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Ethnographical Studies and Colonial Administration.

IN a recently published work by a resident in East Africa of many years' standing, it is stated that the native regards with profound mistrust all white men excepting only British officials and missionaries. This observation, perhaps a little too sweeping and perhaps too flattering to our vanity if assumed to be of universal application, lends support to the view, with which we have been made familiar since the British Empire became self-conscious, that members of the British race are pre-eminently successful as settlers and administrators in strange lands. In so far as this is borne out by the facts, it is in large part due to a certain ability to handle a backward people with a degree of sympathetic understanding. Although it is true that the British record in this matter has not been spotless in the past, and even now is not always above reproach, yet judged by results our methods may perhaps bear comparison, not entirely to their disadvantage, with those of other nationalities.

Lest such a comparison may appear invidious, it is possible to appeal for justification to facts which were forced on the attention of British officers in the former German colonies in Africa after the War. In the official reports, reference is frequently made to behaviour on the part of the natives which certainly seemed to indicate that their former rulers had inspired them with anything but confidence in the white man.

There is, however, less reason for diffidence on our part in instituting such a comparison now that in France, the power with a stake in tropical Africa second only to that of Britain, an appeal has been made to British methods to explain and justify action which has recently been taken by the University of Paris.

The pre-eminence of France in the study of pre-historic man and his handiwork has to a certain extent overshadowed the achievements of those of her men of science who have devoted themselves to other branches of anthropological investigation. To say this is not to ignore the claims of the distinguished human anatomists who have done so much to systematise the study of physical anthropology; or of the distinguished sociological group, with the late E. Durkheim at its head, which founded and carried on *L'Année Sociologique*, now happily revived after an intermission of some years owing to the War. Perhaps only those who follow specialist publications are aware of the extent to which ethnographical investigation has been carried on in the French colonies. Of the results, comparatively little has appeared in the more widely read publications devoted to the study of anthropology. A conspicuous example is the work which has appeared

in the valuable and scholarly publications of the École d'Extrême Orient, dealing with the cultures and peoples of the French possessions in Further Asia. It ought, perhaps, to be unnecessary to emphasise the value of much of the work which has been done in Madagascar and the colonies of North and West Africa.

On more than one occasion in these columns, stress has been laid on the practical value of anthropological training in the administration of the affairs of backward races, or, to use the more general term, of peoples of non-European culture. It has been of interest to those who take this view to note that in the courses of lectures on ethnology and other departments of anthropology which were advertised at the opening of last winter's session of the University of Paris, there was a distinct bias in the direction of the possible practical application of the instruction to be given. Even courses of a general character in the study of religion and social anthropology frequently had special reference to the native races of some or all of the French colonial possessions. The study of Moslem custom and religion was naturally capable of more directly utilitarian treatment; while a large number of courses in linguistics covered many of the more important native languages under French jurisdiction.

A more significant development, however, is the foundation within the University of Paris of an Institute of Ethnology. The object of the Institute is, in the first place, to create a body of professional ethnologists and to give to any residents or intending residents in the French colonies who have an inclination for linguistic or ethnological studies, such instruction as will enable them to carry on these studies intelligently and in accordance with methods which will render the material collected of scientific and practical value. Secondly, to direct attention to recently discovered facts or newly developed methods with the view of their verification, and the testing in the field of any hypothesis under discussion. Thirdly, to publish ethnographical works which, owing either to their length or the amount of illustration they require, cannot be published in the usual periodicals. Fourthly, in conjunction with the colonial authorities, to send expeditions into the field and not to leave to foreigners the exploitation of the ethnography of the French colonies, as has happened in the past.

The idea of such an Institute was first put forward by M. Marcel Mauss in 1914; but its realisation has only recently been attained, the project having been revived in 1924. As a teaching body the Institute will in no way conflict with any existing interests. On the contrary, its primary function will be to act as a co-ordinating body for the courses already provided, or to be provided, at the University, the Collège de

France, the Museum, the École des Hautes Études, the Ecole Coloniale, and the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes. It will provide, in addition, in courses such as cannot be obtained elsewhere, a small number of lessons in technical matters with the view of giving an orientation to the future ethnologist. The Institute will grant a diploma in anthropology and, if or when the necessary ministerial permission has been obtained, a certificate of *Licencie es Lettres*.

It is not without interest to note that Prof. Lévy-Bruhl, in an account of the Institut d'Ethnologie and its organisation and objects, which appears in the *Revue d'Ethnographie et des Traditions Populaires*, 4me trimestre, 1925, Nos. 23-24, indicates to what an extent the founders have been influenced by British methods in defining the scope and methods of the Institut. He opens with a reference of some length to Capt. Rattray's book on Ashanti, pointing to the incident of the 'Golden Stool' there related as an example of the way in which a serious conflict with the natives, and very possibly a punitive expedition, were averted by the advice based on expert knowledge which the newly constituted anthropological service was able to place at the disposal of the administration. Had it not been for the official anthropologist's knowledge of native customs and ways of thought, action in connexion with the Stool which it had been decided to take, without thought of its possible effect on the religious susceptibilities of the native in view of the sacred character of the Stool, would almost certainly have caused a serious uprising. Prof. Lévy-Bruhl goes on to express the hope that a similar anthropological service may one day be instituted in the French colonies. It will then be the aim of the Institut d'Ethnologie to turn out officers competent to man it, not necessarily highly trained ethnologists, but men with a sufficient knowledge of anthropological method to enable them to collect material of both scientific value and practical utility. He pertinently adds that in the study of the resources of the French colonies which is necessarily a preceding condition of their full development, the greatest asset of all, the native population, should not be overlooked.

However flattered we may feel at the compliment implied in Prof. Lévy-Bruhl's reference to the work of Capt. Rattray and his department, British anthropologists have still to regret that the principle that all administrative officials in British dependencies with backward peoples under their jurisdiction should be trained in anthropological methods is an ideal which has yet to be officially adopted in practice. An argument which is applicable to the case of the French colonies should, it is permissible to say, apply with immensely greater cogency to that of the British Empire.