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Recent Developments in the Social Sciences

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*

The avowed purpose of this collection of essays is to place before the average reader the present status of the social sciences. The book is divided into seven chapters. Each chapter deals with one branch of the general field. The first chapter, dealing with Recent Tendencies in Sociology is by Professor Charles A. Wilwood, while the chapter on Anthropology is written by Professor Clark Wissler. These two chapters taken together cover most of the material usually treated under the heading of Sociology. A chapter on the relation between psychology and sociology deals with a recent popular and somewhat valuable rediscovery of the importance of the study of the actions of human beings in groups. This chapter is by Professor Robert H. Gault. Geographical factors are stressed in Professor Carol O. Sauer's chapter, number four, Recent Developments in Cultural Geography. Chapters five, six, and seven deal with Economics, Political Science, and History. These last three chapters were written by Professors John M. Clark, Charles E. Merriam, and Harry Elmer Barnes respectively.

Each of these writers has attempted to give in brief compass the significant trends in the particular field with which he deals. One cannot help but feel that the so-called social sciences are not keeping abreast with the natural sciences in perfecting technique and testing assumptions and results. Perhaps one reason for this is that the obstacle of popular prejudice stands as more of a bar to real progress in the development of the methods of social sciences than is true of the natural sciences, although there is something of the same obstacle always present even to the methods and results of pure science. But that progress is being made in the field of the social sciences is evident to even the casual reader of this volume. There may be a ten-

*Recent Developments in the Social Sciences. Edited by Edward Cary Hayes. Philadelphia and London, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927. pp. 427.

dency to overstress the newness and significance of a particular approach, as in the case of Mr. Barnes in his treatment of history. After all, the historian can be a leader or moulder of thought in only a limited degree. He must be constantly aware that his books may be so written as to insure dust collection or on the other hand so as to insure yellow edition sales with inevitable unfavorable reactions and violent swings of the pendulum to opposite extremes. Mr. Merriam has written an interesting and fair summary of present methods and needs in Political Science. This field of study suffers from several ailments. It borders on law, so many of its best men become lawyers. It borders on government service, diplomatic and domestic, and loses thereby some good workers. It touches philosophy, and philosophers are content to ignore it, although there is some evidence of an awakening on this score at the present time. Mr. Merriam stresses the need of changed technique particularly. But the business of government is not entirely logical. It is no more logical than people are. It is therefore easy to overestimate the results to be achieved by the use of purely rational method. Most methods built upon rational bases fail to take account of prejudice and emotion. The social psychologist is attempting to give the student of government some aid at this point, but his greatest accomplishment up to the present time seems to be to have injected more confusion where there was already chaos. The creation of an entirely new vocabulary to describe age old situations has helped little, and done much harm. One reads with a dictionary and diligence only to find that the subject matter and ideas are old and familiar ones. One grows wary and distrustful as a result.

The book is timely and helpful. It should be read more widely than it will be. It should be read as a description of a group of studies now in a transitional stage. These essays are forward looking, which is encouraging, even though one does not agree that the eye is in all cases fixed on the desirable goal, or even any goal in particular. The book confirms the reviewer in his past tentative opinion that the present trend in social sciences is to emphasize method rather than ends or goals. But methods are so often conditioned upon goals to be reached. To fail to clearly see this would seem to be an error.

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