

THE

TRUE OFFICE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

THE legitimate action of Civil Government is very simple. Its legitimate range is very narrow. Government owes nothing to its subjects but protection. And this is a protection, not from competitions, but from crimes. It owes them no protection from the foreign farmer, or foreign manufacturer, or foreign navigator. As it owes them no other protection from each other than from the crimes of each other, so it owes them no other protection from foreigners, than from the crimes of foreigners. Nor is it from all crimes, that Government is bound to protect its subjects. It is from such only, as are committed against their persons and possessions. Ingratitude is a crime : but, as it is not of this class of crimes, Government is not to be cognizant of it.

No protection does Government owe to the morals of its subjects. Still less is it bound to study to promote their morals. To call on Government to increase the wealth of its subjects, or to help the progress of religion among them, or, in short, to promote any of their interests, is to call on it to do that, which it has no right to do, and which, it is probably safe to add, it has no power to do. Were Government to aim to secure to its subjects

the free and inviolable control of their persons and property—of life and of the means of sustaining life—it would be aiming at all, that it should aim at. And its subjects, if they get this security, should feel that they need nothing more at the hands of Government to enable them to work their way well through the world. Government, in a word, is to say to its subjects: “You must do for yourselves. My only part is to defend your right to do for yourselves. You must do your own work. I will but protect you in that work.”

That, the world over, Government is depended on to instruct, improve, guide, and enrich its subjects, proves, that, the world over, there is little confidence in the democratic doctrine of the people’s ability to take care of themselves: and that the opposite doctrine, that the many must be taken care of by the aristocratic and select few, is well nigh universally entertained. The people’s lack of confidence in themselves is not only proved, but it is accounted for, by this dependence on Government. This dependence of the people on the policy, providence, and guidance of Government, as well in peace as in war, has necessarily begotten in them a distrust of their ability to take care of themselves.

One of the consequences of this self-distrust on the part of the people is, that Government is employed, for the most part, in doing what it belongs to the people to do. And one of the consequences of this illegitimate work of Government is, that Government has become too great, and the people too little—that Government has risen into undue prominence, and the people sunk into undue obscurity. This is evident, wherever we look. The British Government overshadows the British people, and is their master, instead of their servant. It is in France as in

Britain. The French Government owns, instead of being owned by, the French people.

The people of every nation are annoyed, enthralled, debased by this meddling of Government with the people's duties! And never will the liberty, dignity, and happiness of the people be what they should be, until the people shall have risen up, and driven back Government from this meddling. In other words, the people will never be in their proper place, and Government will never be in its proper place, until the work of the people is done by the people.

Whenever the work of the people is taken out of their hands by the Government—or, since the people are quite as ready to shirk their work, as Government is to usurp it—I might as well say, whenever the people devolve it on Government, it is, of course, badly done. This is true, because every work to be well done must be done by its appropriate agent. Whenever Government builds railroads and canals, it builds them injudiciously and wastefully. So too, whenever Government meddles with schools, it proves, that it is out of its place by the pernicious influence it exerts upon them. And to whatever extent churches are controlled by Government, to that extent are they corrupted by it.

That Government does the work of the people badly is not, however, my chief objection to this meddling. There are two other objections to it, on which I lay greater stress than on this. One of these is—that Government, being allowed to do the work of others, fails, for this reason, to do its own work—or, in other words, being allowed to do what it should not do, it fails to do what it should do. The other of these objections is, that the

doing by Government of the work of the people has the effect to degrade and dwarf the people.

I said, that Government has naught to do, but to protect its subjects from crimes. The crimes, however, which it permits against them—and, still more, the crimes, which it authorizes, and even perpetrates against them, show how extensively it fails of its duty. We will glance at a few of these crimes.

Slavery is one of them. And who needs to be told, that slavery is a crime? ay, the highest crime against both the body and the soul. Nevertheless, Government, not only permits its subjects to be enslaved, but it actually enacts laws for their enslavement.

Land monopoly is another of these crimes. The right of every man to his needed share of the soil, is as inborn, inalienable, and absolute, as his right to life itself: and the world has suffered more wrong and wretchedness from the violations of this right than it has even from slavery. Indeed, the robbing of men of their liberty is but a consequence of robbing them of their land. The poverty and impotence of the landless masses make them an inviting and easy prey of slavery. The masses, who fall under the yoke of slavery, fall under it because they are poor. Well does the Bible say: "The destruction of the poor is their poverty." But were the equal right to the soil practically acknowledged, there would be no masses of poverty: and, hence, there would be little or no slavery—almost certainly no slavery. Stupendous, however, and everywhere-practised robbery, as is land monopoly, Government, nevertheless, does not forbid it. Nay, it positively and expressly permits it. Still worse, it does itself practise it. Government is itself the great land monopolist.