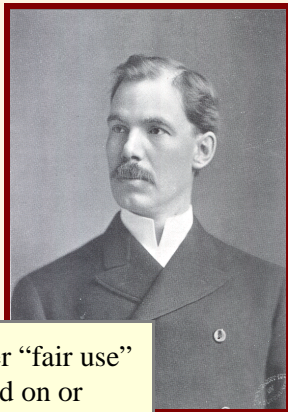


WELCOME!

THIS FILE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL:

Ross, Edward Alsworth. 1936. "The University of Nebraska: February, 1901 – June, 1906." Pp. 87-100 from *Seventy Years of It: An Autobiography*, by Edward A. Ross. New York: D. Appleton-Century.



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CHAPTER VIII

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

February, 1901—June, 1906

My lustrum at Nebraska was happy, for three sons were born to us and all throve. Then the air there has a winey effect, pleases the lungs as sparkling Burgundy pleases the palate. Many a day I found that just to respire was intoxicating.

The Nebraska people are, perhaps, the finest in the Union. They rank third in the proportion of their offspring that get into *Who's Who*; were Nebraska a residential Mecca for successful families from other states—as Connecticut is—they would rank first.

Chancellor E. Benjamin Andrews was one of those economists who through the era of persecution had stood up for the historic monetary policy of this country. The trustees of Brown University, of which he was president, requested him to desist from speaking on the money question. He promptly resigned, on the intervention of the alumni was persuaded to withdraw his resignation, but seized the first opportunity to remove to a more congenial section.

No one could be more simple, manly and forthright than "Benny," as he was fondly called by his faculty. He had the heart of a boy, which was the secret of his great hold on the students. His appreciation of humor was rare and infectious, his chapel talks were a treat. Whatever he touched he freshened with his exuberant personality. I found him an un-failing source of inspiration.

I had already met William Jennings Bryan several times and after I became his fellow-townsmen and neighbor I saw him often. When he was Secretary of State he had my son Gilbert and my niece Sylvia give a violin recital at a diplomatic reception at his Washington home. Bryan's organ-

like voice was so pleasing that often while listening to him I lost the thread of his discourse in my enjoyment of his rich, musical tones. His was one of the most powerful intellects I have known; but, absorbed in politics from his twenties on, he failed to keep up with the general progress of thought, so that in some sectors his outlook was antiquated.

As I looked through Mr. Bryan's book-shelves I noticed they showed many "crank" books presented by the authors; but the works of the great *contemporary* authorities in economics, money, etc., were not there. From our many conversations it became plain to me that Mr. Bryan regarded economic truth as reposing on the authority of great classical thinkers like Adam Smith, Mill, Cairnes and Walker and not as something continually developing out of the study of economic life. For instance, he felt that the qualifications economists were beginning to make in the quantitative theory of money were designed merely to prop the gold standard.

When he was in California in 1899 I tried to impress him with the effect upon the public mind of the sensational gold-strikes in the Klondyke and South Africa, arguing that in the new circumstances the free-silver position might have to be given up. His reaction was that of the debater. He would not consider these new gold supplies as a serious factor in shaping monetary policy, but merely suggested how to parry arguments based upon them. He would say, "Tell them this," or "Meet that point this way." I went away with the conviction that Mr. Bryan was no realist.

My wife and I dined with the Bryans at their home one Sunday in 1905 when he had just been reading Darwin's *Descent of Man*. He held that such a conception of man's origin would weaken the cause of democracy and strengthen class pride and the power of wealth. He gave no sign of having considered what the evidence marshaled by Darwin points to; he regarded Darwin's hypothesis that man has evolved as a "theory" set up as rival to the Creation dogma, not as a generalization emerging irresistibly from an immense number of significant facts. For him the classical authorities and logic settled things—rather than the facts.

He was as healthy-minded a man as I have ever known—

genial, extravert, a model husband, father and friend. Too bad that in his later years he led an attack upon one of the most devoted and defenseless groups in society—the biologists! So many groups are trying to sway the public from sinister motives, he might have spared men of science. Nevertheless, his high character, his stirring eloquence and his chivalrous way of conducting a political campaign made him a giant power for good. Nor should we forget that as Secretary of State he was the one member of the Wilson Administration who foresaw clearly what our profitable dealings with the belligerents in the World War would let us in for.

Brilliant fellow-member of a congenial Ten who dined together once a month was Roscoe Pound, then a supreme-court commissioner. Champion of judges and courts, he pounced on me whenever I swung at the current administration of justice. I insisted that the courts, in dealing with crime, were only social organs equipped with means and power for the purpose of protecting society from malefactors. Every time they turned loose a guilty man on technicalities they confessed incompetence. I did not imagine I was "making a dent" on him, but quietly he began to acquaint himself with the sociological view of law and courts. He worked out a series of masterly studies toward a *Sociological Jurisprudence*, which, however, has not yet seen the light.

He became lecturer in our Law School, then professor, then dean. He prepared an address, "Causes of the Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice," which was given before many state bar associations and deeply impressed the legal profession. Later Pound was called to Northwestern University Law School, then to the Harvard University Law School, of which he is Dean. He has been a compelling force for the adaptation of law and the administration of justice to the changing requirements of our time. In 1906 he wrote me, "I believe you have set me in the path the world is moving in."

While lecturing at Colorado Springs I had long talks with Clarence Darrow. His attitude toward crime and the criminal staggers a sociologist; I could not but feel that he

had lost sight of society's concern in the putting down of crime. His line is, "We're all sinners just like this poor devil in the dock, only he's had worse luck than we." Darrow is past master of the "art that conceals art." He assumes the rôle of a simple, guileless old fellow who trusts to his common sense. He will peel his coat, sit on a corner of the table, slouch against a pillar or a tree, use the simplest English, win the jury to take his utterances as man-to-man. Yet all the time he is the self-conscious, studied artist who knows just where the heart-strings lie, just what incidents and anecdotes and phrases will touch them! Although Darrow is always reaching to play on the heart-strings, you can never accuse him of resorting to sentimentality, for he dwells on things that are *inherently* touching.

I rate Darrow as easily the greatest persuader I have ever listened to.

Town-gown relations in Lincoln were delightful. State officials and first-chop professional and business men were of old-American stock, so that social intercourse had much of the mutual confidence and geniality you find in Southern towns like Charleston and Athens. Of purse-pride there was nought; citizens with ten times our income sought us out for the pleasure of our society. It galled us, though, that the "ceiling" for professors' salaries was \$2,000. The pay schedule had been fixed in law after the "grasshopper years" of the seventies. The average merchant in a "county-seat" had a better living than scholars of national reputation like the botanist C. R. Bessey, the biologist H. B. Ward, the historian F. M. Fling, the chemist H. H. Nicholson, the philosopher A. R. Hill.

What I most missed was means of recreation. I cannot relax amid the daily inflow of letters and telephone calls, books and periodicals; I must flee to the wilderness and lose myself in sport and the contemplation of beauty. But, so cramped were we all financially, no parties could be formed to camp a fortnight on a far trout stream. I had only what days-off I could snatch when some lecture engagement brought me within reach of fishing. However, one July three of us drove from Cody, Wyoming, up the Shoshone River into Yellow-

stone Park and had a go at the rainbow trout; but twenty-two years were to run before I saw the full glory of the Park. A commencement address at the University of Idaho enabled me to pass some rapturous days on Elk Creek. I enjoyed a bit of sport on Spearfish Creek in South Dakota where later President Coolidge had his summer camp. One autumn a party of us drove out to shoot duck on the lakes among the sand hills of northwestern Nebraska. We had rare shooting, but an early blizzard howled down and in that treeless wilderness we should have perished but for a few posts left from one of the cattle-company fences on public land that President Roosevelt insisted be taken down.

One of my students from those days, Burdette G. Lewis, now a distinguished public servant, paints me as others saw me in those days:

Undoubtedly the greatest single event after Chancellor Andrews came to Nebraska was the arrival of Edward Alsworth Ross—the big tall Westerner with a sandy mustache and giant stride. Discharged from Stanford University because he had studied the meaning of Chinese coolie labor, Ross came to Nebraska partly hero, partly curiosity. Students related in awed undertones, after tip-toeing around Ross in the main reading room of the library, that it was true that “Ross reads books just like ‘T. R.’—a page at a glance.”

The writer remembers stepping into the opening session of Dr. Ross's course in Sociology in September, 1901. We came partly out of curiosity as to what “Sociology” might be, partly out of fascination for the unusual Ross, and partly out of a deep feeling of resentment that any man should be fired from a university “for his views.”

The most unconscious and matter-of-fact person there was the new Professor, who came in, pulled back his chair, took his seat at the desk and opened his portfolio as if he had been doing that same thing for twenty-five years. He glanced around the room and then began, “I will now present the seventy-one vestigial proofs of Organic Evolution which we all carry about with us in our body.”

At the end of the breath-taking lecture this born teacher said: “We will discuss the similarities and dissimilarities of animal societies and human societies at our next session. There is a

book in the library by a Russian, Kropotkin, and another by a Belgian, Maeterlinck, which you may consult for ideas. They may help you start your analyses."

The new Professor arose as if he were going away from a mere casual meeting; he did not seem to sense the tension in the room which his lecture had caused. Personally, I was knocked cold "for a loop," as the slang phrase has it, to think I had been betrayed by my own body, which carried seventy-one proofs of all that Uncle Clark had declared was untrue.

I gazed around the room as the lecture ended to see how others felt. If I remember correctly, there was Grace Abbott, sitting out on the edge of her seat, looking at the Professor as if she would like to bite his head off. There was her less self-assured sister, Edith Abbott, sitting limp and helpless with her mouth agape, staring at the Professor. Then there was Emory Buckner nonchalantly making those little crow-feet on his pad just as if he were the original of the Chesterfield advertisement. Then there were the two Myers—Arthur and H. G.; Walter Frederick Meyer, Charles P. Kraft, George Lee and a host of other upper classmen and graduates, whose only point of contact with a freshman like myself seemed to be that they were as rattled and excited as I was.

Then came the Ross seminary in "The Economic Growth of Cities," which ended the complacency of all of us who had been taking Society for granted. The course in "Colonies and Colonization" compelled us to view the world in the course of reconstruction right before our eyes. There was no theorizing and no imposition of preconceived ideas. Professor Ross made us see that the Library was filled with books where ideas could be discovered and the world was filled with men and things in the course of fluxing and that it was up to us to find out for ourselves what it all meant.

Among my students at Nebraska were Fred M. Hunter, Chancellor of the University of Denver, Charles Bracelen, general counsel of the A. T. and T. Company, and Emory R. Buckner, who as U.S. district attorney and special assistant attorney general of New York State has made himself a terror to eminent and powerful malefactors.

Emory, my boy, you have made good!

A young member of the Lincoln bar who afterwards served several terms in Congress as a Bryan democrat was James

Manahan and from his autobiography, *Trials of a Lawyer* (pp. 37-39), I lift the following:

When Dr. Edward A. Ross, who had won recognition as an author and sociologist at Leland Stanford University before coming to Nebraska, proposed to conduct a seminar for post-graduate work on the subject of Colonies and Colonization, I registered as a student and enjoyed the work. It was inspiring to listen to Dr. Ross lecture and take part in the discussions he invited. Facts were of prime importance in the acquisition of knowledge and in the marshaling of facts Dr. Ross was always fair. He had, I think, however, an unconscious prejudice in favor of the Nordic race and Anglo-Saxon civilization so-called! Intimidation and exploitation of India by England was "unjust" but intimidation and exploitation of the Philippines by Spain was "tyranny"; Cromwell in Ireland was a "hard-fisted soldier" but Weyler in Cuba was a "butcher."¹ But regardless of the Nordic Myth, fixed like a religion in his mind, Dr. Ross was a brave and lucid thinker and an inspiration to students seeking truth under his guidance. He had the happy faculty of provoking his class into a questioning frame of mind. We had to be shown. And the harder we made the exposition for the "professor" the better he liked it. He enjoyed argument. One evening we discussed the question of race suicide, a phrase coined by him in one of his earlier books. In the discussion I took occasion to condemn birth control. Dr. Ross countered with a mass of statistical data, showing the multiplication of degenerates. I replied that his mathematics showed the importance of multiplying, and not curtailing the production of the fit. Dr. Ross smiled tolerantly and calmly proceeded to show that the health and happiness of the home and the economic well being of the state were better served by medium-sized families. I had nothing in kind to say, having done no research work on the question, so in desperation I had to fall back on myself as an authority, I said, "I know what I am talking about. My mother bore twelve children. I'm the poorest specimen in the lot. There never was a happier bunch. The doctor was a stranger in our house. My mother was never sick and never complained."

"Now, Manahan," quietly rejoined Dr. Ross, "I will leave it to your sense of fairness, would not your mother have had more

¹ Manahan is right. It was later, when I had made first-hand studies on the spot, that I came to a juster estimate of British imperialism.

out of life, a richer enjoyment, with time for reading and happy relaxation, if instead of twelve children she had, say, four or five?"

There flashed across my mind a vision of my mother's toil-hardened hands and patient smile that would not be denied by me, but lawyer-like I said, "Yes—perhaps so—but—five children—that would have left me out—I was number six."

Ross threw up both hands, and with a laugh capitulated saying: "Well, anything that would leave you out of the picture would never do."

The gold standard had been "put over" in 1896 and imperialism in 1900 by making American business men class-conscious and persuading them of their God-given right to run this country. It was, of course, un-American but most of them fell for it as if it were huckleberry pie. In Lincoln I met frequently with the Round Table, a club founded by Mr. Bryan, which had come to be dominated by leading merchants and bankers. Such cases of "swelled head"! They actually believed the newspaper yawp, 1896-1902, about the omniscience and powerful intellect of the business man. They snorted at anti-imperialism and became apoplectic at criticisms of Britain's course with the Boers or of our dealings with the Filipinos.

With these browbeating wholesalers and grain-buyers I adopted the rôle of a *picador* in the bull ring. I knew the facts, which they did not, and after I had repeatedly made a colander of their hides and pinned *banderillas* to their flesh they grew chastened and wary. They left off bellowing and beating fist on table when contradicted. Then after 1902 savage icebergs turned to harmless water in the genial air of "regard for the public interest." In two or three years several of these erstwhile bullies became good friends of mine.

To show how their university stood in the matter of academic freedom, the Harvard social science professors had President Eliot invite me to give four lectures at Harvard in the spring of 1902 on Recent Trends in Sociology. I gave the lectures on successive evenings at the end of March before 140-175 hearers, the number tending to rise. The lectures, published in the Harvard *Quarterly Journal of Economics*,

were reprinted in my volume *The Foundations of Sociology*, brought out by Macmillan in 1905, which circulated upwards of nine thousand copies. Good talks with President Eliot, quite the Olympian, and with William James, Josiah Royce, Thomas Nixon Carver and other lights of the Harvard faculty convinced me that I had not lost caste by sticking up for bimetallism.

I had spent a year going over and appraising the sociological literature of a decade in four languages. Most of it, I own, was more new than true, "suggestive and thought-provoking" rather than sound. After setting it all in order the idea sprouted in me, "I'll build a Ross system!" I did, but eighteen years were to elapse before it came out.

My *Social Control* manuscript, being overlarge for Macmillan's "Citizen" series, had to be cut down. So in January, 1901, I spent three weeks going over it ruthlessly, giving a sharp tug to every phrase and sentence. If it came away it was stricken; if the web of thought jerked it back into place it stayed. You would have thought I was revising copy for a cablegram. Perhaps paring my manuscript 7 per cent explains why, after having been out more than a third of a century, *Social Control* still sells one hundred and twenty-five copies a year!

Familiar with "young author" delusions I schooled myself not to hope for a circulation above four thousand copies; actually 17,300 have been absorbed. In fact, every one of my twenty-four books save *Standing Room Only?* did better than I expected. I dread rosy "optimism."

Rattlesnake newspapers always trying to hurt me with the public in order to make it easier to "fire" me, used to shriek that I was an anarchist; the fact is, nothing could be more contrary to the anarchist views of Proudhon and his disciples than *Social Control*. They insisted that good order comes almost of itself, doesn't need to be provided or thought about—which is the precise antithesis of my position. When, in Moscow in December, 1917, I had long talks with Peter Kropotkin, I saw that what he and other "philosophical anarchists" wanted was the freedom of the local community from the butter-fingered interference of bureaucrats. After I

came to know the old tsarist State I understood why the Russian *Narodniki* decried governmental attempts to control the rural village. Once I had "had it out" with the author of *Mutual Aid* I heaved a sigh of relief, for from the very inception of my book I had worried over what that redoubtable Slav might think of it.

In the thirty-five years since the book left my anvil I have scrutinized society in many countries and the society which "controls" does not look so global to me now as it did in 1900. Not only do most laws at their passage reflect the outcome of a struggle behind the scenes among pressure groups, but the same holds true of the trends of public opinion and of the deliverances of organized religion. Sooner or later the alert, well-led elements organize in order to mold social requirements to their wishes. The content of the code of social requirements, as well as the strictness with which obedience thereto is exacted, reveal an incessant tug-of-war among spokesmen of contending groups. The masses, when they are too childish or trustful to organize, as is usually the case, will surely be "everybody's goat."

Since I hammered out *Social Control* my forecast of the coming lot of man has greatly changed. I doubt if "lessons from history" will have much to do with shaping humanity's future. Basic conditions are changing so rapidly that most old techniques of control are junk. Science and Invention, with offerings ever more strange and exciting, together with Applied Psychology, open vistas into a wondrous New Age with its own problems of control, in which control devices will be employed that the Past never dreamt of.

So my thousands of hours of patient digging-into-the-Past in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and the British Museum Library went for naught!

In the spring of 1903 I sent an announcement to downtown professional men I knew to the effect that I would observe the hundredth anniversary of the appearance of Malthus' "Essay on Population" in its expanded form (1803) by offering a seminary in "Dynamics of Population." I did not open this seminary to graduate students lest the necessity of discussing delicate points lay me open to the charge that I was

corrupting youth. Twelve gentlemen registered for the course including three judges, two clergymen, an editor and certain lawyers and doctors. The course was a brilliant success, the members reading some of the best papers I have ever heard. It became apparent that the topics involved could be handled without giving offense to any one, so from then on the course was open to our graduate students. The fact that I felt it risky to give the course until I had tried it out with prominent downtown men indicates the fury of eagerness I sensed in Nebraska reactionaries to "get" us liberals.

One who speaks up for public interests against powerful selfish private interests notes great changes in social weather. From 1896 on, the growing mastery of concentrated avaricious interests over opinion-molders made it harder for champions of the general interest to win public sympathy, even to gain a hearing. Then after 1903, thanks first of all to Theodore Roosevelt in the White House, the public began to wake up to the looting of national wealth by ringsters. The "muckrakers" and the exposing "ten-cent" magazines raised such a tide of public indignation that hardened newspaper defenders of the rings were obliged to yield to the prevailing mood and disclose incriminating truth they would gladly have suppressed! The movement gained such momentum that it went right on after Roosevelt had been succeeded in the White House by Taft, watch-dog of big private interests. President Wilson voiced social interests admirably until we got into the World War and Washington was overrun with dollar-a-year corporation executives. Then, in the first post-War decade, private interests had such an inning as they had never before enjoyed in this country, save in the period 1866-73.

From the lecture platform I catch these shifts because they register in the temper of my listeners. For years my protests against the stupid sacrifice of wide collective interests to clamorous, wire-pulling narrow interests are listened to with sympathy and bring me the plaudits of the decent. Then by means of kept press, kept speakers, party machines, and influential national organizations they get control of (write your own "ticket"!), the champions of private interests con-

trive to reverse the current and I note the rise in my hearers of doubt, suspicion and hostility. It is not I who have changed, but they. From many primed sources they have been systematically plied with the notion that we upholders of social interests, being "dangerous," "subversive" and "un-American," ought not to be listened to, even allowed to speak! The change is more marked in high-school students than in college students, in townfolk than in countryfolk, in small-town audiences than in city audiences, in the worldly than in the religious, in the young than in the old. The young (poor things!) swallow whatever is offered them, whereas the older remember the carnival of looting that went on during the last reactionary epoch.

The veterans who have broken many a lance for the public cause groan in disgust, "O Lord, the hogs have broken out again; ten years' work gone for nothing"! Well do they realize that the reversal of a pro-social current of public opinion (with the consequent relaxing of wholesome legal and administrative restrictions which it has clamped on the buccaneers) is worth literally *billions upon billions* to the Big Fellows. Therefore, untold money and years of organizing, scheming and wire-pulling will be given to bring it about. So the time comes when tens of thousands of bright people *make their living pooh-pooh-ing social interests, deriding their defenders and deodorizing, whitewashing and glorifying hankering and aggressive private interests*. Well-captured this mercenary corps should sway the battle in favor of the Porcine, and often it does.

Now, from 1903 on the Hanna-Aldrich-Quay ice-sheet was retreating and sleet was giving way to sunshine for us champions of the social welfare. The doubts of my natural-science colleagues about me vanished within a year. More and more the ideas I was circulating found favor among the thoughtful. I was in growing demand as lecturer and commencement speaker and the young liked the views I stood for. The next Great Ice Age (1919-31) was still years away.

In 1905 my old Hopkins teacher, Dr. Richard T. Ely, who since 1892 had wonderfully built up economics at the University of Wisconsin, got me called to the new chair of sociol-

ogy. I accepted and in the fall of 1906 we removed to Madison.

When it became known that I was to leave, the *Nebraska State Journal* said:

An interesting change has taken place in the attitude of a large section of the Lincoln public toward Dr. Ross since he came here five years ago. He was handicapped by the suspicion that his appointment was political, for he had been a Bryan supporter in the campaign of 1896. When he arrived republicans and gold democrats looked at him out of the corners of their eyes and wondered where he carried the horns and hoofs that they knew he had on him somewhere. Ross said nothing about his troubles at Stanford, but went to work quietly to carve out a new success for himself. The frost began to melt in a short time after his arrival here, and in a year or two the strength and originality of his work won general recognition. A few weeks ago when it was rumored that he might resign to go elsewhere, the protests and calls upon the regents to retain him were unparalleled in number and energy. Most of these came from the very men who had denounced his election as a piece of populist politics. It was as complete a reversal of influential sentiment as this city has ever experienced.

Shortly before leaving I had a hand-written letter from Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes which gave me as much pleasure as an *accolade*.

May 6, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

A little while ago my friend Professor Ely told me of Ross, *Social Control*. I sent for it and then, seeing an advertisement of *The Foundations of Sociology*, I sent for that and this moment have finished reading it. Having done so I cannot refrain from writing a word of appreciation of the two books to you. They are so civilized, so enlightened by side knowledge, often indicated by a single key word, so skeptical yet so appreciative even of illusion, so abundant in insight, and often so crowded with felicities, that it makes me happy to think that they come from America and not from Europe. They hit me where I live and have led me to say by way of Philistine counter paradox to those who think that there is nothing worth reading nowadays—Give me the books of the last 25 years and you may destroy all the rest. And I have said to myself, What vanity to think of intel-

lectual solitude when such adequate thinking is going on. Perhaps I should recall a visit I made a few days ago to Mr. Lester Ward, alas, stupidly late—on hearing that he was about to leave town. He asked me of what Court I was a judge. And I said to myself the optic nerve which is the root of vision cannot see—he did not know or care for external details. So I will explain that I am a judge of the U. S. Sup. Ct. and in that capacity as well as by personal predilection hold myself bound to know what I can of the justification and criticisms of my proper business. There is a certain sadness in reading the books of those who generalize—“I could have painted pictures like that youth you praise so,” one thinks. I do not repine, but when I read what has given me so much pleasure and encouragement I think it only right to say to the author, you are doing a noble work.

Very truly yours,

O. W. HOLMES

Five weeks later came the following from the White House:

June 15, 1906

MY DEAR PROFESSOR ROSS:

Justice Holmes told me to read *Social Control* because he regarded it as one of the substantial achievements of constructive scholarship in America. I have been reading it accordingly, and I like it so much that I must take the liberty of writing to tell you so. Sometimes I feel a little blue about the immense amount of printed matter of utterly ephemeral value turned out within our borders, and grow to have dismal suspicions that the appalling fecundity of the writers who do such work means the choking out of the writers who in any department do really serious work of permanent value; and so I always feel a real sense of obligation to the man whose achievement tends to make my fears groundless.

I do not suppose you ever get to Washington, but if you do, be sure to let me know.

Sincerely yours,

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

SEVENTY YEARS OF IT

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS, Ph.D., LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
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