

**THE LIFE OF
SOCIETY: A
GENERAL VIEW**

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The Life of Society: A General View by Edmund Woodward Brown

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A GENERAL VIEW

By EDMUND WOODWARD BROWN

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INTRODUCTION.

WHILE social science is interested in all manner of social facts it also values and classifies those which, though in form and influence they have varied immensely according to people and age, are yet in their essence universal. In the working of society past and present the universal part has a system which the mind can abstract. It is pleasant, and should be profitable, to see this order in the life of the many men and bodies of men, the many parts of society and bodies of parts, the many movements and groups of movements; to see the continuance and co-existence of the parts; to see the working and co-working and interworking of the forces.

So great is the complexity of social phenomena, and so common has been the idea that society is merely a field of capricious will, that not so much attention has been paid here as elsewhere to regularity, order, and science. The possibility of social science is denied; its work and nature are hazy in the minds of even well informed persons, while many have thought it but a cloud-land, worthless and valueless. Yet for generations a science of society has been emerging, though many thinkers have been unconscious of the fact, many indifferent to it, and still others opposed to it, imagining it to be against theological or other truth. There is, however, of late years, an increasing tendency to study society with care and accuracy.

In this work I have attempted a systematic, but not an exhaustive study of society; for it is impossible for one person to follow out so inexhaustible a subject in all its bearings. He cannot even study to advantage the de-

tail of a single department—the political or the material, the intellectual or the religious. In the detail demanded by modern civilization, political economy, for example, is too vast for more than a general view by one person and must have its specialties. But for the study of special departments of social life a previous general view may be desirable. It may even be well at first to escape from details and confine ourselves to generals. The lesser matters of society may be left out of consideration for awhile, as disturbing elements, and the attention be profitably confined to the greater matters. I am not intending to treat of anything but the barest general causes, characteristics, and spheres of society. In so doing it is difficult to get down into particulars, as well as undesirable, for the outline masses would then be lost. Though the subject be immense and each part can have a treatise by itself, yet a general treatment in a single volume is possible. As we can briefly go over the general outlines of a mountain range or a continent, or the general geography of the earth, so we can do with society. We may discriminate between the general and the particular elements of society; between those which are universal and those which are local; between the points that are common to all people and those that are peculiar to certain people.

My object is to obtain as deep and adequate a general conception of society as possible, the society of any township or any country of the world to-day or the whole world of society in the past. I wish to find an explanation of society that will suit wherever society is in any country or has been in any country or age. I want to get a general view of the constant part of every society. I want to evidence and illustrate this by social and historic facts, drawn from the wide range of society in the past and the present.

Our study has its difficulties. It is difficult to generalize about the ten thousand facts of social life. It is diffi-