

**EXPERIMENTS IN
GOVERNMENT AND
THE ESSENTIALS OF
THE CONSTITUTION**

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Experiments in Government and the Essentials of the Constitution by Elihu Root

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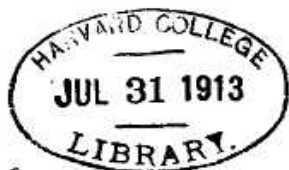
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PREFACE

The familiar saying that nothing is settled until it is settled right expresses only a half truth. Questions of general and permanent importance are seldom finally settled. A very wise man has said that "short of the multiplication table there is no truth and no fact which must not be proved over again as if it had never been proved, from time to time." Conceptions of social rights and obligations and the institutions based upon them continue unquestioned for long periods as postulates in all discussions upon questions of government. Whatever conduct conforms to them is assumed to be right. Whatever is at variance with them is assumed to be wrong. Then a time comes when, with apparent suddenness, the ground of discussion shifts and the postulates are denied. They cease to be accepted

without proof and the whole controversy in which they were originally established is fought over again.

The people of the United States appear now to have entered upon such a period of re-examination of their system of government. Not only are political parties denouncing old abuses and demanding new laws, but essential principles embodied in the Federal Constitution of 1787, and long followed in the constitutions of all the states, are questioned and denied. The wisdom of the founders of the Republic is disputed and the political ideas which they repudiated are urged for approval.

I wish in these lectures to present some observations which may have a useful application in the course of this process,

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There are two separate processes going on among the civilized nations at the present time. One is an assault by socialism against the individualism which underlies the social system of western civilization. The other is an assault against existing institutions upon the ground that they do not adequately protect and develop the existing social order. It is of this latter process in our own country that I wish to speak, and I assume an agreement, that the right of individual liberty and the inseparable right of private property which lie at the foundation of our modern civilization ought to be maintained.

The conditions of life in America have changed very much since the Constitution of the United States was adopted. In 1787 each state entering into the Federal Union had pre-