

**ESSAYS IN
SOCIOLOGY,
VOL. I**

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Essays in sociology, Vol. I by John M. Robertson

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JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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SOCIOLOGY,
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ESSAYS IN SOCIOLOGY

VOL. I.

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BY
JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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DESPONDENT SOCIOLOGY.*

(1893.)

I.

It is a good many years since we have had in our sociological literature a good, serious, sounding croak over the prospects of civilisation. Mr. W. R. Greg's 'Rocks Ahead' is the last performance of the kind which at once recalls itself; and indeed there are many readers who will not recall even that; for Mr. Greg, who was rather overrated in his lifetime, is not now much attended to. Thus Mr. C. H. Pearson, who has devoted a large volume under the title of 'National Life and Character: a Forecast' to themes corresponding to Mr. Greg's, may be said to have had a first-rate opening. It is true, the Duke of Argyll seems to have been performing on the same key

*[Since this critique was written, the present writer has been himself accused of taking a uniformly sombre or "disdainful" view of social evolution in the *past*. Without owning that hard impeachment, he confesses to seeing much more matter for sombre summary in a past studded with failures than in the average situation of civilization to-day. At almost any moment, indeed, there are *some* grounds for grave disquiet in the drift of any civilization whatever; and since Mr. Pearson wrote there have emerged into great clearness, for some of us, grounds for such disquietude in tendencies where he seems to have been partly committed to seeing a process of racial

in a recent work entitled 'The Unseen Foundations of Society'; but then nobody pays much heed to the Duke of Argyll, who, as a journalist once said of him, is "much given to rehearsing the day of judgment, with himself, to use a very inadequate figure, in the chair". Seriously, the Duke of Argyll is only an aristocratic and egotistic amateur in sociology; whereas Mr. Pearson has by solid work earned the right to be heard. His History of England in the Early and Middle Ages, and his smaller book on English History in the Fourteenth Century, will be remembered by all who have read them as the work of an uncommonly thoughtful and vigilant culture-historian. And a glance at the scheme of his 'National Life and Character' suffices to show that he has taken up a theme which will tax all the thought and vigilance that can be brought to bear on it.

revival. But the end of all criticism of social tendency, as of all survey of the past, is to prescribe courses, and it is precisely because of the conclusions he has drawn from the study of the past that the writer resists the conclusions drawn by Mr. Pearson from his survey of the present, these being (in the present writer's opinion) of the nature of false prescriptions. Even if one's view of past evolution be pronounced "pessimistic", there is really no necessary connection between such so-called "pessimism" and despondency; and Mr. Pearson was rather a despondent than a pessimist. And, of course, "pessimism" is a wrong description of the view of things set forth by those of us who prescribe methods of reconstruction. See the essay on 'Culture and Pessimism' hereinafter.]