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## WHAT IS A SOCIOLOGIST?

THE American public in general, and the Chicago public in particular, has had a recent spasm of interest in locating the genus "sociologist." Our respected president gave the cue by appointing to the Coal Strike Commission, in the place proposed for "an eminent sociologist," a railroad employee experienced in organizing railroad men. The newspapers very naturally raised the two questions: first, Is the appointee a good man for the place? second, Is he a sociologist? Before the echoes of this discussion were quiet, the distinguished president of an eastern college took occasion, in an address before leading Chicago citizens, to associate the name "sociologist" with the terms "freaks" and "faddists," and he is reported to have said that sociology seemed to him to have nothing to do except to gather up what is left after political science and economics have done all that is important with the facts of society. Thereupon the Chicago papers reopened the question, "What is a sociologist?" and some of them showed intelligence about the subject which clearly outclassed that of the learned specialist who went out of his way to exhibit his limitations.

We do not care to ask whether a railroad operative is a better man than a sociologist to arbitrate a labor difficulty. He may or he may not be, according to a variety of circumstances. Nor do we care to ask how high the sociologist deserves to stand in the esteem of other people. This is a matter that will adjust itself in time. Meanwhile it may be well for the sociologists occasionally to state to themselves and to the public just what their part in the world's work seems to them to be. The sociologist may or may not be, in the eyes of his fellows, an important member of society, but his place may be so defined and his work so described that even college presidents might learn to talk intelligently about him.

In general, then, a sociologist is a man who is studying the facts of society *in a certain way*. Not every man who deals with

facts of society is a sociologist, any more than every tinker and blacksmith is a physicist, or every cook and soap-maker a chemist, or every gardener and stock-breeder a biologist. There is a sense in which each of these practical employments is a phase of the science to which it is most closely related. In that sense, and in the degree in which the workers enter the scientific ranks, the laborer might be called physicist, chemist, biologist, etc. If there is any propriety, whether much or little, in such loose application of terms, there is precisely the same propriety, in the same sense and in the same degree, in the case of ordinary social workers and the term "sociologist." A printer may incidentally be a statesman, but we do not for that reason call typesetting statesmanship. In the same way the organizer of a labor union may be a sociologist, but organizing labor unions is nevertheless not sociology. Whether a man is a sociologist or not depends on the extent to which he uses the "certain way" of studying social facts, to be more particularly described in a moment.

This is, of course, a matter of more and less. It is not a distinction between things that are absolutely unlike. We cannot draw an arbitrary line, on the one side of which men are statesmen, or scholars, or artists, and on the other side of which they are not. Every one of us is a small fraction of statesman and scholar and artist, even at our everyday work. The same thing might be illustrated in all the occupations of life. There is no way to guard the term "merchant," for instance, so that it will distinguish a rank or a class. The vendor of shoestrings or peanuts on the street corner is a merchant, so far as he goes, as truly as the directors of the East India Company. The boys who speculate in "extra" editions of the newspapers are "financiers" in their way not less than Mr. Morgan in his larger operations. All differences of this sort between men are matters of degree. The gradation of the layman into the scientific man simply falls under a universal rule.

The sociologist is, further, a man who is studying the facts of society *in the spirit of a philosopher*. Doubtless the majority are with one of George Eliot's types in the sentiment: "A philosopher is the last sort of animal I should choose to resemble.

I find it enough to live, without spinning lies to account for life." With due deference to the majority we must insist that the estimate lacks precision. The philosopher is the man who is not satisfied with knowing anything in itself. He wants to find out how each thing fits together with other things. Here again all things are relative. Hamlet's gravedigger and Sam Weller and Maggie Tulliver are Bacons and Kants and Hegels on a small scale, yet it is only in a humorous sense that we call them "philosophers." A great many people are philosophizing above the heads of these types, yet without grasp of enough things to give their thoughts a rating among philosophers. They are finding the times out of joint in a thousand ways. Some of them are trying to mend things. They may be acting wisely or unwisely in their places. In either case there is just as much and just as little reason for calling them sociologists as there would be for calling the inventor of a voting machine, or a promoter of the Torrens system of registering land titles, or the captain of a precinct, a "political scientist." He may be, and he may not. The particular work that he is doing proves nothing. Then there are men who put still more things together in their thinking, and show the philosophic spirit in larger ranges. They deal with facts that go together in sciences. These may be sciences of things, on the one hand, like astronomy or geology, or they may be sciences of people, like history or economics. To deal with these sciences requires a relatively high degree of philosophic power, but men may and do cultivate these sciences as though the abstractions which each chiefly considers are sufficient unto themselves, and do not need to be adjusted to less interesting aspects of the whole from which they were abstracted. There have been historians enough, for instance, who were content to find out just what occurred. They have taken such a narrow view of their work that learning just what occurred seemed to them more important than discovering whether it was worth learning. There have been economists enough who have added to knowledge of the rules which nations must follow in order to increase wealth, and have assumed that they have thereby taken account of all that it is worth while for nations to consider.

There have been political scientists enough who have worked out principles of government, and have been content to explain political machinery as an end in itself, without disturbing themselves to inquire what the ultimate ends are to which all government is merely a means. Thinkers of these types deal with some of the same facts that the sociologist studies, but they display so little of the philosophic spirit that they are properly only craftsmen. On the other hand there are historians and economists and political scientists who try to find out what the connections are between the facts which they particularly study and all the other facts which occur in human experience. These men are philosophers, and it is only an accidental division of labor, not an important difference in kind, that separates them from the sociologists.

The name "sociologist" belongs, then, to all students of society who think of human life, past, present, and future, as somehow bound together; and who try to understand any particular fragment of human life which they may study by making out its bearings upon and its being-borne-upon-by all the rest of human life. A great many people have the notion that sociology is merely a pretentious name for slumming. They suppose it is concerned at most with some of the least successful, or least desirable, elements in society. They take it to be absorbed in plans for improving the condition of wage-earners, or for dealing with paupers and criminals. This notion has been encouraged by people in prominent academic positions who ought to have known better. There is just the same fraction of truth in it that there would be in the idea that chemistry is devoted to poisons and putrefactions and foul smells. Every human calling, from tilling the soil to writing epic poems or founding ethnic religions, has for the sociologist an interest in exact ratio with the importance of the part which that particular calling plays in the whole drama of life. The sociologist is the man who tries to fill the place in our scientific age which the old-fashioned philosopher occupied in the ages of metaphysical speculation. If we remember that the older philosophers varied from Socratic commonplaceness to Platonic idealism, we shall not be surprised at the different sorts of sociologists to be mentioned below. The

sociologist tries to look upon life from a point of view which commands all that science permits us to know about the total facts of human life; and, whatever his special division of labor, he tries to adjust it to the whole of life as seen from this point of view.

The genus sociologist includes, then, a great many species. Some of them are dealing exclusively with the largest generalizations that can be derived from discoverable facts of human society. They are working away upon a positive philosophy of visible human experience, as a substitute for all the philosophies built upon preconceived notions of life. In so far as they succeed in bringing the facts into focus they will presently make life easier and better for everybody; but they are of practically no immediate use whatever to the average man, and it would be much better for all concerned if in professional matters this type of sociologist and the average man could be content to go their several ways and never bother themselves about each other. Everybody will be happier a hundred and a thousand years from now because Charles Darwin serenely pursued his studies for a generation without asking the public to applaud his work, and without turning aside to do anything that the public could understand. Meanwhile hundreds of men every year learned to apply in practical ways what was known about the physical conditions of life, yet without contributing to the development of biology. Both kinds of men have their place, and there is work in like ways for both general sociologists and practical social workers who have but a vague notion of society in general, and who consequently cannot properly be called sociologists.

Then there are sociologists who are working on some minute phase of social activities, let us say some problem in the psychology of social action. Their general idea of life unites them with all the rest of the sociologists, but their division of labor is concerned with some detail of the machinery of life. These men again will in the end make every farm and home and shop in the world a fitter place for human beings; but meanwhile they have practically nothing to do directly with the public, nor the public with them. Their work, like that of the former type, must filter

out into general use through the modifications that it will gradually make in all branches of social science and practice. A few years ago I called with a friend upon Professor Virchow. My friend thought that he was suffering from a disorder for which the celebrated pathologist would prescribe. When our errand was explained, Professor Virchow lifted both hands above his head in vigorous protest. "Why," he said, "I haven't written a prescription in twenty years, and I wouldn't dare to." Yet not a thoroughly educated physician or trained nurse in the world had received a diploma in those twenty years whose conduct in the sickroom had not been foreordained by Professor Virchow's work. If the sociologists of these two types realize any fraction of their hopes, the results will have a similar relation to social practice. They will be carried to society at large through applications made by workers of other sorts.

Again there are sociologists who prefer to call themselves psychologists, or historians, or economists, or political scientists, but their proper classification is indicated by the fact that they, consciously or unconsciously, work from a point of view that is strictly sociological. Others frankly call themselves sociologists, but they work chiefly upon psychological, or historical, or economic, or political, or other problems, yet with sociological organization of their work always in mind. The former are particularly interesting to the professed sociologists, for in spite of themselves they are vindications of the sociological argument. They admit more or less consciously every principal claim which the sociologists have made. They begin to assert with the zeal of new converts that the phase of social activity to which they give chief attention can be correctly estimated only when viewed as a part of all the rest of life. This is the strategic point of the sociological position. Use of this perception as a corrective of all surveys of social facts is the advance in thought which sociologists first of all demand.

Then there are sociologists whose immediate interest is in some concrete religious, or educational, or industrial, or political, or charitable, or criminological improvement. They want to find out what is worth doing, and how to do it. They want to pro-

mote more success in everything that belongs to complete life, and they select some definite division of practical activity for their special effort. This species is very widely contrasted, in its peculiar traits, with the first and second; but the common generic trait of all the types is that they do their work in the spirit and from the point of view described above. The general sociologist does his generalizing with a view to its bearings at last upon all particular cases, and the concrete sociologist does his particularizing under control of regard for all the general truths that the social philosophers may formulate.

It is possible to counterfeit each of these types of sociologist, but the same thing is true of all specialists. We have no way in this country of patenting scientific titles. Every slack-wire acrobat and every chiropodist is at liberty to dub himself "professor." Every snake-charmer or fortune-teller may make gain of the title "psychologist." Every peddler of cure-alls for governmental corruption may glory in the title "political scientist." Every inventor of a panacea for poverty may announce himself an "economist," and alas! each of these, if it suits his fancy better, may advertise himself as a "sociologist." It will probably be a long time before the general public, or even all college presidents, can draw as fair lines between spurious and genuine sociologists as are drawn between quacks and scientific workers in older professions. Meanwhile it is our business to live up to our own scientific standards, and to make the quality of our work distinguish itself.

Within each of the sociological groups referred to, as distinctive problems are under investigation, the methods are as critical, the results are relatively as creditable, as in any older division of science. To assert or to imply the contrary is a provincialism which scholars in other fields will be more and more anxious to avoid.

The public discussions alluded to above raised another point that deserves notice. Some of the most intelligent editorials upon the work of sociologists vigorously belabored the jargon in which sociologists express themselves. They complained that sociologists use language which common people cannot

understand. Letters frequently reach the editors of this JOURNAL voicing the same complaint. It must be admitted that there is a measure of justice in these rebukes, yet there is another side to the case which laymen do not appreciate, but investigators must not allow themselves to be confused about it. Scientific discussion is by no means a mere matter of rhetoric. It is not simply expressing something. It is often an essential part of the process of getting something to express. It is an attempt to formulate a real problem where the layman has no suspicion that a problem exists. It is hazarding a thesis to be tried against the attacks of competent critics. It is an hypothesis to be tested. It is a tentative generalization. Simply because it is a generalization, whether it proves valid or not, it is beyond the usual range of ordinary reflection. That is, the subject and the predicate extend beyond the horizon of everyday vision. No matter how precisely they are expressed, therefore, they do not present a clear image to minds not accustomed to that outlook. If the proposition were expressed so that it would mean more to the layman, the language might lose the very elements that contain its peculiar meaning for the specialist. Of course, it is an affront to omniscient democracy to intimate that every man is not as competent a specialist as any man upon such a familiar subject as human society. Of course, if the average man does not take in the full meaning of a sociological proposition, it is the fault of the sociologist who utters it. Nevertheless, it will be necessary for a good while to come that men who are actually advancing knowledge shall talk to each other a great deal in language that says little or nothing to the layman. On the one hand, the layman has no business to find fault with this, and, on the other hand, if he does, the specialist has no business to mind it. Whatever may have been their sins of abstruseness, American scholars have committed more and greater sins through overambition to impress the public. Premature plays for popularity are much more deplorable than mysterious technicality. In the end scientific tasks are performed sooner and better if scientists address themselves exclusively to their kind, till they convince each other that they

have something to say. It is time enough then to throw away the technicalities and put the new knowledge into general circulation.

The really flagrant sins that have been committed in the name of sociology in recent years have been inflammatory utterances, in terms that found quick response in popular feeling, while there was no proper social knowledge behind them. They conveyed definite impressions, but they were simply audacious appeals to prejudice. Serious sociology is a deliberate plan to discredit that sort of thing and to find a basis for social opinion in a sufficient analysis of social facts. The details of this analysis will not be edifying to the multitude. They will seem academic and pedantic. No doubt they will be, to a considerable extent, as this has been the case in nearly every other field of knowledge. In the end, however, sound learning will be promoted sooner and faster by discussing unsettled problems in the technical language appropriate to problems, than by a parade of simplicity which encourages the public to assume that open questions are settled.

The necessity for this professionalism varies in different divisions of sociology. It is greatest among the first two types named, and least in the fourth group. Members of the latter are less likely to offend the public by excessive obscurity of terms than by the moderation of their conclusions. Popular impatience craves what the serious sociologist can never furnish. There is always a brisk demand for social specifics, but relatively languid interest in social hygiene. One could get tooted as a social prophet any day by publishing a scheme to do away with government. If one merely points out a practicable way of improving the workings of government, it may be a generation before he gets a hearing. A new way to abolish private property would command wide attention at any moment. A feasible plan of juster taxation would have a long and thankless struggle for a chance to explain itself. A crusade to smash "trusts" is always in order, and there is never a lack of spectators eager to see the fun. Serious analysis of inequities in the workings of corporations, and proposals of sane remedies, meet

indifference at best and contempt as a rule. The man who promises to end crime, if society will only adopt socialism, counts as a statesman and a seer with the contingent always ready to accept visionary promises at par. The man who points out an available means of removing temptations to crime, or of heading off criminal propensities before it is too late, is too commonplace to spur the radical imagination. Ten thousand people will swallow a cure-all to one who will think. The sociologist who asks the public to reflect, instead of flattering the demand for quick and complete remedies for social ills, sends himself to Coventry for a long term.

The conclusion of the whole matter for the sociologists is that, when we reach results which are ripe for popular consumption, we should spread the news as widely as possible, and in the plainest terms. On the other hand, while sociology is good for nothing unless it can enrich average life at last, our primary task is to work out correct statements of social problems and valid methods of solving them. We ought not to be distracted either by popular clamor for quick results or by ignorant misrepresentation of our aims. Our main business is to study society by methods which competent judges must indorse.

The worst enemy of the sociologists is defect of scientific patience. Itch to be talked about, without having made any real contribution to knowledge, is the stigma of the pseudo-scientist. Genuine research, no matter how slow in reaching results, and no matter how minute the result in each case, will in due time win for the real sociologists, as for all others scientific workers, their fair share of appreciation.

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