

## Notes and News

### *The Present Position of the Social Sciences.*

THE subject of the Foundation Oration delivered at the London School of Economics in June by Sir William Beveridge, the retiring Director, was 'The Place of the Social Sciences in Human Knowledge'. Though Sir William did not deal specifically with anthropology, his remarks must be of interest to all who regard that subject as one branch of those which are seeking to apply the discipline of science to the study of human institutions. He took for his text the lecture delivered by Thomas Henry Huxley on the educational value of the natural sciences at Birmingham in 1854, and stressed the applicability to the social sciences of the methods there laid down as characteristic of all scientific study: the observation of facts, their classification, deduction from general propositions, and the verification of deduction by fresh observations. Even at that time, Sir William pointed out, Huxley advocated the development of a science which would take society as a whole for its subject. He went on to consider whether the methods of the social sciences are in fact such as to justify their claim to be regarded as scientific studies. In his view this will not be the case till they attach more importance than at present to the observation and verification of facts and until there is closer co-operation between workers in the social and the natural sciences. 'The Social Sciences are not infra-mathematics, but ultra-biology.' If they are to fill this position they must not only be prepared to concentrate more attention on observed fact, but those who are engaged on work in these subjects must aim at a detachment from political controversy which is far harder to the student of human institutions than to the biologist or the astronomer. The shortcomings of the social sciences in this respect may be due to the more controversial nature of the subjects with which they deal; in Sir William's view, however, they arise rather from the rudimentary stage at which these studies still are. He reminded his audience that the theory of Copernicus was published in its final form in 1529, that of Adam Smith not till 1776. The technique of the social sciences is hardly better developed, in relation to the problems which require investigation, than were the crude devices employed by Galileo for the study of acceleration under gravity.

Most of Sir William's remarks applied primarily to the study of the economic institutions of advanced communities, but their relevance to social anthropology is clear. In its insistence on empirical observation and the testing of facts social anthropology has been ahead of some other branches of social science. It is fortunate in not having to rely for its data on statistics covering an immense range, the inadequacy of which for the needs of the

economist Sir William deplored; though perhaps the need for statistics on the small scale that the study of a primitive community allows has been overlooked in the past. In its insistence upon the biological bases of culture it keeps in close touch with the natural sciences. The temptation to leave the field of scientific detachment for that of partisan controversy must be at least as great for the anthropologist as for any other social scientist; and opinions differ as to the extent to which the scientist may have the right or even the duty to yield to that temptation.

### *Nigerian Art Exhibition.*

AN exhibition of modern Nigerian wood-carvings, terra-cottas, and water-colours was opened in London on July 6 by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The exhibition was arranged by Mr. K. C. Murray, Superintendent of Art Training for the Nigerian Government Education Department, and the 86 exhibits were the work of five Africans aged from 17 to 28 years.

Mr. Murray explains in his introduction to the catalogue that all the artists have received an education which, though adapted to African conditions, compares fairly closely with that given at English secondary schools. The teaching of art has been strictly limited to instruction in technique and every effort has been made to avoid imposing European conventions. Perspective, for instance, has not been taught. The students learn much from each other but without any direct copying. Photographs of the art of other countries and especially of Africa have been shown where possible, for it seemed necessary to establish some standards of taste since so many illustrations and advertisements in English books and newspapers are inevitably seen.

The general impression given by the exhibition is the remarkable uniformity of mind shown by all the exhibitors regardless of their age, tribe, or religion. Mr. Murray says that Uthman M. Ibrahim was the first to have training and has thus indirectly inspired the others, but this fact is not in itself an adequate explanation of the uniformity noticed. Those of us who are acquainted with the works of art produced in Southern Nigeria both to-day and in the past by unschooled craftsmen working in the traditional style on objects for religious and other purposes, will recognize that this traditional style has survived strongly in all the exhibits. This fact must be regarded as greatly to the credit of the European teachers who have not forced an unreal personality or false individuality upon their pupils.

The ordinary visitor to the exhibition is likely to be in some danger of comparing the work shown with that of certain modern artists such as the painter Rousseau and the sculptor Barlach, but such a comparison is not justifiable. While men like Rousseau and Barlach abstract and simplify with a highly sophisticated knowledge of form and line, these young Nigerians are obviously in search of that knowledge and have to fight an inherited tendency to abstract form. This arises from the fact that most