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SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: PAST AND PRESENT*

THE MARETT LECTURE, 1950

by

PROFESSOR E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

President of the Royal Anthropological Institute

198 Mr. Rector, Fellows and Scholars, I have been greatly honoured by your invitation to deliver this lecture in commemoration of Rector Marett, a great teacher of social anthropology and my friend and counsellor for over twenty years. I am touched also, Mr. Rector, at delivering it in this familiar hall.

I have chosen to discuss a few very broad questions—questions of method. The considerable advances made in social anthropology during the last thirty years and the creation of new departments in several universities would seem to require some reflection on what the subject is, and which direction it is taking, or ought to take, for anthropology has now ceased to be an amateur pursuit and has become a profession. There is a division of opinion on these matters among anthropologists themselves, broadly between those who regard the subject as a natural science and those who, like myself, regard it as one of the humanities, and this division, which reflects quite different sentiments and values, is apparent whenever there arises a discussion about the methods and aims of the discipline. It is perhaps at its sharpest when the relations between anthropology and history are being discussed, and since consideration of this difficult question brings out the issues most clearly, I shall devote a large part of my lecture to it. To perceive how these issues have come about it is necessary to cast our eyes back over the period of the genesis and early development of the subject.

Eighteenth-Century Origins

A subject of scholarship can hardly be said to have autonomy before it is taught in the universities. In that sense social anthropology is a very new subject. In another sense it may be said to have begun with the earliest speculations of mankind, for everywhere and at all times men have propounded theories about the nature of human society. In this sense there is no definite point at which social anthropology can be said to have begun. Nevertheless, there is a point beyond which it is hardly profitable to trace back its development. This nascent period of our subject was the middle and late eighteenth century. It is a child of the Enlightenment and bears throughout its history and today many of the characteristic features of its ancestry.

In France its lineage runs from Montesquieu and such writers as D'Alembert, Condorcet, Turgot, and in general

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the Encyclopædists, to Saint Simon, who was the first to propose clearly a science of society, and to his one-time disciple Comte, who named the science sociology. This stream of French philosophical rationalism was later, through the writings of Durkheim and his students and Lévy-Bruhl, who were in the direct line of Saint-Simonian tradition, to colour English anthropology strongly.

Our forebears were the Scottish moral philosophers, whose writings were typical of the eighteenth century: David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Frances Hutcheson, Dugald Stewart, Adam Ferguson, Lord Kames and Lord Monboddo. These writers took their inspiration from Bacon, Newton and Locke, though they were also much influenced by Descartes. They insisted that the study of societies, which they regarded as natural systems or organisms, must be empirical, and that by the use of the inductive method it would be possible to explain them in terms of general principles or laws in the same way as physical phenomena had been explained by the physicists. It must also be normative. Natural law is derived from a study of human nature, which is in all societies and at all times the same. These writers also believed in limitless progress and in laws of progress. Man, being everywhere alike, must advance along certain lines through set stages of development, and these stages can be hypothetically reconstructed by what Dugald Stewart called conjectural history, and what later became known as the comparative method. Here we have all the ingredients of anthropological theory in the nineteenth century and even at the present day.

The writers I have mentioned, both in France and England, were of course in the sense of their time philosophers and so regarded themselves. In spite of all their talk about empiricism they relied more on introspection and *a priori* reasoning than on observation of actual societies. For the most part they used facts to illustrate or corroborate theories reached by speculation. It was not till the middle of the nineteenth century that systematic studies of social institutions were conducted with some attempt at scientific rigour. In the decade between 1861 and 1871 there appeared books which we regard as our early classics: Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861), Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), Fustel de Coulanges' *La Cité antique* (1864), McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865), Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865), and Morgan's *The Systems of Consanguinity* (1871). Not all these books were concerned primarily with primitive societies, though those that were least concerned with them, like *Ancient Law*, were dealing with comparable institutions at early periods in the development of historical societies. It was McLennan and Tylor in this country, and Morgan in America, who first treated

primitive societies as a subject which might in itself engage the attention of serious scholars.

Nineteenth-Century Anthropology

The authors of this decade, like those of the generation before them, were anxious to rid the study of social institutions of mere speculation. They, also, thought that they could do this by being strictly empirical and by rigorous use of the comparative historical method. Using this method they, and those who followed them, wrote many large volumes purporting to show the origin and development of social institutions: the development of monogamous marriage from promiscuity, of property from communism, of contract from status, of industry from nomadism, of positive science from theology, of monotheism from animism. Sometimes, especially when treating religion, explanations were sought in terms of psychological origins as well as in terms of historical origins.

These Victorian anthropologists were men of outstanding ability, wide learning and obvious integrity. If they over-emphasized resemblances in custom and belief and paid insufficient attention to diversities, they were investigating a real and not an imaginary problem when they attempted to account for remarkable similarities in societies widely separated in space and time; and much of permanent value has come out of their researches. Nevertheless, it is difficult to read their theoretical constructions today without irritation, and at times we feel embarrassed at what seems complacency. We see now that though their use of the comparative method allowed them to separate the general from the particular, and so to classify social phenomena, the explanations of these phenomena which they put forward amounted to little more than hypothetical scales of progress, at one end of which were placed forms of institutions or beliefs as they were in nineteenth-century Europe and America, while at the other end were placed their antitheses. An order of stages was then worked out to show what logically might have been the history of development from one end of the scale to the other. All that remained to be done was to hunt through ethnological literature for examples to illustrate each of these stages. It is evident that such reconstructions not only imply moral judgments but must always be conjectural; and that in any case an institution is not to be understood, far less explained, in terms of its origins, whether these are conceived of as beginnings, causes or merely, in a logical sense, its simplest forms. For all their insistence on empiricism in the study of social institutions the nineteenth-century anthropologists were hardly less dialectical, speculative and dogmatic than the moral philosophers of the preceding century, though they at least felt that they had to support their constructions with a wealth of factual evidence, a need scarcely felt by the moral philosophers, so that a very great amount of original literary research was undertaken and vast repositories of ethnological detail were stocked and systematically arranged, as, to mention the largest of these storehouses, in *The Golden Bough*.

It is not surprising that the anthropologists of the last century wrote what they regarded as history, for all contemporaneous learning was radically historical, and at a time when history in England was still a literary art. The genetic approach, which had borne impressive fruits in philology, was, as Lord Acton has emphasized, apparent in law, economics, science, theology and philosophy. There was everywhere a passionate endeavour to discover the origins of everything—the origin of species, the origin of religion, the origin of law and so on—an endeavour always to explain the nearer by the farther which, in reference to history proper, Marc Bloch calls '*la hantise des origines*.'

In any case, I do not think that the real cause of confusion was, as is generally supposed, that the nineteenth-century anthropologists believed in progress and sought a method by which they might reconstruct how it had come about, for they were well aware that their schemata were hypotheses which could not be finally or fully verified. The cause of confusion in most of their writings is rather to be looked for in the assumption they had inherited from the Enlightenment that societies are natural systems or organisms which have a necessary course of development that can be reduced to general principles or laws. Logical consistencies were in consequence presented as real and necessary connexions and typological classifications as both historical and inevitable courses of development. It will readily be seen how a combination of the notion of scientific law and that of progress leads in anthropology, as in the philosophy of history, to procrustean stages, the presumed inevitability of which gives them a normative character.

The Twentieth Century

The reaction against the attempt to explain social institutions in terms of parallel, seen ideally as unilinear, development came at the end of the century; and though this so-called evolutionary anthropology was recast and re-presented in the writings of Westermarck and Hobhouse it had finally lost its appeal. It had in any case ceased to stimulate research, because once the stages of human development had been marked out further investigation on these lines offered nothing more exciting than attachment of labels written by dead hands. Some anthropologists, and in varying degrees, now turned for inspiration to psychology, which at the time seemed to provide satisfactory solutions of many of their problems without recourse to hypothetical history. This has proved to be, then and since, an attempt to build a house on shifting sands. If I say no more in this lecture about the relation between psychology and anthropology it is not because I do not consider it important, but because it would require more time than I can spare, and also more knowledge of psychology than I possess, to treat adequately.

Apart from the criticism of evolutionary theory implied in the ignoring of it by those, including Rector Marett, who sought psychological explanations of customs and beliefs, it was attacked from two directions, the diffusionist and the functionalist. Diffusionist criticism was based on the very obvious fact that culture is often borrowed and

does not emerge by spontaneous growth due to certain common social potentialities and common human nature. To suppose otherwise and to discuss social change without reference to events is to lapse into Cartesian scholasticism. This approach had, unfortunately, little lasting influence in England, partly, no doubt, on account of its uncritical use by Elliot Smith, Perry and Rivers. The other form of attack, the functionalist, has been far more influential, as it has been far more radical. It condemned equally evolutionary anthropology and diffusionist anthropology, not merely on the grounds that their historical reconstructions were unverifiable, but also, and simply, because both were historical approaches, for in the view of writers of this persuasion the history of a society is irrelevant to a study of it as a natural system.

The same kind of development was taking place at the same time in other fields of learning. There were functional biology, functional psychology, functional law, functional economics and so forth. The point of view was the more readily accepted by many social anthropologists because anthropologists generally study societies the history of which cannot be known. Their ready acceptance was also partly due to the influence from across the Channel of the philosophical rationalism of Durkheim and his school. This influence has had, on the whole, not only a profound but a beneficial effect on English anthropology. It injected a tradition which was concerned with broad general questions into the more piecemeal empirical English tradition, exemplified by the way in which theoretical writers like Tylor and Frazer used their material and by both the many firsthand accounts of primitive peoples written by travellers, missionaries and administrators and the early social surveys in this country. On the other hand, if students are not firmly anchored by a heavy weight of ethnographic fact, they are easily led by it into airy discussions about words, into arid classifications, and into either pretentiousness or total scepticism.

The Functional Theory

The functional or organismic theory of society which reigns in social anthropology in England today is not new. We have seen that it was held in their several ways by the early and mid-Victorian anthropologists and by the moral philosophers before them, and it has, of course, a very much longer pedigree in political philosophy. In its modern and more mechanistic form it was set forth at great length by Durkheim and, with special reference to social evolution, by Herbert Spencer. In yet more recent times it has been most clearly and consistently stated by Professor Radcliffe-Brown. Human societies are natural systems in which all the parts are interdependent, each serving in a complex of necessary relations to maintain the whole. The aim of social anthropology is to reduce all social life to laws or general statements about the nature of society which allow prediction. What is new in this restatement of the theory is the insistence that a society can be understood satisfactorily without reference to its past. Almost without exception the eighteenth-century moral philosophers presented their

conception of social systems and sociological laws in the form of history in the grand style—a natural history of human societies; and, as we have seen, the enduring passion of their Victorian successors was seeking for origins from which every institution has developed through the working of laws of progress. The modern version of a naturalistic study of society, even if lip-service is sometimes paid to the possibility of a scientific study of social change, claims that for an understanding of the functioning of a society there is no need for the student of it to know anything about its history, any more than there is need for a physiologist to know the history of an organism to understand it. Both are natural systems and can be described in terms of natural law without recourse to history.

The functional orientation, by its insistence on the inter-relatedness of things, has been largely responsible for the comprehensive and detailed professional field studies of modern anthropology, such as were entirely unknown to the anthropologists of the nineteenth-century, who were content to let laymen collect the facts on which they based their theories. It is also largely due to it that the anthropologist of today sees more clearly than his predecessors that an understanding of human behaviour can only be reached by viewing it in its full social setting. All social anthropologists now accept that the entire activities of primitive societies must be systematically studied in the field, and all have the same holistic approach when they come to set down and interpret their observations.

But a theory may have heuristic value without being sound, and there are many objections to the functional theory. It is no more than an assumption that human societies are systems of the kind they are alleged to be. Indeed in the case of Malinowski the functional theory, in spite of the wide claims he made for it, was little more than a literary device. The theory assumes, moreover, that in the given circumstances no part of social life can be other than what it is and that every custom has social value, thus adding to a naive determinism a crude teleology and pragmatism. It is easy to define the aim of social anthropology to be the establishment of sociological laws, but nothing even remotely resembling a law of the natural sciences has yet been adduced. What general statements have been made are for the most part speculative, and are in any case too general to be of value. Often they are little more than guesses on a common-sense or *post factum* level, and they sometimes degenerate into mere tautologies or even platitudes. Also, it is difficult to reconcile the assertion that a society has come to be what it is by a succession of unique events with the claim that what it is can be comprehensively stated in terms of natural law. In its extreme form functional determinism leads to absolute relativism and makes nonsense not only of the theory itself but of all thought.

If for these and other reasons I cannot accept, without many qualifications, the functional theory dominant in English anthropology today, I do not assert, as you will see, that societies are unintelligible or that they are not in some sense systems. What I am objecting to is what appears to me to be still the same doctrinaire philosophy of the Enlightenment and of the stage-making anthropologists of

the nineteenth century, with only the concept of evolution substituted for that of progress. Its constructions are still posited dialectically and imposed on the facts. I attribute this to anthropologists always having tried to model themselves on the natural sciences instead of on the historical sciences, and it is to this important issue that I now turn. I must apologize to historians if, in considering it, what I say may seem obvious to them. My observations would be hotly disputed by most of my anthropological colleagues in England.

Anthropology and History

In discussing the relations between history and social anthropology it is necessary, if the discussion is to be profitable, to perceive that several quite different questions are being asked. The first is whether a knowledge of how a particular social system has come to be what it is helps one to understand its present constitution. We must here distinguish between history in two different senses, though in a literate society it is not so easy to maintain the distinction as when speaking of non-literate societies. In the first sense history is part of the conscious tradition of a people and is operative in their social life. It is the collective representation of events as distinct from events themselves. This is what the social anthropologist calls myth. The functionalist anthropologists regard history in this sense, usually a mixture of fact and fancy, as highly relevant to a study of the culture of which it forms part.

On the other hand they have totally rejected the reconstruction from circumstantial evidences of the history of primitive peoples for whose past documents and monuments are totally, or almost totally, lacking. A case can be made out for this rejection, though not in my opinion so strong a case as is usually supposed, for all history is of necessity a reconstruction, the degree of probability attending a particular reconstruction depending on the evidence available. The fact that nineteenth-century anthropologists were uncritical in their reconstructions ought not to lead to the conclusion that all effort expended in this direction is waste of time.

But with the bath water of presumptive history the functionalists have also thrown out the baby of valid history. They say, Malinowski the most vociferously, that even when the history of a society is recorded it is irrelevant to a functional study of it. I find this point of view unacceptable. The claim that one can understand the functioning of institutions at a certain point of time without knowing how they have come to be what they are, or what they were later to become, as well as a person who, in addition to having studied their constitution at that point of time, has also studied their past and future is to me an absurdity. Moreover, so it seems to me, neglect of the history of institutions prevents the functionalist anthropologist not only from studying diachronic problems but also from testing the very functional constructions to which he attaches most importance, for it is precisely history which provides him with an experimental situation.

The problem here raised is becoming a pressing one because anthropologists are now studying communities

which, if still fairly simple in structure, are enclosed in, and form part of, great historical societies, such as Irish and Indian rural communities, Bedouin Arab tribes, or ethnic minorities in America and other parts of the world. They can no longer ignore history, making a virtue out of necessity, but must explicitly reject it or admit its relevance. As anthropologists turn their attention more to complex civilized communities the issue will become more acute, and the direction of theoretical development in the subject will largely depend on its outcome.

A second question is of a different kind. We ask now, not whether in studying a particular society its history forms an integral part of the study, but whether in making comparative sociological studies, for example of political or religious institutions, we ought to include in them societies as presented to us by historians. In spite of their claim that social anthropology aims at being a natural history of human societies, that is, of all human societies, functionalist anthropologists, at any rate in England, have, in their general distaste for historical method, almost completely ignored historical writings. They have thereby denied themselves access in their comparative studies to the valuable material provided by historical societies structurally comparable to many of the contemporaneous barbarous societies which they regard as being within their province.

A third, and to me the most important, question is a methodological one: whether social anthropology, for all its present disregard of history, is not itself a kind of historiography. To answer this question we have first to observe what the anthropologist does. He goes to live for some months or years among a primitive people. He lives among them as intimately as he can, and he learns to speak their language, to think in their concepts and to feel in their values. He then lives the experiences over again critically and interpretatively in the conceptual categories and values of his own culture and in terms of the general body of knowledge of his discipline. In other words, he translates from one culture into another.

At this level social anthropology remains a literary and impressionistic art. But even in a single ethnographic study the anthropologist seeks to do more than understand the thought and values of a primitive people and translate them into his own culture. He seeks also to discover the structural order of the society, the patterns which, once established, enable him to see it as a whole, as a set of interrelated abstractions. Then the society is not only culturally intelligible, as it is, at the level of consciousness and action, for one of its members or for the foreigner who has learnt its mores and participates in its life, but also becomes sociologically intelligible.

The historian, or at any rate the social historian, and perhaps the economic historian in particular, will, I think, know what I mean by sociologically intelligible. After all, English society in the eleventh century was understood by Vinogradoff in quite a different way from the way it would have been understood by a Norman or Anglo-Saxon or by a foreigner who had learnt the native languages and was living the life of the natives. Similarly, the social anthropologist discovers in a native society what no native can

explain to him and what no layman, however conversant with the culture, can perceive—its basic structure. This structure cannot be seen. It is a set of abstractions, each of which, though derived, it is true, from analysis of observed behaviour, is fundamentally an imaginative construct of the anthropologist himself. By relating these abstractions to one another logically so that they present a pattern he can see the society in its essentials and as a single whole.

What I am trying to say can perhaps be best illustrated by the example of language. A native understands his own language and it can be learnt by a stranger. But certainly neither the native himself nor the stranger can tell you what are its phonological and grammatical systems. These can only be discovered by a trained linguist. By analysis he can reduce the complexity of a language to certain abstractions and show how these abstractions can be interrelated in a logical system or pattern. This is what the social anthropologist also tries to do. He tries to disclose the structural patterns of a society. Having isolated these patterns in one society he compares them with patterns in other societies. The study of each new society enlarges his knowledge of the range of basic social structures and enables him better to construct a typology of forms, and to determine their essential features and the reasons for their variations.

I have tried to show that the work of the social anthropologist is in three main phases or, otherwise expressed, at three levels of abstraction. First he seeks to understand the significant overt features of a culture and to translate them into terms of his own culture. This is precisely what the historian does. There is no fundamental difference here in aim or method between the two disciplines, and both are equally selective in their use of material. The similarity between them has been obscured by the fact that the social anthropologist makes a direct study of social life while the historian makes an indirect study of it through documents and other surviving evidences. This is a technical, not a methodological, difference. The historicity of anthropology has also been obscured by its pre-occupation with primitive societies which lack recorded history. But this again is not a methodological difference. I agree with Professor Kroeber that the fundamental characteristic of the historical method is not chronological relation of events but descriptive integration of them; and this characteristic historiography shares with social anthropology. What social anthropologists have in fact chiefly been doing is to write cross-sections of history, integrative descriptive accounts of primitive peoples at a moment of time which are in other respects like the accounts written by historians about peoples over a period of time, for the historian does not just record sequences of events but seeks to establish connexions between them. Nor does the anthropologist's determination to view every institution as a functioning part of a whole society make a methodological difference. Any good modern historian aims—if I may be allowed to judge the matter—at the same kind of synthesis.

In my view, therefore, the fact that the anthropologist's problems are generally synchronic while the historian's problems are generally diachronic is a difference of emphasis in the rather peculiar conditions prevailing and not a real

divergence of interest. When the historian fixes his attention exclusively on a particular culture at a particular and limited period of history he writes what we would call an ethnographic monograph (Burckhardt's *Culture of the Renaissance* is a striking example). When, on the other hand, a social anthropologist writes about a society developing in time he writes a history book, different, it is true, from the ordinary narrative and political history but in all essentials the same as social history. In the absence of another, I must cite my own book *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* as an example.

In the second phase of his work the social anthropologist goes a step farther and seeks by analysis to disclose the latent underlying form of a society or culture. In doing so, he goes farther than the more timorous and conservative historians, but many historians do the same. I am not thinking of philosophers of history like Vico, Hegel, Marx, Spengler and Toynbee, not of those who can be exclusively particularized as social historians or writers of the *Kulturgeschichte* school like Max Weber, Tawney, and Sombart or Adam Smith, Savigny and Buckle, but of historians in the stricter and more orthodox sense like Fustel de Coulanges, Vinogradoff, Pirenne, Maitland, or Professor Powicke. It is perhaps worth noting that those historical writings which we anthropologists regard as examples of sociological method generally deal with early periods of history, where the societies described are more like primitive societies than the complex societies of later periods of history, and where the historical documents are not too vast to be grasped and assimilated by a single mind; so that the total culture can be studied as a whole and contained in a single mind, as primitive cultures can be studied and contained. When we read the works of these historians we feel that we and they are studying the same things in the same way and are reaching out for the same kind of understanding of them.

In the third phase of his work the anthropologist compares the social structures his analysis has revealed in a wide range of societies. When a historian attempts a similar study in his own field he is dubbed a philosopher, but it is not, I think, true to say, as it is often said, that history is a study of the particular and social anthropology of the general. In some historical writers comparison and classification are quite explicit; always they are implicit, for history cannot be written except against a standard of some kind, by comparison with the culture of a different time or people, if only with the writer's own.

I conclude therefore, following Professor Kroeber, that while there are, of course, many differences between social anthropology and historiography they are differences of technique, of emphasis and of perspective, and not differences of method and aim. I believe also that a clearer understanding that this is so will lead to a closer connexion between historical and anthropological studies than is at present provided by their meeting points in ethnology and prehistoric archæology, and that this will be greatly to the benefit of both disciplines. Historians can supply social anthropologists with invaluable material, sifted and vouched for by critical techniques of testing and interpretation.

Social anthropologists can provide the historian of the future with some of his best records, based on careful and detailed observations, and they can shed on history, by their discovery of latent structural forms, the light of universals. The value of each discipline to the other will, I believe, be recognized when anthropologists begin to devote themselves more to historical scholarship and show how knowledge of anthropology often illuminates historical problems.

Social Anthropology as one of the Humanities

The thesis I have put before you, that social anthropology is a kind of historiography, and therefore ultimately of philosophy or art, implies that it studies societies as moral systems and not as natural systems, that it is interested in design rather than in process, and that it therefore seeks patterns and not scientific laws, and interprets rather than explains. These are conceptual, and not merely verbal, differences. The concepts of natural system and natural law, modelled on the constructs of the natural sciences, have dominated anthropology from its beginnings, and as we look back over the course of its growth I think we can see that they have been responsible for a false scholasticism which has led to one rigid and ambitious formulation after another. Regarded as a special kind of historiography, that is as one of the humanities, social anthropology is released from these essentially philosophical dogmas and given the opportunity, though it may seem paradoxical to say so, to be really empirical and, in the true sense of the word, scientific. This, I presume, is what Maitland had in mind when he said that 'by and by anthropology will have the choice between becoming history or nothing.'

I have found, both in England and America, that students are often perturbed at these implications. There is no need for them to be, for it does not follow from regarding social anthropology as a special kind of historiography rather than as a special kind of natural science that its researches and theory are any the less systematic. When therefore I am asked how I think that social anthropology should proceed in the future I reply that it must proceed along much the same lines as do social history or the history of institutions, as distinct from purely narrative and political history. For example, the social historian seeking to understand feudal institutions would first study them in one country of Europe and get to know all he can about them there. He would then study them in other European societies to discover which features were common to European civilization at that time and which were local variations, and he would try to see each particular form as a variation of a general pattern and to account for the variations. He would not seek for laws but for significant patterns.

What more do we do, can we do or should we want to do in social anthropology than this? We study witchcraft or a kinship system in a particular primitive society. If we want to know more about these social phenomena we can study them in a second society, and then in a third society, and so on, each study reaching, as our knowledge increases and new problems emerge, a deeper level of investigation and teaching us the essential characteristics of the thing we

are inquiring into, so that particular studies are given a new meaning and perspective. This will always happen if one necessary condition is observed: that the conclusions of each study are clearly formulated in such a way that they not only test the conclusions reached by earlier studies but advance new hypotheses which can be broken down into fieldwork problems.

However, the uneasiness I have noted is not, I think, on this score, because it must be evident to any student who has given thought to the matter that those who have most strongly urged that social anthropology should model itself on the natural sciences have done neither better research than those who take the opposite view nor a different kind of research. It is rather due to the feeling that any discipline that does not aim at formulating laws and hence predicting and planning is not worth the labour of a lifetime. This normative element in anthropology is, as we have seen, like the concepts of natural law and progress from which it derives, part of its philosophical heritage. In recent times the natural-science approach has constantly stressed the application of its findings to affairs, the emphasis in England being on colonial problems and in America on political and industrial problems. Its more cautious advocates have held that there can only be applied anthropology when the science is much more advanced than it is today, but the less cautious have made far-reaching claims for the immediate application of anthropological knowledge in social planning; though, whether more or less cautious, both have justified anthropology by appeal to utility. Needless to say, I do not share their enthusiasm and regard the attitude that gives rise to it as naive. A full discussion of it would take too long, but I cannot resist the observation that, as the history of anthropology shows, positivism leads very easily to a misguided ethics, anæmic scientific humanism or—Saint Simon and Comte are cases in point—*ersatz* religion.

I conclude by summarizing very briefly the argument I have tried to develop in this lecture and by stating what I believe is likely to be the direction taken by social anthropology in the future. Social anthropologists, dominated consciously or unconsciously, from the beginnings of their subject, by positivist philosophy, have aimed, explicitly or implicitly, and for the most part still aim—for this is what it comes to—at proving that man is an automaton and at discovering the sociological laws in terms of which his actions, ideas and beliefs can be explained and in the light of which they can be planned and controlled. This approach implies that human societies are natural systems which can be reduced to variables. Anthropologists have therefore taken one or other of the natural sciences as their model and have turned their backs on history, which sees men in a different way and eschews, in the light of experience, rigid formulations of any kind.

There is, however, an older tradition than that of the Enlightenment with a different approach to the study of human societies, in which they are seen as systems only because social life must have a pattern of some kind, inasmuch as man, being a reasonable creature, has to live in a world in which his relations with those around him are

ordered and intelligible. Naturally I think that those who see things in this way have a clearer understanding of social reality than the others, but whether this is so or not they are increasing in number, and this is likely to continue because the vast majority of students of anthropology today have been trained in one or other of the humanities and not, as was the case thirty years ago, in one or other of the natural sciences. This being so, I expect that in the future there will be a turning towards humanistic disciplines, especially towards history, and particularly towards social history or the history of institutions, of cultures and of ideas. In this change of orientation social anthropology will

retain its individuality because it has its own special problems, techniques and traditions. Though it is likely to continue for some time to devote its attention chiefly to primitive societies, I believe that during this second half of the century it will give far more attention than in the past to more complex cultures and especially to the civilizations of the Far and Near East and become, in a very general sense, the counterpart to Oriental Studies, in so far as these are conceived of as primarily linguistic and literary—that is to say, it will take as its province the cultures and societies, past as well as present, of the non-European peoples of the world.

ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS

Ancient Mining and Metallurgy Committee: Report on Pattern-Welding on a Viking Period Spearhead 199

Introduction

Herringbone and other patterns worked in the steel of spearheads and sword blades of the Saxon and Viking periods have received increasing attention of recent years; see, for example, T. D. Kendrick, 'Some Types of Ornamentation on Late Saxon and Viking Period Weapons in England,' *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*, Vol. IX, Helsinki, 1934, pp. 392-8; H. Maryon, 'A sword of the Nydam type from Ely Fields Farm near Ely,' *Cambs. Antiq. Soc. Proc.* Vol. XLI, Cambridge, 1946; and my note on some Viking Period weapons from the Thames in the forthcoming Vol. LI of the *Berks. Arch. Journ.* All three of these papers assume a welding together of thin strips or wires to form a panel which was later welded into the surface of the sword or spearhead. Mr. Maryon in the paper cited has called the process 'pattern-welding' and has gone into it in some detail. He postulates the welding together of strips or wires each about one-hundredth of an inch thick.

Mr. H. H. Coghlan suggested to me in discussion that the preparation of such fine strips or wires would be a difficult feat for the smiths of the period; he thought that polished and etched sections of such a pattern-welded piece would help to show whether this structural explanation of the surface is correct. Accordingly, with the consent of Mr. W. A. Smallcombe, Director of Reading Museum, a specimen of uncertain origin, but probably derived from the bed of the Kennet at Reading, was entrusted to Mr. Coghlan for sectioning under the auspices of the Ancient Mining and Metallurgy Committee. A report on the results of sectioning follows this introductory note.

A. E. P. COLLINS

Report

The thanks of the Committee are due to Messrs. Alfred Herbert, Coventry, who kindly consented to examine the specimen. Their Laboratory Report (No. 12816) follows:

Micrograph No. 1 at 12 diameters magnification was photographed looking down on one of the rippled surfaces near the centre of the spear after partial smoothing, followed by polishing and etching.

On one print are marked in ink three projections which indicate the pitch of the rippling, and the depressions between each oblique ridge of metal are identified by holes still left in the surface. Two strips of very soft steel have been laid



FIG. 1. MICROGRAPH NO. 1

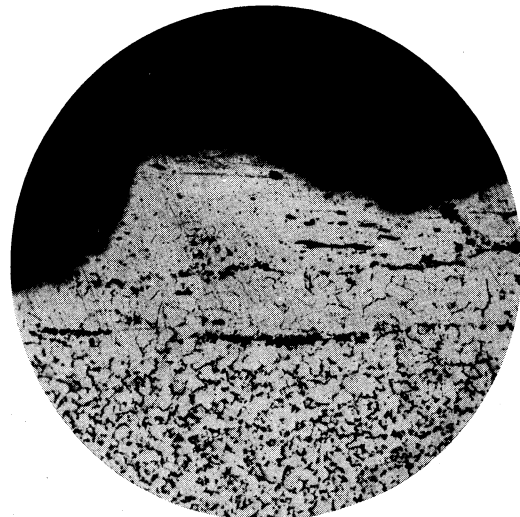


FIG. 2. MICROGRAPH NO. 2