

Manifesto

Josiah Warren

1841

An impression has gone abroad that I am engaged in forming societies. This is a very great mistake, which I feel bound to correct.

Those who have heard or read anything from me on the subject, know that one of the principal points insisted on is, the forming of societies or any other artificial combinations IS the first, greatest, and most fatal mistake ever committed by legislators and by reformers. That all these combinations require the surrender of the natural sovereignty of the INDIVIDUAL over her or his person, time, property and responsibilities, to the government of the combination. That this tends to prostrate the individual—To reduce him to a mere piece of a machine; involving others in responsibility for his acts, and being involved in responsibilities for the acts and sentiments of his associates; he lives & acts, without proper control over his own affairs, without certainty as to the results of his actions, and almost without brains that he dares to use on his own account; and consequently never realizes the great objects for which society is professedly formed.

Some portion, at least, of those who have attended the public meetings, know that EQUITABLE COMMERCE is founded on a principle exactly opposite to combination; this principle may be called that of Individuality. It leaves every one in undisturbed possession of his or her natural and proper sovereignty over its own person, time, property and responsibilities; & no one is acquired or expected to surrender any “portion” of his natural liberty by joining any society whatever; nor to become in any way responsible for the acts or sentiments of any one but himself; nor is there any arrangement by which even the whole body can exercise any government over the person, time property or responsibility of a single individual.

Combinations and all the institutions built upon them are the inventions of Man; and consequently, partake of more or less of man’s shortsightedness and other imperfections; while EQUITABLE COMMERCE is a simple development of principles, which, although new to the public, are as old as the creation, and will be as durable.

This understanding is very natural; because, all attempts at radical reformation known to have been founded on combinations; the failure of all these has destroyed confidence, and the public, not being aware of any other principle, conclude that this is another proposal of the same kind and must fail like the rest. I respect their judgment and believe with them, that every attempt to improve their social condition by the formation of societies or any artificial combination (however ingeniously devised, however purely intended or honestly conducted,) must and will defeat their own objects and disappoint all who are engaged in them.

The failure of the experiments on the community system in New Harmony during the two years trial from 1825 to 1827, sufficiently proved this to my mind, & led to the conviction that the process of combination is not capable of working out the great objects of society; but, the opposite principle, that of Individuality and the process of DISCONNECTION,¹ after much close and severe investigation were found to possess or to lead to all the redeeming and regenerating powers necessary for the complete solution of the great social problem.—Indeed they appeared to promise too much to believe, too much hope; so much, that the discoverer (if we must so call him) dare not communicate his thoughts to his intimate acquaintances for fear of being accounted insane. His only course, therefore, was to prove everything in PRACTICE previously to bringing it before the public.

A whole new course of investigations and experiments were then commenced; the first of which was the “Time Store” in Cincinnati which was opened in May, 1827. This was conducted three years, when it was wound up for the purpose of carrying the principles into all the commerce of life; and the interval between that time and the present has been employed (as far as private circumstances would permit) either in further developments or in preparation for them.

The principles have been applied to the management and education of children, which go to show the radical mistake and the great cause of defeat on this important subject.

The principles have also been applied to the purchase and sale of land & almost all other kinds of property, and to the interchange of almost all kinds of labor including that of merchants, lawyers, physicians, teachers, the conductor of a boarding house, etc., through every step of which, the sovereignty of the individual was strictly preserved and invariably respected. No legislation of any description assumed control over the individual in any case whatsoever; and such was the complete individuality of action that hundreds dealt at the Time Store without understanding much of its principles or its objects; but they perceived that it was their interest to do so, thus demonstrating that the business of the community can be brought into this condition by a natural and irresistible process; without combination, without organisation, without laws, without government, without the surrender of any “portion” of the natural liberty of the individual; demonstrating also that reformation need not wait till the world becomes learned : but the practical operation constitutes a process of re-education which no one can estimate without experience, and which the learned are most backward in acquiring.

Such, too has been the complete individuality of action throughout all the experiments that although hundreds have taken some part in them, they are in no way distinguished as a sect, a party or a society; the public in general do not and will not know them; excepting so far as each individual chooses to identify himself or herself with these principles.

¹ The great principle of human elevation was perceived to be the SOVEREIGNTY OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL over his or her Person and Time and Property and Responsibilities. That this was impracticable where these were connected. DISCONNECTION, or Individualisation of these, therefore, appeared to be the process required. A habitual respect to this Individual Sovereignty, it was perceived, would constitute EQUITABLE moral commerce. The question then arose, how could this complete sovereignty of the individual over its own time and property be preserved through the process of exchanging them in the pecuniary commerce of society? This great point was settled by the idea of time for time, or Labor for Labor—DISCONNECTING all natural wealth from labor each pricing his own by what it Costs him; but not overstepping the natural bounds of his individuality by setting a price on the Value of his article or labor to the receiver of it. The DISCONNECTION of Cost from Value laid the foundation of Equitable pecuniary Commerce. This new commerce required a circulating medium DISCONNECTED from money of all kinds, and representing Labor only; and thus the laborer becomes EMANCIPATED from money and tyranny.

Public influence is the real government of the world. Printing makes this governing power; therefore, among the preparations for the general introduction of these subjects are a simplification of printing and printing apparatus which brings this mighty power to the fireside and within the capacities of almost any one of either sex who may choose to use it; thus is this and every other subject of real reformation rendered independent of the common press whose conductors are generally too much absorbed or too much interested in things as they are, too much under public influence or too superficial in their habits of thinking to do this subject justice in its commencement.

The experiments and preparations are now concluded, and the results are on record or in the possession of living witnesses, and are now becoming the groundwork of practical operations in this neighborhood. Those who wish to become acquainted with the subject can obtain the particulars at the public meetings or by reading THE EQUITABLE COMMERCE GAZETTE which is to be published for this purpose; but the following are some of the most prominent features of EQUITABLE COMMERCE.

It goes to establish a just and permanent principle of trade which puts an end to all serious fluctuations in prices and consequently, to all the insecurity and ruin which these fluctuations produce; and to build up those who are already ruined.

It tends to put a stop to all kinds of speculation.

It has a sound and rational circulating medium, a real and definite representative of wealth. It is based exclusively on labor as the only legitimate capital. This circulating medium has a natural tendency to lessen by degrees the value and the use of money, and finally to render it powerless; and consequently to sweep away all the crushing masses of fraud, iniquity, cruelty, corruption and imposition that are built upon it.

The circulating medium being issued only by those who labor, they would suddenly become invested with all the wealth and all the power; and those who did not labor, be they ever so rich now, would as suddenly become poor and powerless.

It opens the way to employment for those who want it, by simple arrangement which has a natural tendency to keep the supply in rational proportion to the demand.

It solves the great and difficult problem of machinery against labor. On this principle, in proportion as machinery throws workmen out of employment, it works for them; and the way is always open to a new employment, as equitable commerce abolishes profit on mystery, disregards the customary apprenticeships and brings all kinds of knowledge within the reach of those who want it.

The necessity of every one paying in his own labor for what he consumes, affords the only legitimate and effectual check to excessive luxury, which has so often ruined individuals, states and empires; and which has now brought almost universal bankruptcy upon us.

Equitable commerce furnishes no offices to be filled by the ambitious and aspiring, no possible chance for the elevation of some over the persons or property of others; there is, therefore, no temptation here for such persons; and they will not be found among the first to adopt EQUITABLE COMMERCE. It appeals, first, to the most oppressed, the humble, the down-trodden, & will first be adopted by them and by those who have no wish to live upon others, and by those whether among the rich or poor whose superior moral or intellectual qualities enable them to appreciate some of the unspeakable blessings that would result from such a state of human existence.

These are some of the most prominent features of EQUITABLE COMMERCE; and will be perceived that they are precisely the features which a great, redeeming revolution ought to possess

: but they are so extraordinary, so out of the common course and current of things that they will be denounced by some as visionary and impracticable. I am prepared for all this, and I am also prepared to prove that all the most important applications of the principles HAVE BEEN made; and have proved themselves sound beyond all successful contradictions; and to show that upon these principles, it is perfectly practicable for almost any person to begin at once to enjoy some of the advantages herein set forth; and by degrees to emancipate himself or herself from the crushing iniquity and suffering of (what is called) civilized society; and this without joining any society or in any other way surrendering any "portion" of his or her natural and "inalienable" sovereignty over their person, time or property, and without becoming in any way responsible for the act or sentiments of others who may be transacting business on these principles.

JOSIAH WARREN
New Harmony, Nov. 27, 1841.

It has now become a very common sentiment, that there is some deep and radical wrong somewhere, and that legislators have proved themselves incapable of discovering, or, of remedying it.

With all due deference to other judgments, I have undertaken to point out what seems to constitute this wrong and its natural, legitimate and efficient remedies; and shall continue to do so wherever and whenever the subject receives that attention and respect to which its unspeakable importance appears to entitle it; and it is hoped that some, who are capable of correct reasoning will undertake to investigate, and, (if, they can find a motive,) to oppose EQUITABLE COMMERCE; and thereby discover and expose the utter imbecility—the surprising weakness of any opposition that can be brought against it. Opposition, in order to be noticed must be confined to this subject, and its natural tendencies: DISCONNECTED with all others, and all merely personal considerations.

I decline all noisy, wordy, confused, and personal controversies. This subject is presented for calm study and honest enquiry; and, after having placed it (as I intend to do) fairly before the public, shall leave it to be estimated by each individual according to the particular measure of understanding, and shall offer no violence to his individuality by any attempt to restrain, or to urge him beyond it.

J.W.

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