

# The Public

A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &  
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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## EDITORIAL

### A Bad Case of Expertitis.

When scholars ran mad with ecclesiastical philosophies, philosophers are said to have sagely quarreled over the number of angels that could dance on a needle's point without crowding. Now that scholars run mad on scientific specialization, here is a specimen of what they give us:

In a rather startling statement today, the Professor declares that as a result of a study of snakes he is convinced that had they been able to develop hands and feet instead of being obliged to crawl, their brains would have enabled them to dominate the world. In that event, he asserts, man would probably have remained in a primitive, savage state, or possibly even as an ape.

The quotation is from a press dispatch of the 28th of May from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Maybe the Professor was making fun of experts; but if he wasn't he must have been suffering with expertitis, and not far from the danger point.

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### The Sanity of Specialization.

The spread of "expertitis" in every department of human knowledge and skill has long called for a remedy. It is a more dangerous disease probably than "generalizingitis." The victims of the latter are so many-sided in their generalizing that they hold one another steadily in check. But "expertitis" has such eccentric tendencies. Going now with a rush this way, now with a rush that, and with little or no opposition at any time, it runs its course in any of its directions before the

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experts discover their mistake. Of course no one from the outside can help; first, because most persons think of expertitis as a fetish for worship rather than a disease to avoid; and second, because victims of expertitis regard all suggestions from the outside as obtrusive ignorance.

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Now and then, however, a sane expert appears. One of these is Dr. Richard C. Cabot, of the Massachusetts General Hospital, who, in a lecture before the City Club of Chicago last spring, spoke incidentally upon the subject of the "absent-mindedness which comes with specialization." In this connection he said:

I do not suppose that anybody in this age and generation is so crazy as to believe that we can get along without specialization. But there are quite a number of people just about crazy enough to forget that the evils of specialization must be neutralized or they will altogether counterbalance its values. There must be some machinery, some forces, personal or impersonal, to neutralize the evils of the division of labor. I suppose that is just as true in business as it is in medicine; I know it is true in medicine.

Every word of that statement is as sound as the soundest dollar ever coined. And Dr. Cabot was right in his supposition that the evils of specialization are prevalent in business. Expertitis develops wherever there is specialization; and everywhere it may be illustrated as Dr. Cabot illustrated it in medicine:

The weak side of specialization can be exemplified by the particular knack with which a physician uses a microscope. He does not use it as most of you would use it for the first time. You would probably screw up your face so as to shut one eye, or put your hand over that eye so as to use the other more freely. But the physician who has used a microscope for any length of time does not do that; he keeps both eyes wide open, and one eye absolutely blind. That is merely because he wants to see nothing with it. He is specializing on what he sees in the microscope, and that limits his attention to that one object and makes him oblivious of all that goes on outside it. Every specialist is precisely in that position.

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A little reflection upon those true words will bring to any thoughtful mind an appreciation of the value of democracy in government. The evils of specialization must be balanced with common sense: and common sense in government is not to be had of individuals, much less of individuals afflicted with expertitis. Common sense comes from the common people—which means all the people in their communal capacity of one man, one woman, one citizen—each thinking in the

mass. This minimizes selfishness by balancing opposing selfishnesses off against one another; it eliminates the excessive ignorance of some by modifying it with the larger knowledge of others; it eliminates pedantry by merging it in the mass; it soothes the inflammations of expertism by forcing experts to see with both eyes. He who said that no individual is wiser than all individuals, was himself a wise man. Democracy is no loose-ended sentiment; it is a scientific truth.

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### How Protection Works.

An Australian writes this from his State of Victoria:

I bought some hay making tools last week. They are manufactured at Springfield, Ohio. To get here they travel more than half way round the world, pay 5 per cent duty, and the agent's commission; yet I get them for one-third less than the Ohio price.

This is for the protection of the American farmer to whose nostrils free trade is a stench. The same Australian informant reports another example:

Owing to our rapid growth the State works could not build locomotives fast enough. Twenty were bought in America and twenty in England, all made after Victorian designs. The American engines are cheaper than the British by 15 per cent.

But the Baldwin works are protected. What against and what for?

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### Progress in Land Monopoly.

A recent issue of the St. Louis Journal of Agriculture published the following census synopsis on Oklahoma farms:

	1900.	1910.
Number of farms .....	108,000	189,000
Average acreage .....	213	152
Average value per acre.....	\$6.50	\$22.54
Farmed by whites.....	88%	89%
Farmed by Negroes.....	12%	11%
Farmed by owner:		
Unmortgaged .....	52%	26%
Mortgaged .....	4%	19%
Farmed by tenants.....	44%	55%

Observe that the number of farms has almost doubled, but not so much by bringing in new land, as by reducing the size of farms from an average of 213 acres to 152. Observe also that the acreage value has risen from \$6.50 to \$22.54. Some of this increase in value is doubtless due to improvements. To that extent it is significant of general prosperity. But some of it is certainly due to scarcity prices for land merely as land; and to that extent it is significant, not of general prosperity but of the prosperity of farmers who farm farmers at the expense of farmers who farm farms. Observe, too, another form of the progress of land monopoly in Oklahoma—the form that