

**THE WILL OF  
THE PEOPLE**

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The Will of the People by Francis Sullivan

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**FRANCIS SULLIVAN**

**THE WILL OF  
THE PEOPLE**



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THE WILL  
*of*  
THE PEOPLE

BY  
FRANCIS SULLIVAN

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# THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Reflections on an Unfinished Task

## CONTENTS

| Chap. |  | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| I     | A Strong Castle Without Windows.....                       | 3    |
| II    | The Penalty of a Low, or No Standard                       | 12   |
| III   | Superiorities and Inferiorities.....                       | 19   |
| IV    | Nationalism and Internationalism.....                      | 25   |
| V     | The State and Education.....                               | 33   |
| VI    | An Injurious Conception of the Functions of the State..... | 46   |
| VII   | Other Things We Forgot.....                                | 55   |
| VIII  | Patrons of Art and Letters.....                            | 62   |
| IX    | The Eternal in Time.....                                   | 70   |
| X     | The State and Religion.....                                | 78   |

**“Un livre est une lettre écrite à tous les amis  
inconnus que l'on a dans le monde.”**



# THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

## CHAPTER I

### A STRONG CASTLE WITHOUT WINDOWS

The world at large seems now more disposed than ever before to enter into an examination of the democratic form of government with a view to practice.

Many of the advantages of democracy are quite obvious. It is agreeable to the mind of man to conceive that he is governing himself. It adds a good deal of dignity to the part he plays in the world. He is, in truth, at length conceded to be a rational animal who may be entrusted with his own control. Surely there can be no disputing that democracy is the most flattering to the individual intelligence of any of the systems devised for the regulation of man in society.

Then again, democracy is plainly in harmony with a pronounced material well-being for a great many. This is apparent if one contrasts the distribution of riches created or acquired in the development of the north and south halves of the American continent. In the case of South America, under monarchy, great riches were accumulated, but their distribution was highly restricted, while in the peopling of North America, a republic, so very many have been admitted to share in its wealth that a common notion seems to prevail in Europe that every American is a nabob.

Abstractly considered, the prevalence of the will of the majority seems to be the most philosophic principle which can obtain in civil government. With so much that is attractive about it one must always approach the side of defect with a sympathetic interest.

And perhaps the chief failing of popular government, as we find it at present, will be a want of vitality. This will proceed not so much from the common faults which have been imputed to it, such as a tendency to dishonesty in public officials, a want of coherency in times of stress, or a childish fondness for change and novelty, but rather, chiefly, from an incapacity for *distinction*.

It sounds fanciful that a fault so apparently wiredrawn, so far removed from the actualities of sufficient food to eat, and clothes to wear, and houses to live in, and security at home and peace abroad—in a word, an objection so apparently effeminate—could be the greatest menace which threatens the richest and in many respects the most envied civilization in the world. Yet, such is our conviction and in what follows an endeavor has been made both to account for the presence in modern democracy of this peril and to lay before the reader proposed avenues of escape from a universal dominion of the commonplace and inferior.

People who concede the reality of the evil might say, "You have an easy solution. Substitute a monarchy." But there are doubtless many millions of us, who, granting the efficacy of such a remedy (which we are by no means prepared to do), will not listen to the advice. And if we should ever be brought to so fell a condition it would be only by the working of some deep, inexorable law of human nature, but not with our individual consents. For we are tainted with a passion for the democratic ideal, defective and partial as it may at present be. We have no desire to go back into the house of bondage. We are at bottom idealists—a republican is, in the very nature of things, the greatest idealist alive.

We cherish the notion in the abstract, we love it in the particular—of a man governing himself, being his own king and magistrate through the intellectualism of a ballot. To our minds, never did the philosophers of Greece, in that flowering time of the human spirit, nor never will the philosopher in any conceivable future be able to evolve any political notion which shall have attached to it so much dignity and intelligence as the democratic ideal. We would not consent to do away with democracy—we desire to further perfect democracy. We are persuaded that there are certain imperative demands of human nature which the democracy we possess does not appear capable of satisfying. But this is not to say that a reconstructed and perfected democracy would not satisfy them. We believe it would. And some of us, at least, are desirous of experimenting in order to see if such a result cannot be achieved.

While the philosophic principle of democracy, as we have said, appears to us forever beautiful, forever attractive, we are at the same time persuaded that the practical tendency of the rule of the many in modern societies has been toward the illiberal and commonplace. A calamity thus identified, we think, arises from such democracy having too much followed its line of least resistance. To this line of least resistance, the most definite characteristic of which is inactivity of the intellect, we would oppose as the sufficient remedy, mental culture. Not mental culture as furtively nibbled at by bewildered solitaries, but mental culture as the serious concern of the state.

We do not claim everything for culture. We do not affirm that it will heal the body or save the soul, but we do believe that culture is the chief source and fountain in human life of the *inter-*