EQUITABLE SOCIETY AND HOW TO CREATE IT

WARREN EDWIN BROKAW

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By WARREN EDWIN BROKAW

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"Real science lies in knowing what we should and what we should not believe, in knowing how the associated life of man should and should not be constituted."

LEO TOLSTOY, in *What Is Art?*

"Theory is the soul of practice."

Business Book-Keeping and Practice

"For mankind, these are crucial times. Wishing can do little. But thinking can lay hold upon the materials of the future and make a world in which humanity will be freed and enfranchised; . . ."

JOSEPH K. HART

"The land belongs to none and its fruits to all."

JEAN JACQUES ROSSEAU

INTRODUCTION

THE matter in this volume has been accumulating in my hands for thirty-five years. In 1916 I assembled it: from various articles I had written, some as early as 1892; from copies of letters written in personal correspondence; from oral arguments I had had with others, all patched together with newer matter. There was also considerable taken from the manuscript of a larger work on "The Science of Equity" which I had been compelled by circumstances to drop some eight years before. As a preparation for the larger work my wife and I had accumulated quite a cabinet of indexed, typewritten extracts from a very wide range of reading—being unable to afford to buy the books. From these I have taken many quotations.

Early in my propaganda career I learned the necessity for iteration and reiteration, in order to gain interested attention. There are so many things to attract attention that only the most insistent can succeed. This is my excuse for quoting so much from others. There is, also, the fact that many people demand "authority" in support of ideas presented by an unknown writer.

The idea which it is the aim of this volume to impress on readers is so simple that a very small book would be ample for its presentation were it not for the fact that most adult minds have previously accepted ideas which seem to conflict with it. This necessitates arguments to show the inadequacy of the other ideas. And since there are innumerable wrong ways of doing a thing, while usually only one right way, dealing with the others necessitates a large volume.

In December, 1917, my daughter, Vaughn, finished making a clean typewritten copy of this work, and we started *The Equitist* the first of January, 1918. A year later I was forced, through discussion in *The Equitist*, to abandon a long-held semi-singletax theory I had been advocating, and I revised the

manuscript, eliminating that and substituting the present proposition regarding the public revenues. Then Vaughn made a few typewritten copies of the corrected manuscript, some of which have been read by interested friends, all of whom urged publication. Since then I have both added to and taken from it, and have just finished "boiling it down" to its present size.

My interest in this subject dates back to my boyhood days. My father was a "Black Abolitionist," very active in his agitation, and I was born in the midst of it, before the civil war. In 1881 I left Illinois for the Dakotas in search of government land, after having figured out the impossibility of my ever being able to buy or rent a farm in Illinois by working for wages. On my way I was astonished to see thousands of acres of uninhabited prairie land in Iowa, and in western Minnesota I saw some large and luminous illustrations of tenant farming and rack-renting. From that time to this my chief object in life has been to do all I can to hasten the day when *equity* shall be established. That is the only "axe to grind" that I have. So I have always been ready to abandon any theory for a better one—and am yet. It is my most earnest hope that this will contribute substantially toward the earliest possible establishment of *equity*. Insofar as it does, I shall have my reward and satisfaction.

W. E. BROKAW.

Phoenix, Arizona
March 4, 1927.

I propose in this inquiry to *take nothing for granted*, but to bring even accepted theories to the test of first principles, and should they not stand the test, to freshly interrogate facts in the endeavor to discover their law. I propose to *beg no question*, to *shrink from no conclusion*, but to *follow Truth wherever it may lead* . . . If the conclusions that we reach run counter to our prejudices, *let us not flinch;* if they challenge institutions that have long been deemed wise and natural, *let us not turn back*.—Henry George.

(Reader, please note that throughout the quotations used in this book I do not follow the authors in their use of italics and capitals, but place the emphasis on passages to which I wish to call especial attention.—W. E. B.)

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EQUITABLE SOCIETY AND HOW TO CREATE IT

CHAPTER I

In What Direction to Go

That the conduct of individuals is determined largely by the conditions under which they live is as well established as any axiom of political science. J. Allen Smith.

To make people industrious, prudent, skillful, and intelligent, they must be relieved from want.

Henery George

P. Kropotkin: "We saw that a new form of society is germinating in the civilized nations, and must take the place of the old one: A society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and brains to those who choose to employ them in a haphazard way, but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest sum possible of well-being for all, while full, free scope will be left for every individual initiative. This society will be composed of a multitude of associations, federated for all the purposes which require federation: trade federations for production of all sorts,—agricultural, industrial, intellectual, artistic; communes for consumption, making provision for dwellings, gas works, supplies of food, sanitary arrangements, etc.; federations of communes among themselves, and federations of communes with trade organizations; and finally, wider groups covering all the country, or several countries, composed of men who collaborate for the satisfaction of such economic, intellectual, artistic, and moral needs as are not limited to a given territory. All these will combine di-

rectly, by means of free agreements between them, just as the railway companies or the postal departments of different countries cooperate now, without having a central railway or postal government,—even though the former are actuated by merely egotistic aims, and the latter belong to different and often hostile states; or as the meteorologists, the Alpine clubs, the lifeboat stations in Great Britain, the cyclists, the teachers, and so on, combine for all sorts of work in common, for intellectual pursuits, or simply for pleasure. There will be full freedom for the development of new forms of production, invention, and organization; individual initiative will be encouraged, and the tendency toward uniformity and centralization will be discouraged. Moreover, this society will not be crystalized into certain unchangeable forms, but will continually modify its aspect, because it will be a living, evolving organism; no need of government will be felt, because free agreement and federation take its place in all those functions which governments consider as theirs at the present time, and because, the causes of conflict being reduced in number, those conflicts which may still arise can be submitted to arbitration.

"Such is the future—already possible, already realizable. And what prevents us from turning our backs to the present and from marching towards that future, or, at least, making the first steps towards it, is not the 'failure of science,' but first of all our crass cupidity—the cupidity of the man who killed the hen that was laying golden eggs—and then our laziness of mind—that mental cowardice so carefully nurtured in the past.

"For centuries science and so-called practical wisdom have said to man: 'It is good to be rich, to be able to satisfy, at least, your material needs; but the only means to be rich is to so train your mind and capacities as to be able to compel other men—slaves, serfs or wage-earners—to make these riches for you. You have no choice. Either you must stand in the ranks of the peasants and the artisans who, whatsoever economists and moralists may promise them in the future, are now practically doomed to starve after each bad crop or during their strikes, and to be shot down by their own sons the moment they lose patience. Or you must train your faculties so as to be a military commander of the masses,

or to be accepted as one of the wheels of the governing machinery of the state, or to become a manager of men in commerce or industry.' For many centuries there was no other choice, and men followed that advice, without finding in it happiness, either for themselves and their own children, or for those whom they pretended to preserve from worse misfortunes.

"But modern knowledge has another issue to offer to thinking men. It tells them that in order to be rich they need not take bread from the mouths of others; but that the more rational outcome would be a society in which men, with the work of their own hands and intelligence, and by the aid of machinery already invented and to be invented, should themselves create all imaginable riches. Techniques and science will not be lagging behind if production takes such a direction. Guided by observation, analysis and experiment, they will answer all possible demands. They will reduce the time which is necessary for producing wealth to any desired amount, so as to leave to everyone as much leisure as he or she may ask for. They surely cannot guarantee happiness, because happiness depends as much, or even more, upon the individual himself as upon his surroundings. But they guarantee, at least, the happiness that can be found in the full and varied exercise of the different capacities of the human being, in work that need not be overwork, and in the consciousness that one is not endeavoring to base his own happiness upon the misery of others."

The earth is normally bountiful. Abundance is the normal condition. Scarcity is nowhere a marked characteristic of this universe. This earth contains, in and upon its surface, enough and to spare of all that is necessary to the highest attainment of human satisfaction. The traditions of all peoples tell us of a golden age when abundance was not only the normal condition of the earth, but of its inhabitants. That was a time when not only all other life was abundant, but human life, itself, was abundant. The earth was then far more densely inhabited than it has ever been since. The catastrophe which turned the earth from a golden age—a garden of Eden—into a struggling, warring age—a deluged world—swept away vast numbers of all forms of life, and left an environment of comparative scarcity which set human

beings to fiercely struggling for an existence. Modern facilities for intercommunication and transportation, however, make it possible for all of the resources of the earth to be accessible to all. The trouble is, that these resources are not thus accessible.

"The tendencies toward economic and social equality which . . . were marked features of our public-land era, seem fast vanishing into history," said one writer recently. In spite of this change of tendencies he seemed to think that "we are making use of our political equality to try to gain greater social and economic equality."

Our "public-land era" has almost passed. Not only so, but the era of comparatively free land in other countries has also almost passed. Our children cannot escape the economic pressure by going in search of freer lands, as some of us did when we were young. This fact is forcing us to question the unrestricted ownership of land, and leads that writer to say: "The process and factors in distribution from primary producer to ultimate consumer are being closely scrutinized." And since, as another writer puts it "an appalling number of 'the ignorant' have the effrontery to be able to reflect very efficiently," we may be able to get some suggestions worth considering by attempting such a scrutiny.

The dependence of the masses upon the classes is the result of land and money systems which deny equal freedom in the use of the earth; and this is at the root of all industrial troubles.

What is the gist of all the social, political and other problems which concern persons in their association with each other? Is it not the problem of the satisfaction of human desires?

It is a very common mistake for persons to substitute a part of a statement for the whole. The fact that motion tends to follow the line of least resistance is none the less apparent in the actions of human beings than in any other modes of motion. But when that statement is applied to persons it must not be forgotten that its expression must fit its application. When so stated it reads thus: Persons seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion. That is, persons, in seeking to satisfy their desires, tend to follow the line of least resistance and greatest attraction. There is absolutely no exception to this rule. They always have and always will.

Human beings exert themselves solely for the purpose of satisfying human desires. Test this statement by trying to find a human action that cannot be reduced to this basis. A mother goes hungry to save food for her child. She has exerted her power of self control in order to satisfy her desire to supply the needs of her child.

The point to note is that the line of least resistance depends upon the nature of their desires. If I row up stream instead of drifting with the current, it is because drifting will not take me to the satisfaction of my desires no matter how easy drifting is, while rowing will, regardless of the difficulty of rowing. Following the line of least resistance does not mean doing the thing that is easiest to do regardless of results. It means following the easiest line to the accomplishment of the results desired. That is, the line that appears to be the easiest—but appearances are sometimes deceitful.

The desire for life dominates all healthy living things. The dominant desire of every babe is for those things which sustain and develop its life. Those things political economists call wealth, insofar as applicable to human babes. They are the products of human work. That desire remains dominant until the child reaches that age and condition which brings to the fore the desire for esteem—which is, primarily, the desire for association.

Every person has many desires, but among them there is always some one which is dominant, whether it be so recognized or not. As wealth—food, shelter, clothing, etc.—is absolutely necessary to our very existence as persons on this earth, it must be acquired, to some extent, before desires for other things can be considered. When it is sufficiently supplied to allow time for other considerations, the desire to get the approval of others—their esteem—becomes the dominant desire. We are all social in our instincts, and in order to enjoy any degree of companionship with our fellows we must be, in some degree, agreeable to them. Their intimacy, their companionship—even their contact—depends upon the degree of their esteem for us. It is natural, therefore, that we should seek to do those things which will win their esteem. Whenever and wherever wealth-getting is difficult for the many, there wealth-getting becomes the dominant desire. There the "lucky" few, who find wealth-getting easy, find that the

possession of wealth brings with it the apparent esteem of their fellows. What matters it that much of such esteem is defective at heart; it has the outward semblance. The wealthy may always have a following, while the poor, no matter how virtuous, may often be ostracized. Hence it is that, wherever wealth-getting is difficult for the masses, not only is wealth-getting the dominant desire, but it becomes the means for the gratification of the desire for esteem, when the latter becomes dominant in those relieved from the fear of want.

On the contrary, wherever and whenever wealth-getting is easy for all—where none need ever fear want—the desire for esteem becomes the dominant desire of all, and can find its gratification only in meriting esteem. Where wealth-getting is easy for all, none will either esteem or appear to esteem anyone more on account of the mere acquisition of wealth. Thus the same desires which now drive all humanity into a fierce struggle for wealth will, by our making wealth-getting easy for all, force us all into as energetic, albeit not fierce, efforts to merit the esteem of our fellows. This will then be found only in serving them; in doing something of permanent benefit to them. This transformation will appear to many as a change in human nature, but will be, in reality, but a change in the direction of human activities, guided by existing desires.

The very same characteristics which make some persons conspicuous in evil doing, would make them equally conspicuous in well doing, if the direction of the activities of all was turned towards seeking to merit esteem instead of toward the acquisition of wealth and power.

Remembering this, we should expect to effect changes in our customs through changes in our environment. Human nature has not changed since the dawn of history, nor can we change it.

Brand Whitlock said: "I think that much of what we call badness arises out of conditions for which the individual is not responsible, that men are good largely as they have the chance and the incentive to be good, and that it is our duty to see to it that all men have this chance and this incentive multiplied more and more."

When wealth-getting is made easy for all, the reverence for those who are able to exercise the power of getting some-

thing for nothing will give place to appreciation of those who can do the most for the general enlightenment and progress of their fellows. The generally prevalent desire for ostentation has its roots in the power of enabling some to get without giving—to command services without giving services. The power to obtain one's satisfactions by one's own efforts develops a wholesome respect for, or appreciation of, those who acquire by that means. The power to appropriate, on the other hand, develops an unwholesome admiration, or reverence, for those who thus acquire. People naturally imitate those they admire. As the power to appropriate can accumulate faster than the power to produce, and grows by what it feeds on, it becomes the dominant power—the power most imitated.

"Is not the selfish and even cruel aspect which belongs to our great mechanical works, to mills, railways, and machinery, the affect of the mercenary impulses which these works obey?" said R. W. Emerson.

Whatever tends to enable some persons to satisfy their desires at the expense of other persons' work—thus separating the satisfactions from their producers—will develop inharmony in human relations. Look at it from any point of view you please, you will find this the starting point of all the perplexing problems of human association.

"The ingenuity of burglars and cracksmen," said *Current Mechanics,* "has been a large factor in the development of safes and vaults. If no one would steal; if human poverty and greed did not compel men to defy the law, then it would mean nothing to leave a few hundred thousand or any amount of money lying about where it could easily be stolen. But wealth must be hidden behind strong doors, for it offers too great a temptation."

But, as the *Success* magazine said, "We are learning something now about the criminal, and we no longer regard him as a bad man, to start with, but rather as a young fellow without an education, or a training, or a chance. The man who holds you up on the public highway, or becomes attached to your watch in a crowd, may be a grown up child who never had a friendly word, and who was working in a factory when he should have been at play. Modern penologists agree that the average criminal is *made, not born,* and that what he

needs is not the jail, which only makes him worse, but education and kindness and mothering."

"For it is involuntary poverty," said Brand Whitlock, "and its direct and indirect effects, that produce crime, and our duty is to make involuntary poverty impossible. To do this we must do away with monopoly and with privilege, and this, as I fully recognize, is a tremendous task, for there are far more monopolies than many suppose. But with these privileges done away, every one will have a chance to do good and to be good, and then, and not until then, will the condition which we all desire come to pass."

"Human slavery will be eradicated," said Luke North, "when the people feel—in their heads, and hearts—that they won't stand it any longer . . . It's easier and pleasanter to create and produce than to swindle. People don't like to rob each other, they're driven to it by the pressure of want, real or threatened, until it becomes a habit. Out of this bread strife is born most of the enmity, envy, and deceit of the world—out of the Fear engendered by the strife. With Fear gone from life a new psychology will come—almost a new race of people . . . free land will produce a new psychology and the questions that now perplex will assume other proportions."

Human nature is not "imperfect". It is perfect. The imperfections we see are not in human nature, but in the manifestations of that nature; and these manifestations are imperfect because the environment produced by our non-conformity to nature's orderly trend—in our adjustment of human relations—turns human activities into abnormal channels. All that is needed is to change the direction of its activities from abnormal to normal.

All persons are naturally good; the bad are unnaturally so. All human evil is the result of human error. Nature knows no evil. Every infant is good, naturally. We are the products of our environment. Make that right and all will be well. Make that wrong and all will be ill. We have made it wrong. Our first and most urgent duty is to make it over again, and make it right.

Persons, as well as plants, tend to follow the line of least resistance and greatest attraction in their activities. Luther Burbank selects one or two plants from among thousands or

millions and then destroys—burns up—the rest, thus freeing the selected ones from an environment of their influence. Such a method cannot be applied to persons. And since all changes of environment of persons must be made by their own conscious or unconscious efforts, ideal results can only be attained by first having ideal conceptions realized—conceptions consistent with conditions which the orderly trend of the forces of nature makes possible. This requires much more serious and careful thought than is necessary for the development of new or better forms of plant life.

One of the most fruitful causes of impotency of reform efforts is the almost, if not quite, universal assumption that the persistence of any tendency is proof of the normal nature of that tendency; as, for instance, the tendency of interest, rent, profit, intemperance, licentiousness, vice, crime, etc., to persist even under the strictest legal prohibitions. Reformers, misled by this persistence, have fallen into the error of supposing that it is due to some characteristic either of human nature or of natural law. Yet it is clearly within the power of reason to prove that every one of the tendencies named springs from some failure to conform human institutions to nature's orderly trend.

Natural law is but the observed orderly trend of nature. The forces operate in certain ways, and the invariability of their trend is the observed fact which is called law. All that men do is to discover various ways of exerting themselves in relation to that law. They cannot regulate the law, for it is invariable. Every discovery or invention is but the uncovering of another way in which the law manifests. The law of gravity operates just the same whether we make a use of it which injures us or one which benefits. In neither case do we regulate or control the law. We merely so conform to it as to get certain results. If we do this intelligently it is because we have learned enough of the law to know that such exertion will produce such results.

What do we do when we "harness and control" steam and electricity? We merely exert ourselves in conformity with the known trend of these forces, instead of ignorantly exerting ourselves otherwise. We do not control the law, or harness it. We only determine particular manifestations of it by adapting ourselves to its invariable trend.

Hence, altogether regardless of the theological conception of the law, those are right who believe that "the varied economic activities of the individuals in society would be adequately controlled and harmonized with the general interests of society, if statute or human law did not interfere with" not "natural or divine law," as J. Allen Smith put it in his excellent work, *The Spirit of American Government,* but "the individual's conformity to natural law."

If we sufficiently understood natural law, social institutions could be made to so conform thereto as to entirely do away with the apparent need of "the state as an agency for controlling and organizing industrial forces." Underlying the whole problem of human association is the pecuniary incentive. So long as that incentive remains dominant the problem will remain to be solved. But the dominance of that incentive is not a necessary manifestation of the operation of natural law. The fundamental law is the law of motion: that motion tends to follow the line of least resistance and greatest attraction. In its application to human affairs we say that persons tend to follow the line of least resistance to the satisfaction of their desires. But their desires are unnumbered, and often conflicting. The nature of their environment will determine which desire will be dominant. The pecuniary desire is dominant in civilization because civilized society has made wealth-getting (the getting of the things which human work produces for the satisfaction of human desires) so difficult for the majority that many fail even to get enough to sustain life.

As is stated in the *Final Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations,* ". . . decent wages raise wage earners to a plane of thought and action where all their acts and mental processes must no longer be directed toward a desperate struggle for the very right of themselves and families to live."

As Brand Whitlock said, "I have already tried broadly to indicate how the necessities of making a living under our present conditions have affected the customs and habits of men . . . How it is not fair to lay the blame of this condition on the proprietors, for they cannot help it. They, like the men and women who work for them, are in the grip of the commercial machine, and cannot escape . . . Men cannot be forced to be good, but they will become good if given the