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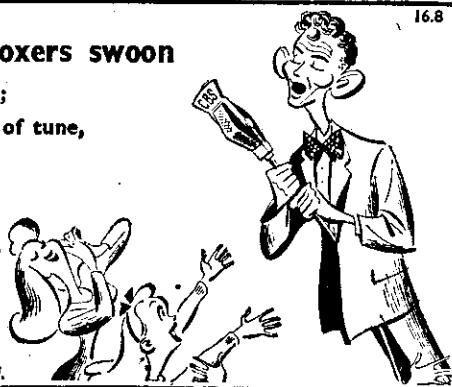
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# "THE PROPER STUDY"

*An Anthropologist Discusses His Subject*

IT has become almost platitudinous to talk about the "export of brains" from New Zealand. We take it almost for granted that New Zealanders with intellectual gifts who go abroad are like retired prize-fighters: they "never come back." If some of us find this a disturbing thought, we should reflect that in many such instances New Zealand could not possibly have provided the necessary conditions in which a talent or an intellectual gift could have been profitably invested.

A special "Listener" interview by A. R. D. FAIRBURN

Professor Raymond Firth, who occupies the chair of anthropology at London University, is an Aucklanders by birth. I cannot imagine that his particular gifts could have been brought to fruition if he had stayed in New Zealand. Nor can I think that if he were to return now, the necessary scope and opportunities could be made available for him. In his case, as in many others, there is good reason for us to congratulate ourselves on having failed to keep a good man down.

Raymond Firth was once a pupil at the Auckland Grammar School. One fateful day he came across a copy of Maning's *Old New Zealand* in a local bookshop, and (in retrospect) that seems to have settled the question of career for him. He dates his interest in anthropology from the time he read that New Zealand classic, and found questions arising in his mind that called for an answer. Those questions have continued to beckon to him (backing away, tantalisingly) throughout the years, and he has followed them—first to London, where he gained his doctorate of philosophy in 1927; then to the remote island of Tikopia in the Pacific; then to Sydney; and back again to London.

In Tikopia he spent a year studying the way of life of the Solomon Islanders. In Sydney he acted as lecturer and acting-professor in the department of anthropology at the university. He returned to Britain to take the job of reader in social anthropology in the School of Economics at London University. Then, in 1941, he received an appointment at the Admiralty, and became secretary to the Colonial Social Science Research Council. (If that sounds formidable, as it did to me at first, have patience: I shall try to explain what it means in a moment). He was appointed to the London University chair of anthropology in 1944.

Professor Firth's purpose in his recent visit to New Zealand (he left for London again on April 22) was to visit his parents, who live near Otahuhu, in Auckland. But he probably would not have seen them during this present year if important academic business had not called him to Australia. With three other distinguished men (one of whom was Professor Oliphant, the nuclear physicist) he has been acting on an advisory committee set up in connection with the establishment of an Australian National University at Canberra. When I first heard the name of this

new institution mentioned, I feared for a moment that the Australians might be taking a leaf out of the Nazis' book. But Professor Firth soon set my mind at rest. This University is to be of a special type. It will devote itself primarily to research and to post-graduate teaching in scientific subjects. There will be four departments, covering (1) physical sciences (2) medical sciences (3) social sciences, and (4) civic studies. Australia, it seems, is taking a realistic view of the future: for science, rather than the humanities, will no doubt continue to dominate our lives.

"The proper study of mankind," wrote Alexander Pope, to whom I apologise for breaking up his line in this fashion, "is man." But the anthropologist, as Professor Firth pointed out, runs up against certain difficulties when he proceeds, with due propriety, to that study. "Man" is a big subject. The anthropologist soon finds, when he begins to explore his material, that he moves into the territory of specific sciences—psychology, economics, political science and so on. This has naturally led anthropologists to specialise in some particular aspect of the general, all-inclusive subject. Professor Firth himself has been drawn to social anthropology—the study of men in their social groups rather than man as an individual. I asked him to give me some indication of the present trends of development in social anthropology.

"There are three main lines of development at the present time," he replied. "First, a more rigorous theoretical analysis is being made of the concepts relating to society and the details of the social structure. Groups such as the 'lineage clan' and their functioning in social life, their political and economic relationships in the simpler forms of society, are being investigated very fully.

"Secondly, the relationship between personality and culture, and the conditioning of the individual by his social environment, are being studied intensively, especially in America. Thirdly, anthropological knowledge is being applied for practical purposes. Research is being carried out on an increasingly wide scale in connection with problems with which governments are concerned—peasant development, colonial administration, and so on."

## White Man's Burden

I confess that I had thought previously of anthropology in terms of the measurement of comparative cranial capacity in fossil skulls, the analysis of primitive magical rites, and other such matters that belong to the deep perspective of history and pre-history. I had not entertained the notion of anthropology as a modern practical science. It seems, however, that a great field of work is opening up.

It is fairly obvious, even to the layman, that the administration of colonial government among native races has not been carried out with complete success by the European nations. To use plainer language, it has in many

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