

ECONOMICS OF LIBERTY

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Economics of Liberty by John Beverley Robinson

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JOHN BEVERLEY ROBINSON

**ECONOMICS
OF LIBERTY**

Economics of Liberty

by

John Beverley Robinson



Herman Kuehn
31 Prince Street
Minneapolis

1916

This book is intended to be a brief and clear statement of the system of social organization first enunciated by the illustrious Proudhon a century ago.

His works, although of unparalleled brilliance, are so voluminous that it is often difficult to extract his meaning from the mass of controversy that envelopes the fundamental thoughts.

If any are persuaded by these pages of the efficacy of liberty to accomplish social order, justice and prosperity, it will sufficiently gratify

The Author.

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SOCIETY

WHAT is Society?

Everybody nowadays is talking or writing about Society—society in the abstract—general human society. Social service, the social uplift—all the phrases, half discredited in advance by the fluency with which they drop from our lips—what do these really mean?

Wise professors of sociology treat of “the housing of the poor,” “the problem of the unemployed,” devise futile formulas, and pile up mountains of barren statistics, while no one in recent times has uttered even an outline of a theory as to the essential constitution of that Society of which Sociology, by its very name, proclaims itself the science.

We habitually regard the headless, formless chaos of absurdities in human relations, in the midst of which we live, as Society, but we are without an intellectual norm to guide us: we have evolved as yet no concept with which to rationalize the observed facts.

Or, if such a norm has been proclaimed in the past, it has not been shouted in the ears of the people so that they must hear it. It has fallen out of sight and hearing, and must be reproclaimed in words intelligible and unmistakable, until it gains acceptance.

For, without such a norm, all our painstaking researches into facts are fruitless; as were the researches of alchemy before chemistry

with its scales and atomic theories rationalized it. Some generalized conception, at the least some working hypothesis, is essential, before the dry statistics, that we so laboriously gather, can have any meaning or lead to any conclusion.

Let us try to clarify our thoughts, and to build up some clear, crystalline conception.

In the first place, what do we mean by a society in the little? Societies abound today—societies for the propagation of this and the prohibition of that—all sorts of societies, and for all sorts of purposes. What then is a society?

A society is evidently a combination of two or more persons in order to unite their efforts toward achieving a common end: evidently also such a combination must be entirely voluntary on the part of those who combine.

It is possible to secure combined effort without the assent of them whose efforts are combined. When a white man, armed with a repeating rifle, compels a band of unarmed savages to obtain ivory for him, he combines their efforts indeed, but we call such a combination slavery, not association.

For every association it is essential that the efforts of the associated should be exerted voluntarily; and such a voluntary association it is that constitutes a society.

If two men ask a third to show them the way, and he willingly accompanies them, they are associated: if, being two to one, they