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LIBERTY EQUALITY FRATERNITY

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What has happened? This question is being pressed throughout the world by a startled and perplexed generation. It is asked not only by philosophers and intellectual leaders, but by millions of men and women of every sort and type who are not scholars and who make no claim to scholarship. It is being asked in every land. Interest in this question is profound, alike in Europe, in Asia, in Africa and in the Americas.

It was no less an authority than Gibbon who said of Tacitus that he was the first of historians who applied the science of philosophy to the study of facts.¹ The time has come to do whatever may lie in our power to learn the lessons taught by Tacitus and by Gibbon. The one outstanding philosopher in the world of today, the Italian Benedetto Croce, has just now published a volume of absorbing interest which offers the best possible approach to an understanding of what is really going on in this twentieth-century world.² A reading of this remarkable book will go far toward giving to men and women of today an insight into the forces which are at work in the world and a comprehension of their significance and of how, if at all, they may be controlled.

¹Gibbon, Edward, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. (London: Methuen and Company, 1896). Volume I, p. 121.

²Croce, Benedetto, *History as the Story of Liberty*. (New York: Norton and Company, 1941).

The shock of these happenings has been so great that vast numbers have been stunned by it. What they had supposed to be well-founded faith in controlling principles of thought and of morals, of social, of economic and of political organization, is treated with disdain and contempt. The rule of reason has been displaced by that of cruel and merciless brute force, while the precepts of morals and the ideals of religious faith are disregarded entirely. The great religions of the world are despised and assailed for the reason that they, each and all, call for faith in a God, an overruling Providence, who does not happen to come under the jurisdiction of any present-day despot, but must, if He exists at all, be that despot's rival and competitor. Moreover, the ruling agency of these relentless despots is irrational and violent emotion. It uses as its battle-cry: "We do not know where we are going—come along!" It has been clever enough to take possession of ardent and ambitious youth by its absolute control of the schools and the process of education and by the elimination of a score of the world's historic universities with that freedom of thought and of expression which is now more than two hundred years old. By powerful and most ingenious military organization and equipment these new animal forces have conquered one civilized and free people after another. These conquered peoples, being deprived of the instruments of war and of the capacity to produce them, are helpless to resist the armed forces which serve not only as their police, but as their rulers, both local and national. In short, we are learning how easy it may be to conquer and to rule the world if religion and morals are thrown to the winds,

and if the whole of the world's instrumentalities in the making and use of armed force are confined to the governments of the ruling despots.

Had it been predicted that the rapid development of liberal thought and policy which became so obvious in the seventeenth century, which reached its age of enlightenment in the eighteenth and which could record the achievements of the English, the American and the French revolutions, would be followed in another century or two by the appalling reaction which now everywhere confronts us, the prophet would have found himself without believers and without honor in his own country. Of all the manifestations of this reaction, none has been more startling or more ominous than the formal renunciation and denunciation of that truly great motto, *LIBERTÉ ÉGALITÉ FRATERNITÉ*, by those who for the time being are in position to speak for the French people. One might think that it would have seemed sufficient to offer new interpretation to these words, but to disavow them completely and to have them removed from the hundreds of public buildings on which they had so long been carved, simply passes comprehension. Incidentally, it reveals an obvious lack of a sense of humor.

What is it which has made possible and caused these literally preposterous acts? The only answer can be that they are the result of acceptance, willing or unwilling, of a doctrine of social organization which would substitute permanent class groups and distinctions for that form of free and orderly social, economic and political organization which represents and reflects the spirit and the ideals of a true liberalism. Since it is

plainly impossible to go back, either in France or elsewhere, to a ruling class of landowners or inherited nobility, this can only mean the intention to set up by force a state of fixed and permanent economic, social and political classes to displace a state of free men to whom every opportunity for improvement, for distinction and for service would be open. It is grotesque to call this a New Order. In all essentials it is one of the oldest orders that human history records. This indicates, once more, how important it is for those who would guide their fellow men, to be in possession both of a map and a compass.

In their present form, these doctrines reflect and would apply the teachings which were pressed upon the world nearly a century ago by Karl Marx and the group of which he was a ruling member. One has only to read the story of the life of Marx at Cologne, in Paris, in Brussels and in London to see to how great an extent what he said and wrote was the outcome of that spirit of envy, hatred and malice by which he was surrounded throughout his life. Indeed, all attempts and plans to suppress or to limit individual accomplishment on other than moral grounds have this same foundation. It may be Communism, it may be Nazism or it may be the less extreme Fascism, but each and all reflect and embody that spirit of envy which is the unworthy result of observing the rise in the world of others than one's self.

Of course, these attempts at restriction, compulsion and despotism are all advanced on grounds of public interest and public advantage. It is the common man, so-called, the ordinary man, who is to be protected by

them. The fact is, however, that what is being attempted would have just the opposite effect. It would sentence the individual, however talented, however ambitious or however competent, to remain in the group or class into which he was born. It would stop all true progress and substitute mechanical mass production for individual originality, achievement and high human service.

It is moral principles and moral ideals, and those alone, by which an individual's work in the world should be limited. Any limitation imposed by sheer force without regard to moral principles is reactionary in the extreme, as well as destructive of all excellence. Instead of being in the interest of the great mass of the people, it is distinctly and violently against that interest. It would destroy the very foundations upon which free institutions rest and would substitute some one of the many forms of despotism for that free government through public opinion which we have come to know as democracy. Under such a system of social, economic and political organization and government, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity would all disappear. When Voltaire wrote that "It is inevitable that mankind should be divided into two classes with many subdivisions—the oppressors and the oppressed," he turned his back upon the rule of moral principle and assumed a world where selfishness and force alone were in control.

Croce points out that the German philosopher Hegel was the author of the famous statement that history is the history of Liberty.³ The story is a long and fascinating one, since it reveals the power of the wish for

³*Op. cit.*, p. 59.

Liberty and the skill with which, in one form or another, the rule of Liberty was strengthened through the centuries. It makes it plain that, as was said by Montesquieu, "Liberty does not consist in doing what one pleases . . . Liberty can only consist in being able to do what one ought to do." This great struggle reached its victorious climax as the eighteenth century drew to its close, when the people of what was to become the United States of America formulated the Bill of Rights and incorporated it in the newly adopted Federal Constitution, and when shortly thereafter the French people, acting through their Constituent Assembly at Versailles in 1789, drew up as their guiding principles the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The English people had begun still earlier, although with less formality, to write modern history in this field of thought and action.

Today probably no word, unless it be Democracy, is used so carelessly and often with so little understanding, as the word Liberty. It is fundamental that Liberty is not a grant by government, but that government is a delegation of power by people who have Liberty, and that this government must always be subject to their control. It is the chief business of a free people, and their greatest responsibility, to see to it that the government which they have set up does not, under one pretense or another, invade the reserved field of Liberty and restrict it in a manner which the free people themselves have never authorized or contemplated. In a democracy the state and government are wholly distinct. The state is the field of reserved Liberty plus the field of government. State and government can

be identical only when Liberty has wholly disappeared. The constant struggle of those who are, consciously or unconsciously, enemies of Liberty is to increase, even to multiply, the function and authority of government. Education, on the other hand, is the instrumentality by which the people are to be taught and trained to use so wisely their opportunities in the field of Liberty that the public interest is constantly carried forward constructively and helpfully, without inviting or permitting government to invade the field of reserved Liberty. The notion that all governments in what we call democracies are truly representative of the whole people and that their every act is to be accepted by the people without discussion, is most unreasonable. Theoretically, in a democratically organized state, government represents the will of the majority of the people, but, in fact, as very little study of election statistics will show, what government too often represents is really the influence of small, well-organized, persistent and frequently self-seeking minority groups. The political history of the American people abounds in illustrations of this fact. Some of them are familiar, but many of them, having taken place beneath the surface, have been known but to the few. Actually, in our federal system of government the one and only representative of the whole people and the only one chosen by them is the President of the United States. Senators chosen from and by the several states and representatives in Congress chosen from and by the various congressional districts are in many cases brought forward by very small but stubborn and ambitious groups, and carried through to election by a vote of only some 10 per cent to 30 per

cent of the entire possible vote of the state or district which they then claim to represent. This is one reason why calm, dispassionate and non-partisan consideration of problems of outstanding public interest and importance is so often impossible, since the attention of members of the federal legislature is almost wholly fixed on those matters which are urged upon them persistently—and often with threats—by highly organized and self-seeking minorities. It is this habit which throws light on what Jefferson called “the morbid rage of debate.”

The chief problem which confronts the lover of Liberty is the preservation of that Liberty. It faces two dangers—on the one hand, regimentation and despotism, and on the other hand, license. Free men have long since drawn a clear line between Liberty and license. It was Burke who asked, “What is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils.” What he meant was that without those two limitations Liberty becomes license.

The Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Commandments which Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were written into the moral law and then into the statute law of one people after another. Violation of any one of these four Commandments is not an act of Liberty, but of license, and this violation has long since been made a crime, punishable as such. There are many other misuses of Liberty which have not risen to the height of being defined as criminal, but which are unreasonable, improper and even dangerous acts of license.

The line between Liberty and license can never be drawn with mathematical accuracy, but the wise man instinctively knows where that line is. Unbalanced and

confused imaginations lose sight of any distinction whatever between Liberty and license. There are organizations for the defense of civil liberty whose energies and exhortations are often directed to the defense of what are plainly un-civil liberties, namely license. Those who are victims of such states of mind become not only a public nuisance, but often a public danger. Moreover, they bring about undeserved criticisms of Liberty itself, and are pointed to by those who prefer despotism as evidence of the folly of trying to establish and preserve Liberty for mankind in general. Probably Liberty has no more powerful enemy than license. Men are often deceived by what is license, when they would be quick to understand and to resent an attack on Liberty by despotism. In the present-day economic organization of the world, it is of vital importance that the free man preserve his freedom, both from invasion by government under the guise of advancing the public interest and from undermining by license with all its dangers. The words of Madame Roland still echo across the years, "O Liberty! how many crimes are committed in thy name!"

The fundamental liberties of the individual are those defined in our own national Bill of Rights. They are freedom of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom to petition the government for a redress of grievances, and those other forms of freedom which are defined in the first ten amendments to the Federal Constitution. When that Constitution was under consideration, the opinion was expressed by many that the primary principles of civil liberty might well be taken for granted and need not

be written into the new Constitution. The years which have followed afford abundant proof of the wisdom of those Founding Fathers who would take nothing of this kind for granted, but who insisted that a definition of the fundamental rights of the citizen be formally incorporated in the Constitution. Had this not been done, the history of the American people would have been very different from that which it now is. We have this clear-cut, fortunate and philosophically sound definition of our Liberty, and it is our highest duty to see to it that that Liberty be preserved and protected and not weakened, undermined or lost by careless indifference to attacks upon it, often well disguised and highly mischievous, from within. This means everything, not only to the people of the United States, but to the whole world of tomorrow.

Fundamentally, Equality means the equality of all in respect to civil, economic and political rights and equality before the law. It does not mean, and could not possibly mean, equality of individual ability, of individual capacity for achievement or in value of individual service to one's fellow men. Considerations of physical strength and health, of mental inheritance and equipment, and of environment, from all of which difference of opportunity arises, make such equality wholly impossible. No two individuals are ever exactly alike, and unless they were exactly alike, they could not possibly be equal in this mechanical sense. We see something which approaches mechanical equality among those confined in prison or those compelled to work either with hands or with brain under conditions rigorously imposed by a dominant power. Among a people which enjoys

Liberty, Equality quickly reveals itself by the rise to positions and opportunities of steadily increasing importance of those men and women who exhibit exceptional ability and capacity for achievement. In the industrial history of the American people there are illustrations without number of the capacity of the individual, given his opportunity, to rise to positions of high administrative power and responsibility solely by use of that equality of opportunity which our free institutions offer to him. Of those who are at the present time the chief administrative officers of twelve of our greatest railway systems, five began their service as clerks, two as office-boys, and one each as fireman and engineman, as track-laborer, as stenographer, as telegraph operator and as rod-man. This record tells its own story of the opportunity which is open to excellence. Many other similar instances could be found by an examination of our industrial and commercial organizations.

All those schemes of social, economic and political organization which would mechanically impose equality of service, of reward and of opportunity upon all, would invent a kind of Equality wholly out of consonance with Liberty. If that sort of Equality is to come first, then there will be no Liberty. The right to work, to earn and to save, and to use one's savings to increase production and to meet human needs, is fundamental to democracy. This right cannot be limited by any doctrine of permanent social and economic classes which are engaged in perpetual struggle for gain at each other's expense. Nor can it be limited by enforced membership in any group or organization—religious, political, social, economic, or industrial. Any such enforced limitation

is not only undemocratic but it is anti-democratic. It is only Equality based upon Liberty, and which is Liberty's companion, that is real and which can carry civilization forward, generation after generation, through the efforts and the leadership of the most competent.

It is many years since I first had occasion to point out in a public address that a chief business of democracy is to produce its own aristocracy. That is the way in which democracy discovers those who are most competent to render it important and responsible service. It does this through the establishment of equality of opportunity in the field of Liberty. This democratic aristocracy will not be one based upon birth or inheritance. It will not be one based upon wealth or artificial advantage or upon that type of advantage which is known as privilege, but it will be one based only upon ability and capacity for achievement. That democracy will be most secure and most likely to last which can and does produce this aristocracy of its own and is guided by it.

Today the democracies, including our own, are subject to grave and in many ways deserved criticism because of the fact that they so often allow differences of opinion on minor matters and the passion for long-continued debate to postpone action at a time when their own prosperity, and indeed their own safety, depend upon their acceptance and support of a sound public policy adjusted to the needs of the moment. It is this characteristic, so often revealed in the recent history of the British, the French and the American democracies, which has led to the taunts, the cynicism and the sneers directed at them by the world's present-day despots and their groups of blindly devoted followers.

It is for a democracy quickly to make it plain that it can be and is an efficient form of government, and that neither Liberty nor Equality need be or will be weakened or sacrificed in order to attain efficiency of the highest order. We Americans can learn much from a study of the world's history during the past thirty years, as well as from a study of the problems which faced Abraham Lincoln and of those which face the President of the United States today. Quick and wise efficiency is the secret of their fortunate solution. One of Woodrow Wilson's wisest remarks was that "the highest and best form of efficiency is the spontaneous co-operation of a free people."

Given Liberty and Equality, there remains Fraternity. That is a state of mind and of conduct which is the outgrowth of Liberty and Equality working successfully together to guide an orderly, a progressive and a liberal society. Fraternity reveals itself in those hundred and one acts of kindly thoughtfulness and care which are in so large a degree characteristic of present-day America. It is the spirit of Fraternity which leads to great benefactions, made in the public interest by those who by reason of ability or good fortune have honestly acquired large wealth. Those who are really moved and guided by the fraternal spirit do not keep these vast fortunes for the members of their immediate families, but they bestow them in the public interest upon those institutions and undertakings which represent and reflect the fraternal spirit at its best. These are colleges and universities. They are hospitals and art museums. They are undertakings in the field of music and the fine arts. They are institutions to pro-

mote scientific discovery and application of new knowledge to the wants and needs of man. They are institutions for the care and guidance of the dependent and of those who by reason of personal deficiency or disease are unable to care for themselves. Were there no fraternal spirit, all such helpless individuals would be told to care for themselves, and if they could not do so, to pass out of existence and let nature take its course. That is the barbaric but not the civilized method of dealing with one's fellow men.

What is called Capital is civilization's greatest achievement. Capital is what has been gained by work. It is earnings and savings used to increase future production and to co-operate with others in multiplying that production. The mother of Karl Marx was a very wise woman, for she wrote: "If Karl had made a lot of Capital instead of writing a lot about Capital, it would have been much better."⁴ If one will read the story of the life of Andrew Carnegie and of John D. Rockefeller and see how, as unprecedented success attended their life work, they had in mind from the very beginning the service of their fellow men through the use of the fortunes, however large, which they might acquire, he will see the working at its best of what is contemptuously called the capitalistic system. Both Liberty and Equality would be far less efficient and far less deserving of enthusiastic and devoted support were they not accompanied by Fraternity. It is Fraternity which learns the lessons that Liberty and Equality have to teach and that characterizes a social order made up of civilized human

⁴Beer, M., *The Life and Writings of Karl Marx*. (New York: International Publishers (no date).) P. 31.

beings who will not willingly let their fellow men suffer or be in want.

Where, then, could we find for the guidance of tomorrow a motto more abundant in promise and more sound in principle than Liberty Equality Fraternity? To think that after receiving for a century and a half the approval and the applause of civilized men, this noble motto is now attacked and even ridiculed, is the best possible evidence of the backward character of the worldwide revolution which is under way and which has for the time being conquered France. If men were really civilized and if their word, formally and authoritatively given, could be depended upon, this backward revolution might have been much more speedily met and checked. It is only thirteen years since the governments of almost every nation in the world united with their fellow governments to renounce war as an instrument of national policy and to proceed to the settlement of international differences and disputes in a spirit of peaceful discussion and judicial determination. The ink was hardly dry upon this great treaty known as the Pact of Paris when some of the governments which had signed it began to prepare for war more vigorously than ever before in history. Their men of science were set to the invention and perfection of new instruments for military use. The children in their schools were disciplined and trained not to enjoy and to understand Liberty, but to do as they were told, to obey without question and to submit to the emotional guidance of formulas and phrases, every one of which meant war and preparation for war. It was those nations which accepted the Pact of Paris in the spirit in which they signed it that did not

engage in these preparations and that, therefore, were the first subject of attack when the new despots undertook to take over the rule of the world for the establishment of their New Order. The democracies lagged in military preparation, and they lagged because their peoples believed what their governments had said and were innocent enough to take it for granted that all other signatory powers were honest and faith-keeping. Such is the explanation of much which is now going on all about us, of the undermining of national spirit and national unity of purpose by every sort and kind of public enemy, and which has led to the pathetic downfall of France and the literally appalling attack upon Great Britain and its people. This is neither the time nor the place to attempt a forecast of what the immediate future has in store. If, by any fortunate chance, the chief enemies of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, which are now carrying on a stupendous military contest between themselves, should wreck and ruin each other, the door would be open to a new era of progress, provided the democracies have the insight, the courage and the intellectual capacity to take the lead in organizing a truly new world on those principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity which must rule if prosperity and peace are to return and to endure. The federal principle has now established itself in so many forms and over so many different areas that there can be no question but that it will afford the key to the solution of the chief political problems which world organization has to offer. That economic nationalism which has had so much to do with promoting world confusion, world competition and world war, must give way to that international trade system which

great seers like Adam Smith and Richard Cobden, John Bright and Gladstone long ago saw to be as necessary as it is sound. There is no more reason why every independent sovereign nation should supply all of the physical wants of its own people from territory under its own flag than there is that it should supply all of their intellectual wants and needs from men of science, men of letters and intellectual leaders who speak that language and who owe that allegiance. Ideas go about the world with instant speed and without obstruction. Why should not men's economic needs be satisfied in like fashion? All that is required to answer this question is high intelligence, insight, courage and adherence to the motto, Liberty Equality Fraternity.

For the time being, the people of France have been compelled, officially at least, to turn their back upon those noble words. They have been flatly told that their system of free, democratic government has broken down and that there is no way by which it can be re-established. Government by decree, through the agency of definite and fixed economic or social groups or classes, is hailed as the substitute for democracy and its hopeful successor. What is called "this reformation" is to be brought about by selection of the élite from all rungs of the social ladder. This selection, however, is not to be made through Equality of opportunity for all, but by the definite act of a higher and controlling power. In other words, "by decree" is to take the place of democratic legislation. Surely, as great a people as the French will not permit so reactionary a condition as this to remain forever. The intellectual history of the French people is so superb that their intellectual life cannot die.

It may be for the time being in a state of coma or it may be held in chains, but it will return to its self-control, to its freedom and then, sobered and disciplined by the experiences of this generation, it will write those words Liberty Equality Fraternity upon hundreds of walls, this time to remain for ages to come.

The opportunity of world leadership, now offered to the American people, is so unprecedented that our responsibility is too great to be measured in ordinary words. When world leadership was with Greece and then with Rome, civilization, however magnificent in its intellectual manifestations, was so simple and so undeveloped in the economic and industrial fields that what the Greeks and Romans were able to accomplish was quickly made plain and written into history. Conditions today are not only different, but wholly new. This twentieth-century world of nearly one hundred separate national units has cherished the hope and the belief that each national unit, whether large or small, might be made secure and protected in its national independence by international co-operation, international law and the judicial settlement of international disputes. The American people have been committed to these principles from the very beginning of their history. They have cherished them, they have hailed them, and time and time again they have given vigorous and emphatic illustration of their faith in them. Unless the small national group can be protected by its fellow national units, there can be neither Liberty nor Equality nor Fraternity in the national and international life of the world. It is idle to use these words as applicable only to individual life and thought and conduct. They must also be ap-

plicable to national policy and to international life and thought and conduct. If the American people can lead the thought of the world to turn its back upon any system of social, economic or political organization which rests upon fixed and definite classes or groups with a resulting spirit of class consciousness, then indeed will the door be open to the progress of a truly liberal philosophy of life and of government. The call of today and tomorrow is to the people of the United States. Will they hear that call? And will they answer it in the spirit of their great forefathers—of Washington and of Franklin, of Hamilton and of Jefferson, of Madison and of Marshall, of Webster and of Lincoln? If they will, the future peace and prosperity of this now torn and broken world will be as secure as human thought and human power can make it.