

## ARTICLE VIII.

## SOCIOLOGY A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY.

BY PROFESSOR WALTER E. C. WRIGHT, D.D.

SOCIOLOGY deals with human beings in their mutual relations. It investigates how men live together. Historical sociology is concerned with every detail of that which has been, and is, in the interactions of man upon man. Theoretical sociology, basing itself on history, does not refuse to consider any possible interrelation of individual men. It is interested in the individual, however, only in his relation to others. Crusoe on his island is not a subject of sociological study until joined by the man Friday. Nevertheless every characteristic of every individual is of sociological interest, for the way men will react on each other depends on what they are in themselves.

The basal forces of sociology are the instincts, sentiments, and purposes that produce and influence associated life. These activities of the soul are conditioned by the powers man possesses for attaining their various ends. These powers again are conditioned and influenced by the forces of nature outside of man. Nothing that pertains to man within or without is foreign to sociology. Sumner has happily phrased this breadth of the science in saying, "Its elementary conditions are set by the nature of human beings and the nature of the earth."<sup>1</sup> In this statement, "the nature of human beings" is properly put first, because it is fundamental; "the nature of the earth" is secondary, for it affects society only through its influence on human beings.

<sup>1</sup> Sumner's *Essays*, p. 82.

The physical conditions of the earth have set around some wide regions barriers that society has so far found impassable. There is no society within hundreds of miles of the poles. There is none in several waterless regions of considerable extent in other zones. On the edge of the uninhabitable polar regions, and near the earth's absolute deserts, a scattered population maintains only a crude society. It cannot reach high development where there is lack of numbers and of physical resources. On the other hand, tropical islands of genial climate and great fertility have seldom been the theater of a highly developed social state. Too easy physical conditions tend to depress human activity, and fail to develop self-restraint. Without industry, prudence, and foresight in individuals, society can be little more than an embryo. It does not follow that sociology is a physical science, as Buckle argued a generation ago, attempting to find almost the entire explanation of history in soil and climate.<sup>1</sup> Equally extreme was Dr. Draper, who made isothermal lines account for Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as for the Civil War in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Sociology can never in this way be reduced to the simplicity of the physical sciences. The motions of the solar system come from the interaction of two constant, unchanging forces. Initial momentum and gravitation account for every movement, and are the data for predicting the future positions, of every member of the system. Nor Earth nor Mars nor Jupiter can increase nor diminish these forces. But in society the individual members by their very personality are centers of positive force. Not only does one great man often alter the face of society, but men in their combined activity change the very face of nature.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of Civilization in England*. Introduction, Chap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Civil War in America*, Vol. i. pp. 89-125.

<sup>3</sup> *Marah, Man and Nature*.

Nor can sociology be reduced to the terms of either chemistry or biology. Chemistry is far more complicated than physics, for the elements are many, and each has various affinities, so that the combinations are practically infinite. Biology is still more intricate. Plants and animals must obey gravitation and every other physical force, and have their being amid the unceasing activity of all the chemical forces; but, at the same time, by their vital power, they use all these lower forces for higher ends. The oak tree is no rebel against gravitation and capillary attraction and endosmose and exosmose, nor against chemical affinity and the sun's actinic rays, when it lifts from the earth and gathers from the air the elements it shapes into woody fiber fit for the timbers of a war-ship. Yet the oak is higher than these forces it makes use of. Physics and chemistry will not tell the whole story of the oak. It belongs in the field of biology. Its story is a chapter of life.

The whole story of human society cannot be told by physics and chemistry and biology. Man himself is higher than all these, though obedient to all their laws. He cannot sever himself from physical forces. But he can make use of these forces. He adjusts his waterwheel to the falling water, and makes the cataract grind his food corn. He turns this force of falling water into electricity, carries the electricity this way or that, and turns it back into mechanical force at the place where he wishes it, or transforms it into light for street or dwelling. He trims his sails and sets his rudder to make the north wind carry him east or west as he wills. Man cannot break away from the forces of chemistry. He uses those forces to turn brittle ore into tenacious iron and serviceable steel. He puts together the elements of gunpowder or dynamite, and uses either as he will, whether it be for beneficence or for mischief. What can he not do with chemical forces if the present rate of laboratory invention continues a little longer?

It is equally true that man while under biological forces is also able with intelligent freedom to use them for his own purposes. Man cannot by taking thought add one cubit to his stature. He can choose for perpetuation and multiplication the useful variations of plant and animal. Man not only adapts his agriculture to the soil and climate of his locality, but by intelligent selection among natural varieties he has covered his fields with choice grains, and filled his orchards with trees that bear luscious fruit. He eats now bananas and oranges unencumbered with seeds and expects a seedless grape. His domesticated animals, horses, cattle, sheep, even swine, show what use his intelligent purpose can make of the forces of biology. According to man's varying desires he breeds draft horses for strength, or racers for speed; he rears in one place herds for dairy products, in another place for beef; or one flock of sheep to meet the need of clothing, and another to supply food for the table.

In still another way man shows even more strikingly that he moves in a higher plane than that of biology. The highest type of man rules over his own instincts and impulses. His intelligence judges whether and how far they are safe guides. His will decides whether to give them at any time free rein or to curb and restrain them. Man's power of intelligent choice puts his life in a different category from the phenomena of biology. Personality is the supreme factor in men's life together. The study of sociology is a psychological study.

While the nature of man himself as a rational and moral being is thus the most important force in producing the phenomena of society, the nature of the earth is also a contributory force of no small significance. Geographical influences can so work upon men as to produce great social results. Rich mines allure a different type of men from those that are attracted by fertile soil. The difference in

the people thus drawn together insures a different social development in the mining camp from that of the farming community; or in the mild climate sought out by invalids from that in a region of frost and storm to which only the robust venture.

This attractive force of conditions and resources is not the only means by which geography influences society. External conditions affect human character by inciting some elements to higher activity, and by either lulling others into inactivity where there is little occasion for their exercise, or even suppressing some latent elements through refusing them any possibility of achievement. The good harbors on the coast of Greece were a factor in early Greek society, because of their psychological influence on the men of Greece, inciting them to venture out upon the fickle sea, and developing strenuously the qualities that are exercised in navigation.<sup>1</sup> The lack of thrift which so often stifles the social life of semi-tropical regions is readily accounted for by the fact that the shortness and mildness of the winter season renders it unnecessary to make any considerable provision against the cold. The genesis of the "hoodlum" in San Francisco has been explained by Professor Royce by the safety with which truant children can sleep out during the larger part of the year in that genial climate.<sup>2</sup> Of whatever sort and however great these influences from physical geography are, they never can be a social force apart from human beings to act upon. We may call them factors, but the nature of the product is determined by the nature of the multiplicand. The impor-

<sup>1</sup> Shaler, *Sea and Land*, p. 153 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See *International Monthly* for November, 1900, art. "The Pacific Coast: A Psychological Study of Influence," where Professor Royce sets forth, with great suggestiveness, the combined effect on both individual and social life of the geographical conditions of the Pacific Coast, and the conditions under which it was settled. Some of the influences he points out have only the force of opportunity, others are positive stimuli.

tance of physical conditions in relation to society should not be suffered to obscure the fact that the one source of society is the social nature of man.

Is not this argument simply beating down a man of straw? Do not all writers on sociology when pressed for ultimate statements recognize the forces that mold and move society as forces of the soul? It is claimed by the later apologists of Mr. Buckle, that he gives a psychological explanation of "secondary civilizations." Buckle and his school have not made that impression on most readers. They have seemed rather determined to account for all psychological phenomena as the effect of physical environment. It is sometimes difficult to know whether, by what a writer calls psychological forces, he means anything more than the resultant of environment and organization. Some that talk much of psychology, the science of the soul, do not clearly represent the soul as anything more than a succession of activities. They regard life as the result, instead of the cause, of organization. Think of a sociologist, who is psychological beyond most, using as if it were an axiom the statement "habitual activity determines human character"! Habitual passivity determines the shape and movement of inanimate things. The clay takes whatever form the potter impresses upon it; the driftwood moves wherever and at whatever rate the current carries it. But activity belongs to life. Because man is a living soul he can act. His character determines his actions. His character is a cause. The whole field of sociology is thrown into a distorting perspective, unless the activity of the individual soul is kept in the foreground, and the reactions of physical environment and human environment and of organization are relegated to their proper place in the background.

The psychological elements of sociology are not limited to either man's sensibility or his intellect or his will. All the functions of the soul play their part singly or com-

bined. It may be questioned, indeed, whether these functions are not all present in varying proportions in every act of the soul. Sociology will reach nothing conclusive if it is made a study simply of the feelings and desires. Even political economy was sadly inadequate, so long as it recognized in man nothing but the desire to buy cheap, and sell dear, and make gain.

Neither may sociology stop with the intellectual activities of the soul, as if man were an apparatus for observing and classifying phenomena, as any other sort of a logical machine. The intellect rightly claims large recognition in the study. It is evident on the very surface of history, that a great discovery or an important invention is able to transform the social life of whole nations and of the world. The last half-century has seen marvelous changes brought about by enlarging intelligence in regard to electricity. Incalculably greater was the change produced in prehistoric times by the inventors of the art of working in iron. Intelligence is a tremendous force in society, but no measure of intelligence can obliterate human emotion and desire. In fact it may be questioned whether intelligence is not secondary to feeling, compelled to do its chief work through inciting or directing the desires.

There are, also, most important ethical aspects to sociology. New religious convictions and moral purposes have many times renovated society. At the same time there is no more common popular error on this subject than to conceive of sociology as a branch of ethics. Programs for bettering the world do not make up the body of sociology. They are only devices for applying principles. The science is in the principles. The principles must deal with human feeling and knowledge as well as choice. Programs for improving society are fatally defective if they consider only what men ought to do. The wise legislator must consider what all sorts of men will do. His laws will not accom-

plish their wished-for purpose unless enacted in view of how they will affect the ignorant as well as the intelligent, the dishonest and selfish as well as the upright and patriotic. Human nature as its highest attribute possesses the power of moral choice. But wide regions of human activity are spontaneous, automatic, and these must be fully considered by sociology. They fill large spaces in the associated life of the race.

Systems of sociology must be ultimately judged, not by the skill they exhibit in observation and classification, so much as by their underlying philosophical principles. A man may be great in mathematics, or chemistry, or perhaps in biology, whether he believes in a soul or not. No one is a safe master in sociology unless he has a right apprehension of the powers and activities of the human soul. Sociology is a psychological study.