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Government by the majority

Ross Winn

1896

Throughout the centuries that have fled since man crawled forth from his cave an ignorant savage, there has been some form of organized government under which somebody has been oppressed. During all these unknown ages the people have had but little voice in the affairs of nations. For a long time the source of authority was not in this world at all. The king sat on his throne by the will of god, and therefore was not accountable to the people for his acts. He commanded — the people obeyed. He was lord of their bodies, and his partner, the priest, was master of their souls. The government of earth was a duplicate of the “kingdom of heaven.” God was the supreme despot above, the king was his faithful imitator below. Between the heavenly king and the earthly king the people were very much like the fellow who got caught between the devil and the deep sea. That is to say, if they rebelled against the one, they were confronted by the agents of the other, and the argument in both cases was the same — force.

But in the course of human progress the people became more enlightened, and the divinity of kings as the basis of government had to go. But government itself remained, and under it

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the people were enslaved. But government — this monster of the ages — that has been guilty of every possible crime, has been compelled to change its garb, to put on a new mask, in order to keep the people in subjection, otherwise they would have rid themselves of it long ago. But, while government has changed its garb — its form — it never has changed in principle, because, like the christian god, government is the same in principle yesterday, to-morrow and forever.

There are but two theories upon which government can be based. One is the divine right of kings, the other is the natural right of majority rule. In this country at least, no one will maintain the divine right of kingcraft. So we have only to notice the majority rule fallacy.

Admitting that the will of the majority does, in some mysterious way, prevail, (which is not true) the question arises, by what right does it rule? When two men meet, one man on the highway, have they, because of their superior number, the right to dispose of his life or his property? If A. has no right to control B. when acting as a single individual, does he acquire this right by combining with C.? Let those who advocate government meet this question fairly. Let them candidly admit that ten men when combined possess rights which belong to none of them as individuals. That is the logic of majority rule. Let them deny *this* proposition, and their whole case is gone “like the baseless fabric of a schoolboy’s dream.”

We have had coercion enough. For ages man has ruled with sword and bayonet, with bars and chains. For many centuries the strong hand of power has crushed the liberties of the people, has soaked the soil with human blood, has cast the sable shadow of oppression over the earth, and now are we not civilized enough to dispense with it forever? What blessings does government confer?

Has it not ever been an engine of oppression in the hands of the few? Is it not in its very nature antagonistic to freedom, and can we expect it to defend that which it destroys?

For many centuries government has held sway, and liberty has been driven from among men. Let us give liberty control.

Liberty does not bring confusion, it brings peace. Under government the nations are armed constantly for war. The state thrives on war and bloodshed. Its chief prop is the sword. It lives only by violence. Take from it the power of its arms, and it will die a natural death.

The government of man by man is essentially tyrannical. It is this infernal doctrine that has painted on the sable canvas of the past the wildest scenes of rapine and murder. Let us away with it.

Ross Winn.