The history of social development

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THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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BY

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Translated by

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With an Introduction by

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The value of Dr. Müller-Lyer's book is that it is a serious attempt at an Inductive Sociology. The moment that the Sociological student passes out of the region of abstractions he finds himself wandering in an uncharted wilderness of fluid and disconnected facts. His natural impulse is to take refuge in specialism. He will study some particular region of contemporary life, or of the historic past, or of the Simpler Societies, and learn what is to be learnt about that nook or corner, since the whole field is too wide for his exploration. This method produces valuable special studies, but it does not give us a Sociology. It yields no theory of the nature and development of society as a whole, it gives no account of the general trend of civilization, and answers none of the questions about progress or retrogression. But these are the questions to which more urgently than heretofore the world needs an answer. The potentialities of good and evil in civilization have been multiplied many times by the increase of human power. What are we going to make of them? What has human "Progress" amounted to so far as it has gone, and what can the watchman say of the night? Carlyle's question, "Whence, and oh heavens! whither?" is even more clamant for us than for him. Now we shall not know the future merely by recapitulating the past because the human mind is constantly introducing new factors. But neither shall we be able to guide our own future
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intelligently unless we understand the present and how it came to be. It is not a question of fatalistic prediction, but of focusing racial experience in a way that will throw clear and dry light on the permanent human problems. This is the task of inductive Sociology, and the first step to a solution is to find methods of distinguishing, describing and correlating the successive phases through which human societies have in fact passed. These are Dr. Lyer's "Phases of Culture." The merit of his work is that with the minimum of hypothetical assumption he endeavours after a scientific classification of the mass of facts which the Anthropologist, the Archeologist and the Historian proffer to the enquirer. Just as in the sciences of life theories of descent are based on morphology, so in Dr. Lyer's handling are theories of social evolution. That he should be equally successful in the application of his method in all parts of his enquiry is impossible. That the method might be amended and supplemented by other methods is probable. But that it is a method to be taken into careful account is certain. Further, it is developed with a lucidity and evenness of temper which may surprise and enlighten those who imagine all German work to be crabbed, obscure and distorted by theoretical prepossessions. Mrs. Lake has done a service to students who cannot grapple with the original in offering them the present very readable version.

L. T. HOBHOUSE.
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In common, I think, with most teachers of Sociology, I have often felt the need of some book which should co-ordinate the general facts of social development and so furnish the student with a scheme within which to group, in their due significance, the elements of both primitive and historical civilization. The late Dr. Müller-Lyer’s Phasen der Kultur supplied this need—but only for students familiar with German. I therefore felt peculiarly glad when Mrs. Lake and her daughter undertook the task of translating the book into English. Those who are familiar with the original will find that the translation very faithfully reproduces both the simplicity of style and the clearness of expression which characterize Dr. Müller-Lyer’s writing. The book is therefore excellently fitted to serve as a basebook for English students; while the wide range of its survey and the inherent interest of the facts dealt with should make a strong appeal also to the general reader.

It is only right to add that the translators began their task in the hope that such a use of their leisure time might be of real assistance to others. Their unselfish perseverance should win the gratitude of both teachers and students of Sociology.

E. J. URWICK.