



PROFESSOR FIRTH
New Zealand is behind the times

instances been botched. Crude attempts have often been made to impose the theology of Little Bethel, the morality of Tooting, and the politics of the barrack square on races to whom these things meant less than nothing. The White Man's Burden has been carried, on the whole, as clumsily as an inept store-hand will carry a sack of potatoes: that is to say, we have tried (with the best of intentions) to do something very like embracing it—whereas a native would probably carry it with ease balanced on his head.

The long and the short of it is that in the past we have not used our heads sufficiently in dealing with subject native races. Social anthropology, regarded as a practical science, sets out to remedy this error. It is being taken very seriously by the British Government. Four years ago the Secretary of State for the Colonies created the Colonial Social Science Research Council to organise and administer research work—and Professor Firth, as I have already related, became the secretary of this new body. The Council includes among its members economists, anthropologists, linguists, psychologists, political scientists, and other experts—most of them university people who are interested in making available their specialised knowledge. Various research programmes have been begun, the funds for which have been provided by the British Government under the authority of the Colonial Welfare and Development Act.

"Are any other nations doing this sort of work?" I asked Professor Firth.

"Yes. You may be interested to know that New Zealand is the only country with Pacific responsibilities that so far has given no special training to its administrative officers. There is a very general realisation elsewhere that anthropological knowledge of all kinds is not only useful but essential in successfully administering colonial territories. As far as the British Empire is concerned, the initial expenses of research are being borne by the Home Government. But the local administration will in every case provide a large part of the cost of the actual development schemes that are undertaken as a result of research."

"What forms does this research take?" I asked.

"Well, for example, basic research is being done regarding the standards of living of African peoples, the social

origin of these standards and of the legal systems operating, the relationship between these and European legal systems, and so on. Land tenure rights are looked into—a very thorny question, this, as a rule. Women's rights—the system of economic incentives in operation—the general scheme of 'values' of any particular society—these are the kind of material dealt with."

I had kept my most difficult question till the last. "What about the Europeanising of native races?" I asked. "Are we to let their native ways of life be destroyed, and their whole pattern of life be broken up? Are we to link every native village with Hollywood, and let the people have motor cars, radio sets, lipstick, high heeled shoes, digest magazines, and all the rest of our paraphernalia?"

"The only answer one can give to that question," said Professor Firth, "is that the decision doesn't really lie in our hands. All over the world, the native peoples are already taking things into their own hands. All primitive peoples are now at least on the fringe of industrial civilisation, and have access to European consumer-goods. Up to a point, the institutions of Western society are being introduced. Nearly everywhere—and particularly in such places as Malaya and West Africa—there is a dynamic drive among the native peoples towards bettering themselves. They are already selecting what they want from the wide choice of European consumer-goods. One finds a passionate interest in bicycles and other mechanical things. Many natives are enthusiastically teaching themselves typewriting. I've seen West Africans manufacturing lamps out of old cigarette tins, metal pipes and bottle-tops, and selling them for sixpence a time. They make a good job, too."

"In short, the time has gone past when we can ask the question, 'Shall we change the ways of life of native peoples.' The only important question at this time of day is *how*."

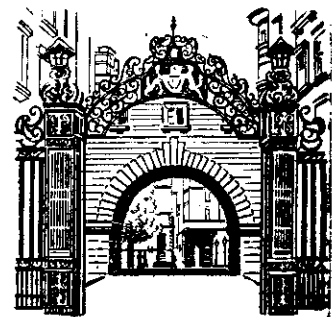
"And in this our European governments have some responsibility?"

"Certainly. We can't stop the tide from flowing, but we can guide it to a certain extent. We can see that the impact of European civilisation is not so sharp as to cause injury. We can prevent mistakes from being repeated. We can try to ensure that change and transition occur as smoothly as possible. And this is where social anthropology comes in. From now on, if all goes well, whatever administrative measures are applied to colonial territories will be applied in the light of the best knowledge available."

More About "Carmen"

WITH performances of Bizet's *Carmen* scheduled to begin at the end of the month, recordings of music from the opera should be popular with radio audiences who want to freshen up their memories. A few weeks ago we announced in *The Listener* that a member of the NZBS, Ashley Heenan, had arranged a special *Carmen* Suite, including some of the opera's best-known music, to be played by the National Orchestra. But there is also in existence a *Carmen* Suite that was arranged by the composer himself, and it will be heard in a programme by the BBC Theatre Orchestra from 1YA at 9.35 p.m. this Sunday, May 9. The orchestra is conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham.

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