

THE PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS
—OF—
HISTORIC PRECEDENTS.

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—BY—
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THE PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS OF HISTORIC PRECEDENTS.

BY HON. CUSHMAN K. DAVIS.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In 1857 a class of thirty-five young men was graduated from this University into the great school of life, and one of that class stands here to tell a few things that the years have taught him.

There was then little indication that the future would be perturbed by any extraordinary agitations. It promised to be an era of repose. Political controversies there were, but that they bore in their depths the tempests of revolution and battle no one imagined.

A generation in time has since passed, and how the world has changed. Italy, "the Niobe of nations," has found her lost nationality, and has ceased to mourn. Spain has been a republic. The harlequin emperor of the French vanished at Sedan, and a republic grew upon the ruins of his empire. The map of Germany has been remade. A portentous revolution has been at work in Russian society; a vast ferment which aliens cannot understand, and which seems like one of those mysterious agitations of other times, which impelled whole nations to slowly traverse many degrees of longitude, and to bring low the most stable political institutions. We then thought our own country to be an edifice nearly completed, but we now know that we were admiring only its foundations. Time has builded it beyond any conception then entertained. Slavery, the most powerful and crushing social and political conception since feudalism, vanished like Armida's palace, with all its grandeurs, sins and seductions. The greatest war ever waged by civilized man broke upon us almost without warning, spent its force and passed away, leaving our dear country

stronger, better, wiser than before. The iron trail of civilization has effaced the trail of the savage across the continent. Inventions, bounteous and miraculous, have extended commerce, sweetened life, planted exotic luxuries in desert places; and, working politically by the instantaneous change of thought, in the joint debate of telegraphy, by conferences made possible by a few hours of travel from remotest places, have done away forever with that sectional element which was formerly so narrow, selfish and parochial as to threaten our very existence.

All this has come to pass in less than thirty years. The members of that class in all this played their parts. Many of them survive. Some of them have passed away, and among these are they who lie in the impregnable ranks of death on Southern ground, whom no martial music wakes again, or the tread of hostile armies in the least disturbs or even makes to dream.

But this you will say is commonplace, and why is it recited? I do it because, in history, every moment is critical and revolutionary, and the injunctions of social and political duty are upon us continuously. We live by education too much in the past. We bow before a shrine from which the god has departed. We look back and say, those were the times of endeavor; those were the times when fame bestowed her coronets; it was then that great purposes were fruitful to the men who entertained them. Of the present, we mourn that it is barren, and that our lives are cast in moveless years. Standing upon a mountain top of our own, everything seems desolate. We look afar to the peaks which former generations have scaled, and they seem, standing luminous and glorious in the distance, nearer the heavens than we. All their arid commonplaces are invisible, and we forget that we also stand upon a pinnacle, towards which the men of times to come will turn repiningly, even as we do now.

We must not fail to grasp firmly the fact that every period in history, every moment of time is revolutionary.

It is not merely progressive. The revolution may be progressive, or it may retrograde. There is no optimism so delusive as that which views humanity going with predestinate march up an inclined plane. History is full of annihilated nationalities, whose art has become burlesque, whose literature has sunk to puerilities, whose massive edifices of learning, built apparently for eternity, have changed to mists, and rolled away like vanished clouds. There are long tracts of historical desolation—long arctic nights in time—where the explorer finds some ancient institution, like a ship in polar seas, fixed fast in a frozen ocean, filled with its dead. And the problem of our time, as it has been of all time past, is to master the forces which dismember states and institutions. True religions take care of themselves. There is something of divine immortality in them. But the social creation is not thus. Man creates it; he must take care to preserve it, and herein lies the true value of education. Auguste Comte spoke the wisest of words when he said that, "all knowledge has prevision for its object." Education, like capital, is valuable for the interest it bears—for the dividends it declares. When it ceases to do this it becomes frightfully bankrupt. Great men are simply the trustees of a fund for investment and accumulation, to be applied daily as the profits are realized. The parable of the talents has a profound social and political significance. It means duty to be performed with profit.

It seems ungracious to say that one must unlearn—or rather cease to have much confidence in—much that he has acquired in the process called education, before he can become of real use in the great concerns of life. Of course knowledge is power—we all know that—but mere knowledge is not power, it is simply possibility. Action is power, and its highest manifestation is action with knowledge. But these are not convertible terms.

The modern processes of education are doubtless excellent, and are improving. They are faulty in the as-

sumption that the world is ruled mainly by talk, in the face of the fact that the American Congress has become a great national palaver, in the midst of which not one-tenth of the necessary business is done. One of the most alarming signs of the times is the oratorical contests fostered by many colleges.

Any one who has been a student, and who has, for thirty years, looked closely into that wonderful thing called life, and has felt its stern reversals of hope, cannot suppress the wish that the schools would deal more with the visibly impending situations which lower on the edge of every horizon of time—with the *ta mellonta* concerning which some Greek author speculated. This wish may not be a wise one. Possibly its realization would introduce too much contention into that calm region of youth, whose days, as we look back upon them from middle life, are such golden days. Never were there such skies, such risings and settings of the sun, such nights when as the abysses of the heavens opened, “unbruised youth” went dreaming through infinite space, of love, of immortality, of deeds to be done, of a life which alas! comes to no man, and yet of which each generation dreams the fond old dream again. But I do persist in this wish, because it seems to me of the highest importance that the young men of this country be made more immediately influential in those great issues, which each moment press upon all society.

Much time is lost, in our early years, in freeing ourselves from the persistent delusion, that we have but to draw from what we have learned in our school days, and from books, the solutions of the questions with which we must deal. Nothing can be more erroneous. There was never yet a political or social precedent which exactly fitted and controlled a present question. You may draw, from all the depths of learning, examples which, in print, seem duplicates of an impending situation, and, in proportion as you attempt to shape the pres-

ent to it, you will fail miserably. A difference in faith or dogma, the influence of luxury, the freedom of conscience and discussion, the speed with which thought is transmitted and space is traversed, thus bringing to bear instantly the judgment of millions upon the point of action, instead of working slowly outward from great cities as in the ancient times, which now in a day sometimes interposes a veto of more than tribunitian power, all these disvalue the rigid precedents which we have learned by rote. Statesmanship has ceased to be autocratic, and all reform now consists in combinations, by many men, of examples with new elements, which are constantly evolved from the analysis to which all human institutions are daily subjected. It is the condition of development, in our day, that all this should be so, and this explains why foundations, intended to be unalterable, do, from the moment they are laid, begin to contract or to expand as needed. Take a most striking example, the Constitution of the United States. It is juristic orthodoxy to declare that it was perfect in its origin, and that it has not changed, except by formal amendment. But the fact is otherwise. It was very imperfect; slavery was recognized in it, but was swept away by a repealing method not prescribed by that instrument, and the repeal was made valid by the fiction of acquiescence after the fact. The powers of the states were left so undefined, in the anxiety to secure the adoption of that Constitution, that, among its framers, immediately arose two schools of construction, whose disputes were only ended by the conclusion of war. In this respect judicial construction, sometimes interpolating by decision, and at other times by permitting legislative enactments to evade its prohibitions, under the overpowering repealing or amending forces of national necessity, has so changed that great charter, in many of its features, as to make them unrecognizable by the men who framed it, and it would be denounced by many of them. What would Jefferson say to the national banking system, to the grants of

land in aid of railway construction; what Franklin to the national debt?

There is nothing in the earlier part of the French revolution so grotesque to the scholar as the constant reference, in the speeches and writings of that most fruitful time, to the characters of antiquity, as they are presented by Plutarch. There is a total want of this kind of appeals in that every-day, common sense statesmanship, which has made England the greatest and most enduring power that has ever existed. It may be remarked here, that no nation has ever been so little guided by historic precedents as that mother of nations, whose children have colonized the earth; who populated America, Australia, New Zealand and returned to India the results of that Aryan migration which commenced in prehistoric times, and has borne back to the place of its origin the accumulated experience of thousands of years, and the examples of many nations that have perished in the conquering progress, which has literally made its way around the earth.

Every male child, born in the United States, is an heir apparent to the Presidency. From the moment of his political eligibility, his feet are planted upon the avenues of political promotion. It has been complained that this dedication to public affairs is an evil, but this is a mistake. It is never to be forgotten that we are forming a nation, which is still in its crude adolescence. In such periods, the rule of civil service is the same as that of military service; the young—those under forty-five years,—are best to do the work. Our history covers a few years only, and it is strewn with discarded perfections. We have not as yet become one people. *E. Pluribus Unum* is so far merely prophetic. The various streams of humanity, which are forming this delta of the nations, bear their own tints and hold in suspension the components of the lands from which they flow. It will take centuries, and a process of geologic slowness, to bring us to our destiny. In the

meantime, the turbulency of all great creative processes must be expected. Every man must bear his part, and it is the instinct of construction, as irresistible as that of bird or insect, which impels the American youth to immediate participation in political affairs.

Therefore they, who are graduating from the school of youth into the university of life, will do well to learn early how their training and acquirements can be made operative. And the first lesson, as has been already indicated, is to beware of precedents. No great benefit, social or moral, to mankind has ever been wrought without an infraction of precedents, and this infraction has, in severity and cruelty, been exactly in proportion to the obduracy of the resistance it has encountered.

Now, if there is any one precept, which is laid down line upon line in the schools, graven in the mind which has then been baked and glazed to preserve the inscription, it is the invariability of doctrine. This is all well enough as to physical science. It is the very condition, of course, of ethical teaching. But, as to social and political subjects, as to those laws by which states grow, are made great, and then weaken and fall into heaps of ruin, it is utterly fallacious. The strict application of the scientific method, (so called), will always produce oppression. There is as well a bigotry of learning, as of faith. "This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof." This scientific absolutism found its protagonist in Auguste Comte, who constructed a hierarchy of the sciences, commencing with geometry, and entering its penetralia in sociology, where it ended in a rhapsody of delirious logic, in the revelation, that all affairs, civil, social and religious, ought to be committed to the regulation of a few trained minds, taught to administer everything. This Hercules of modern thought, who began by strangling the twin serpents of priestcraft and aristocracy, ended his task by incorporating them into one dragon, breathing into it a new life, and infecting it with a deadlier poison. His fine

theories of individual freedom from authority ended in the establishment of a Brahminism of the most appalling character, and the modern philosopher joined company with the Egyptian and Aztec priesthood, with Anabaptists and the Fifth monarchy men, with the familiars of St. Dominic and with Moses. His secular hierarchy was of the most intolerant character; intolerant necessarily, because it was asserted to be an absolutely true and scientific conception of a state of society and of the duties of government; and most intolerant, because, while two creeds may co-exist, the co-existence of two systems of science, upon the same subject, is impossible. With political schemes, it is otherwise. Many can, and do exist, in competition, and are functional in a state, together or alternating, and when the competitory test is over, the result is never the embodiment of one of the contestants with all of its pretensions. It is rather a product of all of the competitory agencies. The simple fact that man is at once an imperfect and progressive being, and that the multitudinous man called society is the same thing, demonstrate that rigid and abstract scientific rules do not apply to the growth or the government of states. This is said with proper limitations. I do not deny that rules which we cannot control, may like gravitation, govern the planetary motions of the social state, operating unspent through all the ages. But we do not apply them. What to the motions of Saturn—that planet of Time—are the disturbances on his surface, the fall of immeasurable snows, the storms of mighty seas, the showers of fragments of his arches of fire, or the duress of the comet, that Ishmael of the stars, which was arrested and perplexed by the attraction of his moons? Nothing; the planet moves on in its appointed courses, bearing all these with it.

The old problem of fatalism and free will exists as to states, as it does in ethics. But its existence, and even its insolubility, do not destroy duty.

There is no doubt that political principles are varia-

ble—so much so that to say of a party that it is consistent is often to pronounce the sentence of its condemnation. “Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s,” was the admonition of our Redeemer to the Pharisees and Herodians, who, “seeking to catch him with words,” endeavored to entrap him into the political dilemma of arraying the Kingdom which is not of this world against the power of Rome.

These principles, while they have progressive operation, oscillate from one extremity to the other of the arc of vibration. They pause sometimes, and sometimes retrograde apparently, like planets, which in turn are morning and evening stars. It is sometimes the highest wisdom to do this, for it is never to be forgotten that reformatory tendencies are frequently too expansive for the age to bear their pressure. The French Revolution is the standing example, to all time, of the truth of this remark. It was a pendulum loaded with a bomb, which exploded all along its sweeping oscillation from the point of lowest political and personal degradation and servitude, to a point of political and personal emancipation, that was greater than the age could bear. And nowhere, among all political revolutions, was it ever attempted to press at once to realization and enjoyment certain abstract political conceptions, the scientific truth of which is undeniable.

It is not to be controverted that questions, absolutely and presently ethical, sometimes present themselves for immediate and perhaps ruinous solution. Slavery was such an one. But there is a shadowy boundary of great width between these and what may be termed the mere inconveniences, or arbitrary postulates, of the social or political state; and it is in this broad domain that we are to live and work, and often grope our way: where the eye may be raised, in hope, to the exceeding brightness of the distant Gate Beautiful, but must be used with care upon the pitfalls and seductions of the path beneath the feet.

The most advanced political philosopher, ever produced by England, is doubtless Edmund Burke. That vast intelligence circumfused, like an ocean, all political continents. He stood in the forefront of political philosophy, like the angel Uriel in the sun, watching the world on which it shed its light. And yet this speculative statesman saw most clearly the truth, that in politics there are few general principles. He says: "These metaphysical rights, entering into common life like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed, in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections, that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction. The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity, and, therefore, no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable to man's nature, or the quality of his affairs."—"The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes, and in proportion as they are metaphysically true they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of middle, incapable of definition but not impossible to be discerned. The rights of men, in government, are their advantages: and these are often in balances between differences in good, in comparisons between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil. Political wisdom is a computing principle—adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing morally, and not metaphysically or mathematically, true moral denominations."

In saying this, he proved how much he had unlearned of the teachings of his youth; or, to express it better, how he had expanded these acquirements to fit them exactly to the situation in which he lived. He had become their master, and not their servant. His words illustrate the grand distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and, in

this, he thought with Paul, the greatest of ecclesiastical statesmen, who said, "all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient."

I am so anxious to see the American youth become beneficially influential in affairs that I am, throughout, stating my views perhaps too absolutely for nicely adjusted criticism, but not too absolutely for use, if they are true. And, if we now are, as I firmly believe, in a critical period of our development; if changes in our system are threatened of the most radical character; if problems, which never before arose in any State, are presenting themselves for solution; if insidious influences have already endangered some of the most vital elements of our national and social being; if these must be met, not by the sword, but by the intellect of the people working upon our institutions to reform and to better them, then no voice can be too loudly raised, even if like Cassandra's, it be not believed.

The hope of any country is in the men who are under thirty years of age. If, in the exercise of political power, they are what Napoleon termed mere ideologists, they are too often a positive obstruction to the cause they most dearly cherish. This is particularly true in a system like ours, where the aspiring aims of youth cannot be authoritatively repressed. But if they early learn that their knowledge must be their servant and not their master; that their acquirements are the insubordinate mercenaries of action which must be brought to discipline, and massed upon the decisive points of engagement, under the restraint of existing circumstances; that all battles cannot be victories; that, sometimes, even safe retreats must be fought for; that the good does not always prevail, but that, in fact, humanity loses many a battle, even if it eventually conquers in its successive Punic wars—then the spirit of true statesmanship has possessed them, and their relations to their times will become immediately beneficent.

The most dangerous master and the most useful servant in this political task is the science of political economy. Nearly all of the teachers of this science, of whatever school, have forgotten the cardinal doctrine of statesmanship, that principles in practical application are merely relatively true or untrue. An absolute principle cannot work despotically upon anything but an absolute and fixed subject matter. An observer placed so far above the earth that he cannot see the calms and the head and cross winds of the ocean, but can plainly see the great oceanic streams, those rivers of the sea, which belt the marine world, will say, that the path of ships lies solely along these; but let him descend to the surface and be subject to the action of disturbing causes, and he will readily concede that the art of navigation consists principally in the employment of expedients. It is so with this science, in its abstract form and in its application. But it is remarkable that, just in proportion as a subject of knowledge is abstract and in some of its aspects insoluble, dogmatism becomes bigoted. This was notoriously true of the scholastic subtleties of the middle ages and of that mystery of religion, caused by the absence or presence of a Greek letter, over which holy men fought in church councils like gladiators on the arena. We accordingly find in all the schools of this science the most intolerant and unteachable dogmatism. The contemptuous pity and real fury, with which one professor flays, anatomizes and dissects another professor, are one of the spectacles of modern thought. They do forget that the subject-matter is man, with all his weaknesses, his diseases, individual and social, his inequalities, his failings and his sins, all these multiplied, millions-fold, by that complicated mass which we call society, and this also made more complex by its subdivisions into nations, of different degrees of intelligence, freedom, refinement and power.

I know of no better contrast between the actual and

the theoretical, in this respect, than that presented in the relations between Catherine of Russia and Diderot. There the absolute and the expedient confronted each other in their most expressive human types. More than any other thinker in that fecund age, excepting perhaps Rousseau, Diderot conceived, popularized and placed upon the logical line of success, the absolutely scientific conception of a state. He possessed one of the most prescient intellects of any of the sons of men. In the midst of the sciences of our day we often see a light that comes from afar, and, looking up and away a hundred years, we are dazzled by some coruscating conjecture of Diderot. More than any other person, the great Empress represented, in their extreme form, the institutions upon which he and his co-laborers in Europe waged their war. Hers is the most complicated character among all women of whom history takes any notice. She was at once impulsive and imperturbable, affectionate and cruel, sensual and cold, liberal in theory as Rousseau, despotic in practice as the Czar Peter. She had Cæsar's head and Cleopatra's heart. She was Aspasia, Messalina and Zenobia, all in one. She invited Diderot to St. Petersburg, as Frederick did Voltaire to Potsdam. Ceremony was dispensed with, and, in the midst of Polish partitions, of Siberian deportations, of orgies, which would have made the wife of Claudius blush, and of literary undertakings and appreciations, which would have made Hypatia glad, she sat day after day *vis à vis* with the profoundest thinker of that time, listening to his brilliant expositions. She writes that, "any witness, who happened to be present, would have taken him for a severe pedagogue, and me for his humble pupil." She heard all that he had to say, and answered in these memorable words: "Monsieur Diderot, I have listened with the greatest of pleasure to all that your brilliant intelligence has imparted. With all your great principles, (which I understand very well), one could make fine books, but very bad business. You forgot, in all your

plans for reform, the differences in our positions. You only work on paper, which endures all things; it opposes no obstacle, either to your imagination or your pen. But I, poor Empress that I am, work upon the human skin, which is irritable and ticklish to a very different degree." Diderot went back to France, and, in a few years, the absolutely and invariably true was given power, and, like an apocalyptic angel, it broke upon the nations the seals of its terrors, so that "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men" hid themselves in the great day of wrath. Catherine left her empire to her successors, and they, practicing absolutism of the other extreme, look out upon a "waste, wide anarchy of chaos," which is expressed by the word "Nihilism." Coleridge said of the phrase "extremes meet," that "to collect and explain all its exemplifications would constitute and exhaust all philosophy." And it is certain that here the extremes of political conception have met in the same anarchic result.

The man of iron and blood brought low the black eagles of Hapsburg, overthrew the chosen dynasty of France, reduced the papacy to its minimum of influence, and made of German manhood a mere civic and military machine. A few years pass. Suppressed individualism bears up against the solid fabric of the great Empire with an internal force, which threatens to become irresistible. It endangers the hoary head of the monarch, which bore a school-boy's curls at Waterloo. Its visions haunt the sublime and gloomy recesses of the intellect of the greatest modern constructive statesman, and he, reversing all his history, makes peace with the Vatican, and placates socialism with utterances which sound much like a confusion of faith in the new dispensation.

Whatever may be the pretensions of the schools, they have never yet succeeded, and they never will succeed, in establishing any inflexible political doctrine. The calm, smug dogmatism, that idol of the theatre, of which Fran-

cis Bacon wrote, that, "it is manifestly instilled by the fictions of theories and depraved rules of demonstration"—is one thing which you are who going out to encounter life must learn to essentially distrust. You can impose but few of the unquestionable verities that you find in books. You must submit to much that you can demonstrate is erroneous. The most stable political constitutions are subject to an organic law of modification, which will, without any human enactment, amend, and even repeal, the instrument when necessary.

All political conceptions run back to Fichte's primary rule, that each man has the right to live in society with just that amount of liberty which will not encroach upon the liberty of other men. This alone implies the necessity to regulate and repress in every contingency when this heritage of liberty is invaded or overthrown, no matter what the devotees of *laissez faire* may say, who seem to regard the state as a mere preserving agency. And it is all mistake to maintain that this or that theory of regulation or repression can ever become obsolete or unnecessary, though it may be readily granted that the necessity may in the great average of progress become less. The world in this progress moves in an ascending spiral, curve reentering towards preceding curve. In that vast procession the present reverts to a very distant past; remote epochs touch each other; the old becomes the new. The face of Sesostris, graven in ancient stone, might be taken for Napoleon's profile. Succession is not always the rule in history. The conception of time is often illusory, for the most remote events are in reality often contemporaneous. Justinian abolished the corporations, and sixteen hundred years afterwards they threaten society as they did the stability of Rome. Agrarianism was laid to rest with the Gracchi to reappear in our time under circumstances strikingly similar. Feudalism, with its domains, its untaxed lords, their retainers, its exemptions and privileges, made war upon the aspiring spirit of humanity,

and fell with all its grandeurs. Its spirit walks the earth and haunts the institutions of to-day, in the great corporations, with the control of the national highways, their occupation of great domains, their power to tax, their cynical contempt for the law, their sorcery to debase most gifted men to the capacity of splendid slaves, their pollution of the ermine of the judge and the robe of the senator, their aggregation in one man of wealth so enormous as to make Crassus seem a pauper, their picked, paid and skilled retainers who are summoned by the message of electricity and appear upon the wings of steam. If we look into the origin of feudalism, and of the modern corporations,—those Dromios of history—we find that the former originated in a strict paternalism, which is scouted by modern economists, and that the latter has grown from an unrestrained freedom of action, aggression and development, which they commend as the very ideal of political wisdom. *Laissez-faire*, says the professor, when it often means bind and gag that the strongest may work his will. It is a plea for the survival of the fittest—for the strongest male to take possession of the herd, by a process of extermination. If we examine this battle cry of political polemics, we find that it is based upon the conception of the divine right of property, and the preoccupation by older or more favored or more alert or richer men or nations, of territory, of the forces of nature, of machinery, of all the functions of what we call civilization. Some of these men, who are really great, follow these conceptions to their conclusions with dauntless intrepidity.

Herbert Spencer proclaims that “government is essentially immoral.” “Not only does magisterial power exist *because* of evil, but it exists *by* evil.” These are not paraphrases; they are his own expressions. He employs them as definitions of social facts and principles. Let us change his terms, but not his meaning, and see where they lead us. God’s law is essentially immoral; not only does it exist *by* evil but *because* of evil. Can anything be more

shocking than this? How utterly does it crush conscience—not only the conscience of the individual, but also the conscience of peoples, which, in long tract of time, makes nations great and enduring. The speculative results, to which this theory of law and government leads, are at once grotesque and awful. It is an old proverb, that all thought leads to theology. So Hartmann, a recent German thinker upon these subjects, holding to these views, maintains that God was unhappy in the beginning, and is so yet, because of the cureless imperfections of the moral universe, and that the highest duty of man is to pity his suffering Creator. The fact is, that Hartmann has done nothing more than, with sincere irony, to push his diabolism to its legitimate conclusion, and has made the principle of evil the Deity. But he has done nothing new. One of the most singular chapters in the history of Christianity is that concerning the Ophites sect, which felt logically bound to deify Satan himself.

Mr. Spencer holds that the only duty of the state is protective. He declares that his definition "of state duty forbids the state to administer religion or charity;" forbids it "to administer education," because "it involves taking away his property to educate his own and other people's children * * and the taking away his property for such a purpose is wrong." He also asserts that "the dogma that it is the duty of the state to protect the health of its subjects may be successfully combated on grounds of policy."

Thus, abstract social science, the inspirer of such Utopian hopes, reaches its latest conclusion that the sole object of government is to enable those who have property to hold their own. Starting with the freedom of the individual as a postulate, it ends, not as creditably as Comte, in a hierarchy of intellect, but in an oligarchy of property-holders. Selfishness reigns supreme. The liberty of the individual is annihilated by the logical process constructed to maintain. But how much is here ignored! What has

become of the equality of man, of that conception of liberty which calls each man free within such limits as will not restrain the equivalent freedom of his neighbor? It is a political deification of Mammon. *Laissez-faire* is not utterly blameworthy. It begat modern democracy, and made the modern republic possible. There can be no doubt of that. But there it began its limit of political benefaction, and began to incline toward the point where "extremes meet." Nations became stronger than other nations, classes than other classes, individuals than other individuals. The strength of the strongest man was not enough. He was mortal; his heirs would scatter his accumulated power; he was amenable to laws which punish the body. Accordingly the modern corporation took huge proportions. The mortal put on immortality. The dead man's clutch of mortmain reached out from feudal graves, laid hold upon property, and established in the very midst of a system of free exchange a system of perpetuities. The ideal became hurtless by most penal laws. It occupied domains to which the greatest feudal holdings were mere parishes; it granted supplies, or withheld them, as it chose. The legislature became its committee, the judge its register, the executive its puppet, the bar its pander, the pulpit its apologist, the laborer its vassal, and the state its prey. It laid its iron meshes over the people, and they fluttered beneath like birds under the net of the fowler.

The poor fisherman, told of in the Arabian Nights, threw his net into the sea, and drew up a casket covered with rust and slime and closed down with the seal of Solomon. He took it in his hand, and holding it to his ear, he heard the voice of a spirit imprisoned within telling him in tones of enchanting sweetness how he, the poor, miserable fisherman, if he would release the prisoner, might sway the sceptre of power, might revel in all sensuous delights, might command all the riches that are hidden by earth or sea. The foolish fisherman broke the seal by which the wisest of men had confined the enemy of mankind, and

lo! there rose from the casket a cloud unformed, which towered to heaven and which, at last, condensed into an awful, malignant demon, who stood dilated to the skies. The fisherman lured the devil into his prison, closed the seal upon him and threw him back into the depths. A similar task is laid upon the present generation.

And comes some pert dogmatist and says "*laissez-faire*." To every assertion that the people in their collective capacity of a government ought to exert their infeasible right of self defense, it is said you touch the sacred rights of property. The bull Apis is holy. Let the fittest survive; in other words, let armored and shielded privilege beat down, crush and extort as in the feudal days. These doctors of absolute and fixed political principles will not see that an oligarchy has arisen in the very midst of the modern state, and that our republican system is as truly a *simulacrum* as the Roman republic, whose forms were so sedulously preserved by Augustus. The plain fact is that the scheme of representative government is under test of the most powerful solvent that has ever been applied to it. Vergniaud said of the French revolution, that it would, like Saturn, devour its children. The same danger threatens us.

There is an instability in our political system which must be remedied by the men who are now under thirty-five years, if it is ever remedied at all. That system is subject to upheavals and collapses which dangerously strain it. To use a homely phrase, the machine jolts. Sometimes the financial portion is out of order, then the commercial system works out of adjustment, then the labor functions play fast and loose; sometimes the international connections are displaced, and from these result bankruptcies, socialism, riots, tramps and wars.

This is the situation which awaits the youth of this generation, and it behooves these crown princes of the world that they try on the crown of the dying king with a steady and reverent hand. They come fresh from the

schools. They have been taught some new things which are not ripe for use, and they have been taught many things which have ceased to be utilities. They have seen little affairs in operation. They have not had time fully to realize the fact that the relations of many things are matters of variable and conflicting boundaries. They have had set before them the illusory forms of beautiful but unattainable ideals. They are vigorous, loquacious, uncompromising and sympathetic. They are the near future raging to become the present. Great will be that statesman of mature years who has, by thorough education of himself in the progressive forces of his time, so mastered them that he can with sympathy, and yet with corrective and restraining judgment, bring these innovating forces of youth into proper efficacy. Great, indeed, will be that people when such forces will not depend upon the guidance of a few such men, but will come spontaneously into action as the product of a system of education.

I have dealt herein with the practical part of life. It would please me better to paint the forms of fair ideals, which you can never embrace, and which, as they touch, dissolve. You will never warm the marble realities of your years to come into immortal brides, no matter how passionately you may yearn over your creations. Life will be full of disenchantments. Its burdens sometimes seem too heavy to be borne. Friends betray you. Riches take wings and fly away. Death touches with its petrific mace the most world-stirring personal activity, and the unmelting frost lays upon the man its spell of everlasting stillness. Ambition's crown is snatched from heads of royal worth. The consolations of real life depart like hired watchers, and nothing seems left for utterance but the cry of Job, "why is light given to a man whose way is hid and whom God hath hedged in?" But to these thoughts comes another, like a Genius which knows nor time nor space, nor matter, nor the vicissitudes of material things. It turns with an omnipotent hand, like a deity whirling a

shining world upon its poles, the great orb of man, and reveals its other hemisphere. It is the world of mind, of thought, of eternal self, of which each man is lord. It too has its continents, its limitless seas, its peaks which reach to heaven, its Edens from which no one was ever driven, its angels who have never fled. Of this life in time, it is written, that

“We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep;”

but the life of self will witness the fall of all the stars. Here you can build with no limitations. No other man, nor society, nor any of the imperfections which inhere in time or matter can restrain you. Here your material is all the past; your friends are the denizens of all the ages. They care nothing for the mutations of this little day of time, shut in between the nights of birth and death. Calm, beneficent, shining and majestic, they guide your life like natal stars, and endow you with their own immortal powers.