and personal restraint,

this type of government and political economy also guards against the impulse of the moment controlling its decision-making, while developing political and economic institutions that mirror those qualities premised upon restraint. It is precisely the inculcation of these habits into social, political, and economic structures that exemplified Mallock's worldview.

ENDURING LESSONS

In *The Limits of Pure Democracy*, Mallock successfully developed a science of conservatism based upon an affirmation of personal restraint, aristocratic rule, and market economics.[14] He attracted a wide array of critics and supporters from diverse perspectives. The epigones of his detractors remain consistent in their criticisms.[15] The defenders of Mallock's work have also recently experienced a resurgence of scholarly activity, which proves the continuing relevance of his perceptive insights for contemporary situations.[16]

For Mallock, pure democracy was a practical and theoretical impossibility. To resolve the dilemmas facing the West, he urged systematic research and the rejection of simplistic responses, such as the "crude puerilities" proposed by Marx and others.[17] Published in the assumed heyday of plebiscitarian democracy in 1918, at the end of World War I, combined with Britain's approval of the Representation Act that enfranchised women, it is possible to dismiss the profound insights offered by Mallock in *The Limits of Pure Democracy*. But to neglect Mallock's vital re-articulation of popular rule, and his stress on the need for ethical-political restraint in all its modes, is to also diminish the prospect of recovering a humane social order in an age of increased social fragmentation. To the end, Mallock remained hopeful for a regeneration of the spirit and character of authentic democratic life.

H. Lee Cheek, Jr.

NOTES

1. W. H. Mallock, *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1920). For studies of Mallock's early life, see Douglas P. Brown's "The Formation of the Thought of a Young English Conservative: W. H. Mallock and the Contest for Cultural and

Socio-Economic Authority, 1849-1884 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 2004); Russell R. Gartner, "William Hurrell Mallock: An Intellectual Biography" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1979); Russell Kirk, The *Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1995); William O. Reichert, "The Conservative Mind of William Hurrell Mallock" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1956); and J. N. Peters, "William Hurrell Mallock," in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 337-338.

2. W. H. Mallock, *The New Republic: Culture, Faith, and Philosophy in a English Country House*, intro. John Lucas (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1975).
3. *Memoirs*, Ibid., p. 89.
4. Mallock's other seminal work of political analysis is his *A Critical Examination of Socialism* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1907; reprint, Transaction Publishers, 1989).
5. See Gartner, Ibid., pp. 70-71.
6. *Memoirs*, Ibid., 251-251.
7. W. H. Mallock, *The Limits of Pure Democracy* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 1 [hereafter cited as *Limits*].
8. *Limits*, Ibid., pp. 10-11.
9. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 7.
10. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 10.
11. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 59.
12. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 72.
13. *Limits*, Ibid, p. 108.
14. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 286-287.
15. For a thoughtful example of the recent reawakening of interest in the debates between Mallock and those he criticized, with special attention to Henry George, see Roy Douglas, "Mallock and the 'Most Elaborate Answer,'" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Volume 62, Number 5 (November 2003), pp. 117-136. Mallock was also interpreted on occasion as complementing social and political causes that may not have been in accord with his own views. The efforts of Alan Ian Percy, the eighth Duke of Northumberland, in republishing an abridged version of *The Limits of Democracy* after Mallock's death (*Democracy* [Chapman and Hall, 1924]), should be viewed in this light.
16. See Brown, Ibid., and J. N. Peters, "Anti-Socialism in British Politics, 1900-1922 (D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2002). In terms of Mallock's more sustained criticism of plebiscitarian democracy,

see Claes G. Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life: A Philosophy of Politics and Community*, Second Edition, Expanded (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990); Ryn, *The New Jacobinism: Can Democracy Survive*? (Washington, D.C.: National Humanities Institute, 1991); Ryn, *America the Virtuous: The Crisis of Democracy and the Quest for Empire* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003); and H. Lee Cheek, Jr., *Calhoun and Popular Rule* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2001 and 2004).

17. *Limits*, Ibid., p. 179.

PREFACE

This work was planned, and the opening chapters were written, in the earlier months of the year 1914, when the outbreak of a great war was only a remote contingency. Since then, and more especially during the last twelve months, the subject here discussed—namely, the nature and the limits of the power of pure democracy—has acquired day by day a more immediate importance. Indeed, all practical controversies may be said now to turn on it. It thus has happened that the principles here laid down in general terms have, whilst the work was in progress, been illustrated by a series of extraordinarily apt examples. References to many of these have been added in brief footnotes. Four-fifths of the work were, however, substantially complete before the world was astonished by the revolution in Russia; and, though it has been possible to add a few footnotes relating to that movement, such notes are necessarily inadequate to the magnitude and significance of the occasion. The author has therefore thought it desirable to rewrite the concluding pages, and substitute a more detailed mention of recent events in Russia and other countries also, for a final discussion of various general facts and problems, such as the genesis and functions of a leisured class, the possible equalising of certain industrial faculties by education on the one hand, and the probably increasing difference between the highest and the lowest on the other, the increasing pressure of

the world-population against the means of subsistence, and the increasing importance of mere mental efficiencies in combating this pressure, etc. The publication of these discussions (growing as they do out of the questions here dealt with) is deferred.

The author desires to record his obligations to the singularly interesting work on oligarchy in revolutionary parties, by Professor Michels of Basle, which was published in England in the year 1915 (see Book I, Chap. I); to Mr. Stewart Graham's account, published some years ago by Mr. Murray, of the socialist experiment in Paraguay known as New Australia (see Book IV, Chap. III); and also to *The Daily Mail*, for the letters published by it from a socialist correspondent in Russia.

Further, the author regrets that it has been impossible to include any reference to certain articles on "Industrial Revolution or Ferment," which were published in *The Times* in October, 1917, and attracted wide attention. The whole of the present work was by that time in the printer's hands.

November, 1917.

THE LIMITS OF PURE DEMOCRACY

BOOK I

POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTION OF A GENERAL WILL

ATTENTION has often been called to the astonishing extent to which the thoughts, the passions and the actions of vast multitudes of men have been vitiated or misdirected by the use of ambiguous language. A signal example of this fact may be found in the doctrines of a writer who, more perhaps than any other, was instrumental in inflaming the passions which gave force to the first French Revolution.

"Man is born free, and is everywhere in chains." Such are the opening words of the most celebrated work of Rousseau; and though the philosophy of Rousseau himself is by this time largely obsolete, these words to-day are significant in a sense far deeper, though quite other, than that which their author and his disciples imputed to them. To Rousseau they seemed, and to multitudes they have seemed also, the condensed expression of some liberating and momentous truth. Indeed even to-day, if repeated to audiences of a certain kind, they would doubtless be received with acclamation. But anybody who takes them to pieces in the daylight of common intelligence, will now discover that they either mean nothing at all, or else that they mean something which, even if true, is absolutely without import-

ance. It will be interesting here to submit them to a short but a close analysis.

If there is anything really important in what they profess to enunciate, this obviously is comprised in the first four of them—"Man is born free": the assertion that he is "everywhere," as an actual fact, "in chains" being nothing more than a rhetorical way of saying that the actions of the human unit are, under existing conditions, artificially hampered by the actions of units other than himself. Hence, when the man who is "free" and the man who is in "chains" are contrasted, the former is understood to differ from the latter in the fact that his way of life and his actions are determined by himself only—by his temperament, his desires, and the extent of his personal faculties—and are not controlled by others in opposition to his own bent.

Such, then, being here the meaning of the word "free," what, let us ask next, is the meaning of the word "man"? Since here it is plainly synonymous with "the individual human being," its meaning may at first sight seem to be clear enough. But this is not so; for, even when defined thus far, it may mean either the human being at any stage of its existence, or it may mean the human adult as distinguished from the child or baby. There is also an ambiguity which attaches itself to the words "is born." If these are taken literally, the only human beings that are born at all are babies; and to say that "man is born free" must mean, and can mean only, that babies are born free; and this again must mean, if it means anything, that so long as they are utterly helpless their condition and actions are determined by no desires, by no intelligence, and by no judgments but their own. The mothers of the human race will hardly endorse this proposition as accurate, nor will anybody claim much value for it as a contribution to social science.

Let us, however, suppose that when "man" is stated to be "born free," the statement is not to be taken in its strict obstetrical sense, but means that, though doubtless born in a natural condition of dependence, he naturally comes to be free by a process of post-natal development. This meaning is at all events less absurd

than the other; but let us consider if it is true. If it is true at all, it must be true of actual human beings, either as they exist to-day or as they existed once on the surface of the earth somewhere. That is to say, in the lifetime of every average individual a period normally arrives, or normally did so in the past, when his actions cease or ceased to be "chained," controlled or limited by the actions and existence of anybody except himself; for if no such freedom is exemplified in the history of human nature it would be nonsense to represent such freedom as natural, and it would similarly be nonsense to represent the so-called "chains" as artificial.

Is it, then, possible to discover any portion of the earth's surface where either now or formerly such freedom either is, or ever has been, achieved by the inhabitants as a natural incident of their maturity, and enjoyed by them in peace thenceforwards without any "chains" to limit it? The answer is that, with a few chance exceptions, a freedom of this kind is altogether imaginary. Just as every baby is bound to have two parents, most adults are bound to mate and to have babies, for unless they did so the human race would end; and as soon as a man sets himself to woo, and keep on terms with a mate, and as soon as children are born for whom he must provide food, his actions begin through the operations not of artifice, but of Nature, to be so "chained" by the existence and the demands of others that they differ inevitably from what they would be if he lived alone. To say that a man is naturally free as soon as he achieves maturity is no truer than to say that he is born free as a baby. Here and there, there may be a free baby; here and there, there may be a free adult; but the only kind of baby that is free is the baby that is left to die, and the only kind of free adult is the solitary on a desert island.

Here, then, in this insane proposition that "man is born free," and in the wide effects produced by it on the thoughts and temper of multitudes, we have a signal example of the condition of moral and mental chaos to which language used ambiguously is able to reduce mankind, causing their demands and arguments to resemble the cries of animals vaguely conscious of anger, disease,

or wounds, rather than a rational diagnosis of what is really the matter with them. From this prefatory example we will now pass on to another, for ourselves far more important—namely, the chaos of thought and sentiment, of which the nucleus is the word "Democracy" as used at the present time.

"Democracy" is a word which, whatever it may mean otherwise, is now, with equal frequency, used in several senses, the epithet "political" being used to indicate the one, the epithets "industrial" and "social" being used to indicate the others. The first is of great antiquity, the second and third are modern, and between the first and the latter two, even popular thought draws a fairly clear distinction. The principles, indeed, of industrial and social democracy, by those who project and look forward to their triumph in the near future, are consciously regarded as novel extensions of a principle the action of which is already familiar in the sphere of political government. Hence political democracy is regarded by all parties as democracy in the basic form with which all argument as to its nature and the extent of its application starts; and political government, in respect of its current functions and limitations, means for all parties substantially the same thing. Its objects, whether achieved by restriction, adjudication, or command, are understood to be limited to the maintenance and improvement of such general conditions as will for each citizen, in respect of his private life, guarantee the utmost freedom which consists with the freedom of others, and which the scope of his own talents enables him to utilise for himself.

This general conception of the functions of political governments being assumed, the word "Democracy," if ambiguous in its political sense, is not ambiguous for want of attempts to define it. Professed democrats are constantly addressing themselves to the task of describing Democracy as a peculiar system of government, and defining its peculiar features with an ostentatious semblance of precision; but, the moment their definitions are analysed, all of them, as we shall see presently, fall to pieces, leaving no idea behind them which has any counterpart in the world of actual or of possible fact.

This assertion must not be taken to mean that such persons are attempting to define a nothing. On the contrary, they have all of them at the back of their minds a something so profoundly real that, although it is operative in very various degrees, it is never absent from the government of any human society; and if we want to understand what this something really is, we must set ourselves to consider exactly how far, and why, it differs from those conceptions of it which all current definitions popularise.

Of these current definitions, which naturally exhibit much verbal variety, we will accordingly take three versions, which everybody will recognise as signally, and also as favourably, representative.

Our first shall be the most famous of all—still unrivalled as a talisman for eliciting instant cheers—namely, the definition of a great American statesman: "Democracy means government *of* the people, *for* the people, *by* the people."

Our second shall be that of a more recent authority—an American likewise and a very distinguished publicist, according to whom democracy is a special system of government which ensures that "every man, in virtue of his manhood alone, shall have an equal voice in the affairs of the common country."

Our third definition shall be taken from a contemporary English writer, Mr. Cecil Chesterton, whose style has a ring of homely common sense like Cobbett's, and who, in a volume entitled *The Great State*,[1] has joined certain other reformers in a very temperate attempt to harmonise the dreams of revolutionaries with the bald actualities of life. The definition which Mr. Chesterton contributes to this volume, being given at some length and not in the form of an aphorism, may be briefly summed up thus. Democracy in its essence is government which, by whatever means, is actually in accordance with the general will of the governed; and ideally this result might be realised by an ideal despot. Practically, however, ideal despotisms are impossible; and no less impossible, except in microscopic communities,

[1] A Collection of Essays by English writers of Socialist or semi-Socialist Sympathies, edited by Mr. H. G. Wells.

is government by the extreme alternative—namely, the voice of all the citizens assembled under the same tree. The only device, therefore, which is practicable in the great States of to-day is the election by the many of a small number of delegates, to whom the mass of the citizens specify what "the general will" is and whose sole business is to execute it in accordance with the terms specified. True democracy exists, so this writer proceeds, in proportion, and only in proportion, as the correspondence between the action of the delegates and the general will is complete.

Let us now consider what these definitions come to, beginning with the first and most famous of them.

This definition consists of three separate statements: firstly, that Democracy is government *of* the people; secondly, that it is government *for* the people; and, thirdly, that it is government *by* the people. It is obvious that the first purports to enunciate something which, however profound, can at once be grasped by everybody; whilst the second adds something more profound and distinctive still, and that both lead up to the cumulative profundity of the last. Let us ask, then, what intelligible meaning can be possibly read into each.

To begin, then, with the first—"government *of* the people" is a phrase which, with equal verbal propriety, may be taken as meaning either of two opposite things. It may mean government exercised over the people by some power external to them—a meaning like that of the preacher when he speaks about the government of the passions; or it may mean government which the people themselves exercise. It cannot, however, bear the latter of these two meanings here; for this, without any ambiguity, is reserved for the final statement that democracy is government *by* the people, which either means this or nothing. Unless, therefore, it is an instance of pure tautology, government *of* the people must mean government which is somehow exercised over them; and it must, in so far as it is realised in any concrete case, mean government exercised over the people of some particular country. As to the second statement, its meaning is as plain as that of the last. Government *for* the people must mean, in any concrete case, government carried on

in the interest of the people of a particular country, and not in the interest of the people of any other. What, then, is the meaning of the three statements in combination? Its three clauses being combined, this world-famous definition of democracy reduces itself to the following propositions: that Democracy in any concrete case—let us say in the case of France—is government which is exercised over the French people, and not (for example) over the German; that it is exercised by the people of France, not by the people of Germany; and that it is exercised by the people of France with a view to their own advantage.

Now what, with all its solemn crescendo of emphasis, does this definition convey to the mind of any human being which was not in his mind already before he began to listen to it? What is it more than a sequence of superlatively barren platitudes? And yet after all it must, as addressed to millions, be the vehicle of something vital: or it would never be quoted as a watchword, and call forth plaudits, as a spark sets fire to gunpowder. In what part of it, then, does its vital meaning reside? Its vital meaning, its sole distinctive meaning, resides in nothing that the words say by way of an informative proposition. It resides in some sense, altogether unstated, which is presupposed to be already attached to one of them; and that word is the word "people." This presupposed sense is like the skin of a drum, and the so-called definition is nothing but a drum-stick beating a tattoo on it.

This drum-beating, however, does us one service at all events. Though answering no question itself, it loudly calls attention to the question which requires to be answered. What, in detail, for persons calling themselves "democrats," does this one word "people" mean, thereby for them acquiring its peculiar resonance? The "people" of any country cannot, in this connection, be merely a synonym for the inhabitants taken as a whole, as it would be were we classifying peoples according to their racial colours. It must carry with it some implication of a narrower and more incisive kind. It must mean, and it obviously does mean, one or other of two things—either some particular section of the inhabitants,

which governs or ought to govern, to the specific *exclusion* of some other section; or else the whole of the inhabitants, regarded as a governing body, to the specific *inclusion* of some section which is, under certain forms of government, excluded.

Now there are doubtless many agitators who, animated by passion or prejudice, would maintain that the former of these two meanings is the correct one, and that government by the people means the specific, and indeed the vindictive, exclusion of all individuals from power who are in any way sufficiently eminent to be distinguishable as a separate class. But no democrats of to-day, who claim to be serious thinkers, commit themselves intentionally to any position such as this. On the contrary, as Mill points out, they profess altogether to repudiate it. The essence of "pure democracy" according to modern conceptions of it is, says Mill, "government by the people as a whole," no individuals being excluded, whether high or low, and none of them having less power, though none may have more, than any others. This conception is expressed with unmistakable clearness in the second of those definitions of Democracy which have here been chosen for examination, and to which we will now turn.

The essence of political democracy, according to this definition of it, is "that every man shall have an equal voice in the affairs of the common country," and that he shall have this equal voice "in virtue of his manhood alone." Here again we have a formula the ultimate purport of which must be looked for in what it implies rather than in what it enunciates; but what it does enunciate is so precise that its full implications can be reached by a use of the simplest logic; and in realising what these are the author himself aids us. The formula in question does not, he says with the utmost emphasis, imply that all men are equal, or even approximately equal in all respects. On the contrary, "the differences between men and men in their capacities for rendering honest service to society are," he says, "immense and incalculable," as may be seen in the spheres of art, philosophic thought, and more particularly the scientific control of industry. In the general business of life, this

writer freely admits, it is the influence of exceptional men that makes the world move onwards; but in the sphere of political government—and here we come to what his formula really means—it is the essence of democracy to render all such influence inoperative. The doctrine that the right of each citizen to "an equal voice," or to one vote and only one, "in the government of the common country" is a right which belongs to him "in virtue of his manhood alone," means this, and it cannot mean anything else. It means that the ground on which a citizen is entitled to vote is simply and solely his possession of those residual characteristics which enable an anthropologist to distinguish a man from an erect monkey. It is these residual characteristics that each vote represents, and it is because these characteristics are equal that each vote should have an equal value. Hence, if this definition of political democracy be correct, true democracy must be government determined by faculties which, however unequal actually, have for this special purpose been reduced artificially to their lowest common denominator. It might recognise in a Newton a master of all mathematical science, but it would not allow him, in examining the business books of the nation, to impose on his fellows any conclusions with regard to them which his washerwoman could not arrive at just as well as he by use of the simple arithmetic required for adding up her bills.

Such would be the result, in strict or abstract logic, if democracy means government by all as units of equal influence. But practically, though not in the abstract, the principles of even the strictest doctrinaires lead to a conclusion which is much more moderate than this. All such persons recognise when they talk of equality the existence of some men so low in the scale of intelligence, or by temperament so perverse or slothful, that no State which consisted solely of men like these could thrive. Indeed, Socialists often admit that in dealing with such a residuum a Socialist polity would have to resort to measures not less but more severe than any which are applied to-day. They certainly would never contend that men who, possessing nothing, refuse to produce anything, or that idiots or obstinate drunkards,

should be able to influence legislation in accordance with their own ideas. The extremest democrats, however, may without practical inconsistency maintain that such men should have votes nevertheless, for such men being necessarily a small minority, the cumulative power of their votes would, if it stood for anything mischievous, be nullified by the votes of a normally sane majority. Thus the abstract theorem that under a true democracy the power of all citizens would be equal in virtue of their manhood alone is modified by the theorem that the power of each would in practice be contingent on his manhood being of an average or a normal kind. And here we reach what to all intents and purposes is the working conception of democracy which is at the present day implied in the formulæ of doctrinaires, and which floats in the minds of multitudes. It is a conception of a government determined solely by the mass of inconspicuous men—by what Whitman, the poet of democracy, celebrates as "the divine average."

Now, apart from certain facts which will claim our attention presently, this conception is very far from fantastic. For what is it that ideally the average man represents? He represents common honesty, common sense, common neighbourly goodwill, and the common family affections. He is moreover so far from being an abstraction that, if average men in this sense did not form the majority of mankind, no social life of a tolerable kind would be possible. The most towering genius in respect of his household conduct must reason, feel, and comport himself like nine men out of every ten, or else there will be no dealing with him. Why, then, it may be asked, should not political government be determined by men acting as equal units through an exercise of those faculties only in respect of which all average men are equal? Is there anything in the nature of the case to make such a régime impossible?

The answer is that there are two things, the first of which is as follows: We have seen that the most obvious difficulty which, in strict or abstract logic, the theory of democracy suggests—namely, that it reduces the units of influence to their lowest common denominator—is solved by the fact that persons of appreciably subnormal

character would have in practice no influence at all. But, though in this way the difficulty which comes from below is eliminated, the corresponding difficulty which comes from above remains. For just as, if the influence of every unit is equal, the judgments of ninety average men would nullify those of any ten men who were subnormal, so likewise would the judgments of the average ninety nullify those of any ten men their superiors in so far as these, by the exercise of superior talents, reached any conclusions which anybody not notably imbecile could not entirely understand, and was not on the point of reaching by his own unaided faculties. Else, if the ninety voters allowed the ten to guide them, ten men would have the votes of ninety other men in their pockets, and the primary principle of pure democracy would be violated.

Here is one of the difficulties involved in the very plausible conception of democracy as government determined by the people alone, the word "people" being taken as meaning the units of the average mass. But below this difficulty lies another of a yet more fundamental kind; and in order to gain a clear idea of what this difficulty is we will now pass on to the third of the three definitions of democracy which have here been cited as typical, and consider it more minutely. All theories of democracy as government by the will of the people involve an assumption, which we have not as yet noted, that if we only exclude the upper and lower minorities the remainder of any population, or the units of the average mass, are certain, with regard to all political questions, to think, feel, and judge in substantially the same way; and this aspect of the question Mr. Chesterton's definition brings into full prominence.

Mr. Chesterton, as we have seen already, sets out with observing that democracy, if conceived in terms of its ultimate object, is simply an absolute harmony, no matter how ensured, between the acts of the executive government and "the general will" of the governed; but he adds that, in practice, so far as large States are concerned, it can be realised only through the agency of elected representatives, to whom the general will is communicated by those electing them, and whose sole busi-

ness is to obey it with abject accuracy. He admits, however, that the realisation of such a government is a feat less simple than it seems. Elections, he says, may rest on the widest possible suffrage, and the result may, as ample experience shows, be not democracy, but a kind of degraded oligarchy. For example, he says, "Sir Josiah Gudge is elected to represent the radical borough of Slocum," but does Sir Josiah, he asks, represent this borough in reality? Sir Josiah, as a member of Parliament, must, he says, do one of two things or the other. "He must vote in accordance with the will of the inhabitants of Slocum, or against it. If he does the former, he is acting as a faithful representative. If he does the latter, he is not a representative at all, but an oligarch." How far, then, is the official conduct of the typical Sir Josiah of to-day really determined by any instructions which the inhabitants of Slocum have dictated to him? The inhabitants, says Mr. Chesterton, will really have dictated nothing. Sir Josiah will have come to them with a programme of measures already formulated; his opponent will have come to them with another; and all that the inhabitants will have had any chance of doing will have been that of making through the ballot-box a Hobson's choice between them. Such a method of government is certainly not democratic; and yet, says Mr. Chesterton, it is the method which, as modern experience shows, has thus far emerged invariably from the most elaborately democratic institutions. What, then, is the explanation of this practical paradox? The explanation, says Mr. Chesterton, is as follows: Both the primary essentials of pure democracy are present—the general will, like a great toothed driving-wheel on the one hand, and the executive body, like a small wheel, on the other; but in all democratic constitutions which have thus far been elaborated, the mechanism connecting the two has always been defective in some way which prevents the former, except on rare occasions, from imposing its own movements on the latter, thus leaving those of the former for the most part quite inoperative. Hence the only difficulty in the way of rendering democracy complete is, says Mr. Chesterton, altogether mechanical. It has no connection with the

nature of the democratic principle itself; and the task of surmounting it, though not altogether simple, needs only a few experiments and a little ingenuity for its accomplishment.

Mr. Chesterton's explanation of a difficulty thus emphasised by himself is interesting because, by its candour, it exhibits him as looking for it in every place but the right one. The fundamental difficulty does not lie in the fact that the present machinery for realising the general will is defective. It lies in the fact that any general will, which does or which can exist, is something widely different from Mr. Chesterton's own conception of it, and from that which all modern theories of pure democracy postulate. That such is the case will be obvious if we only take the trouble to analyse this conception carefully.

There are three points, then, as to which all democrats are agreed. One is that any will which can be called general is the sum of the judgments of the units of the average mass. The second is that the judgments of each unit shall be represented by a single vote, and thus be of equal influence. The third is that the judgments of each unit shall, as represented by his vote, be freely formed by himself, and shall not, for governmental purposes, have been warped into conformity with the judgments of any other person or group of persons, whether by bribery, intimidation, or any other device of any kind.

This last point deserves special attention; for if large numbers of men, though their votes are recorded by themselves, are really expressing by them the dictated judgments of others, these others will, as has been said already, have, not their own votes only, but to all intents and purposes an indefinite number added to them. That such is the case when the judgments which votes express are changed from what they otherwise would be by brutal and direct bribery, is a fact on which democrats themselves are the first persons to insist; but results essentially similar are, as presently we shall see in greater detail, producible by other methods. An Iago might revenge himself on a faithful Desdemona who had repulsed him, by the simple process of bribing an assassin

to murder her; but he might compass the same end by persuading an Othello that she was faithless, and thus inciting the husband to do the deed on his own account. What money would do in the former case, statement would do in the latter. It would enable one man to determine the conduct of a second, or—to put the matter in terms of political life—to transfer the control of the second man's vote to himself; and in political life, under a system of universal suffrage, the promulgation of statements which are made with the deliberate object of swaying the judgment in some special direction is one of the most powerful means by which one man may master the votes of many, and virtually multiply his own. This is not true, it must be noted, of the publication of bare facts, if these be stated in their integrity; but whenever, with a view to the effect of it on the public mind, news is coloured by comment, or a calculated distribution of emphasis, those responsible for such procedure are, in so far as they are successful, transferring the control of the votes of other men to themselves. Inconvenient electors were, in the days of Pickwick, kept from the polling-booth, and so deprived of their votes, by "hocussing their whisky," and leaving them drunk in a barn. Hocussing the facts is a method of the same character; and in proportion to its success is no less incompatible with the principles of pure democracy.

No one could admit this more fully than democrats themselves, as the violent outcries raised by them in Great Britain and Germany against official manipulations of news in time of war have testified. But let us suppose that full purity of voting, in the sense here indicated, were achieved. Would the difficulties involved in the postulates of pure democracy be ended? We shall, on the contrary, be simply brought at last to the ultimate difficulty out of which all the others spring.

This ultimate difficulty resides in the obvious fact, which we have not as yet considered, that if the judgment of the people, or the units of the average mass, are to be so united as to acquire a force that is cumulative, and thus constitute a will which deserves to be called "general," it is necessary that these judgments shall be,

in all important respects, identical. The question, therefore, is whether or how far, with regard to governmental matters, all average men are, if left to themselves, certain or even likely to judge, and therefore to will, in the same way, simply because none of them are distinguished by conspicuous incapacity on the one hand, or even by the rudiments of conspicuous talent on the other. To answer this question in a few words is impossible. The matters with which governments have to deal are various; and, as we shall see, it is only with regard to certain of them that any general will of a spontaneous kind is possible.

Let us begin with taking two simple examples of governmental action, with regard to one of which all men do, as a fact, spontaneously judge alike; whilst, with regard to the other, the spontaneous judgments of most men—even men of considerable capacity—are a blank. Our first example shall relate to protection from murder; our second to the question of bi-metallism.

All men, even murderers themselves, so long as they are left at large, desire that the Government, by laws and the maintenance of an adequate police, should minimise the risks which any citizen runs of being stuck in the ribs when he is asleep or enjoying an evening stroll. No prompting, no agitation, no bribery is needed to bring even the stupidest citizen to this way of thinking.

But let us suppose that the question with regard to which the will of the average mass is consulted is the question of whether the system of mono-metallism, as at present established, shall be maintained or shall be modified by what is called "the remonetisation of silver." Here is a question the answer to which, according as it was yes or no, might very appreciably affect the well-being of everybody; but if it were put by any member of Parliament to each of the voters who elected him, the answer of all but a few of them, if they spoke their minds, would be this: "The question of the respective merits of mono-metallism and bi-metallism is a remarkably difficult and, we may add, a remarkably dry one. We know nothing about it ourselves, and the most eminent experts disagree. You, however, though

you only muddle us when you talk about it, presumably know more than we do, or else you are not worth your salt. So do not worry us about *our* judgments. Make the best use you can of your own." Mr. Chesterton lays it down with an air of blunt finality that a representative must always do one or other of two things—"that he must vote either in accordance with the will of his constituents or against it." It does not occur to this often very sensible writer that there is yet a third alternative—which is, with regard to many questions, the only one ever realised—that the constituents may have no definite will at all.

These two illustrations show clearly enough what, if considered broadly, the state of the case is. They show us that a will of the kind which pure democracy postulates is, with regard to certain questions, a permanent, a familiar, and a completely realised fact; while they show that, in contrast to such questions, others exist also with regard to which such a will is so completely a myth that it has in the world of realities no possible counterpart. It is evident, therefore, that the postulate of a general will in politics can, if we are to accept it as more than an idle and academic dream, be so accepted only with important and specific limitations. Let us now take a bird's-eye view of governmental questions as a whole, dividing them into groups, according to the degree of completeness, or of incompleteness down to the point of nullity, in which such a general will as pure democracy postulates either does exist, or can possibly exist, with regard to them.

We shall find that, roughly and for the purposes of the present discussion, political questions are divisible into four groups as follows:

(1) Fundamental, simple and unaltering questions;

(2) Momentary and simple questions;

(3) Temperamental questions;

(4) Composite questions, or questions which, though not momentary, are constantly presenting themselves in practically new forms, and which, though varying in complexity, are all of them far from simple, whilst certain of them constitute a sub-group meriting the designation of Abstruse.

Of these four groups of questions the first and fourth—the Fundamental and the Composite—are normally the most important. We will, therefore, begin with disposing of the intermediate two, before turning to the others, which will be the main subject of our discussion.

Of Momentary questions, the most striking example is one which relates to war. It has nothing to do with the conduct of war itself or the kinds of preparation and action on which its success depends. It has to do solely with the question of whether war on a given occasion shall be undertaken or no. On certain occasions the inhabitants of some one country become so exasperated by the behaviour and the menaces of another that all conflicting judgments as to the complex facts of the situation give place to a common passion, and there is thus developed a cumulative will to fight the force of which is a multiple of individual wills formed by the citizens severally "in virtue of their manhood alone." But a general will of this kind, however vast its effects on the course of human history, is in itself short-lived, not outlasting the crisis which called it forth; and, as such crises are happily rare, it is exceptional. It is not a characteristic of the normal life of nations.[1]

As examples of the questions here called Temperamental, we may take those relating to the consumption of alcoholic liquors and those into which a religious element enters. Such questions, so far as the possibility of any general will is concerned, not only differ from those involved in any momentary crisis but are essentially and diametrically opposed to them. With regard to Temperamental questions, the units of the average mass not only fail to arrive at judgments which even approach identity, but they form and maintain judgments which are intentionally and even violently conflicting. Who can contend that all average men, simply because they are neither illustrious thinkers nor fools, will feel and judge alike as to the drinking of beer or

[1] Amongst Momentary questions may be included the abolition of a monarchy. In many cases the dethronement of monarchs has been the work of intrigue; but regarded merely as a single act, a spontaneous general will may quite conceivably sanction it. But to abolish one kind of government is a very different thing from governing.

spirits? Some of them will be for free drinking, some of them for regulated drinking, some of them for prohibiting the drinking of alcoholic liquors altogether. They will judge and feel differently, not because their intellects are unequal, but because their temperaments and prepossessions are diverse. The same observation holds good of the judgments of average men as to questions connected with religion. Many Socialists are at great pains to explain that a man's religion, in any reasonable polity, has no more to do with government than the colour of his hair or trousers; and so far as religion is merely an inward conviction this is no doubt true. But if in any country, whilst masses of men are atheists, others are sincere Christians, and if the religion of the latter has any effect on their lives, there are two sets of questions at all events in which religion is closely implicated, and which Government must deal with in one way or another. These are questions relating to education and marriage; and it is obvious that, as to any legislation by which these two questions are affected, any million of convinced Christians will spontaneously differ in opinion from any million of similarly capable atheists. In the case, then, of all those questions here called Temperamental the postulate of pure democracy, that all men of average intelligence will, as to questions of government, come to the same conclusions, is so absolutely contradicted by fact that it would not be worth while to discuss it, if it were not one of the implications of much popular argument.[1]

Thus, if we set aside Momentary questions because with regard to these, though a general will is possible, it is possible only on signally rare occasions; and if we set aside Temperamental questions because, with regard to these, average men, as such, have no natural proclivity to will in the same way, or join together in

[1] Amongst Temperamental questions must be included those into which the racial element enters, such as those involved in the relation of Ireland to the United Kingdom, and Ulster to the rest of Ireland. Even in Ulster itself there is a Catholic will and a Protestant. Of divergencies in popular opinion which are due to racial temperament, examples on a still larger scale have been provided by the United States in connection with the European war.

developing any general will at all, it is with the Fundamental questions and the Composite questions that we are here mainly concerned; and we shall see that, if regarded as the subjects of a general will of any kind, the difference between these last, though mainly one of degree, is practically so profound that, whilst a purely democratic will is a reality with regard to the former it is, from the nature of things, with regard to the latter impossible.