

dated 1929, and it seems rather a pity that the opportunity was not taken to bring it up to date also. In some instances (notably the sensitized cheque paper, foil papers and offset papers) the samples included would not find favour among users as typical of the best of their kind. This comment, however, applies only to a relatively small proportion of the samples, and the value of the volume as a whole (especially to the student,

for whom it is primarily intended) cannot be over-estimated.

Since the author has now retired from his official position, this work may be regarded as a parting gift to the industry. It certainly deserves to command an appreciative welcome from an industry already so much in his debt for the years of unstinted and able service he has devoted to it.

JULIUS GRANT.

## ECONOMY OF A PRIMITIVE PEOPLE

### Primitive Polynesian Economy

By Raymond Firth. Pp. xii+387+8 plates. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1939.) 15s. net.

THE material upon which Prof. Firth has based his study of primitive Polynesian economy in this book was gathered in the course of his expedition in 1929 to Tikopia, one of the islands of the British Solomons group in the Pacific. A valuable study of the social anthropology of the inhabitants of the island already stands to his credit in a substantial volume. He now turns to an investigation from another point of view—a point of view which is claimed, and justly claimed, to be new, namely, that of the system of values which determines preferences in the satisfaction of needs.

The people of Tikopia, it will be remembered by those who are acquainted with Prof. Firth's earlier book, are virtually untouched by White civilization; and in their mode of life they may be regarded as an example of a people of simple backward culture. When, however, this culture is submitted to examination, it is seen that what may be termed their economy, as thus defined, is by no means simple, but on the contrary is of a highly complex character. It is made no easier of understanding in the eyes of a Western observer by the absence of price and its common measure, money. This absence is, of course, a fact which has not passed unobserved by previous observers of life in other primitive or backward communities; and the differences in standards of value and media of exchange have been the subject of instructive study. Prof. Firth, however, is the first to examine the problem to which it gives rise from the point of view of the functional anthropologist, prefacing his study with a consideration of the general question.

Now it must be clear that the study of the economy of a primitive people may be approached from two very different points of view. On one hand the sociologist, and the observer whose record is intended to meet the needs of a Western

audience, will make use of a classificatory system and a terminology based upon concepts which in theory, at least, are abstract and of universal application. The anthropologist, on the other hand, in so far as he aims at an accurate and objective ethnographical record, is concerned with a standard of values that is relative—relative to the culture of the people under investigation. It will be remembered that Prof. Malinowski records a striking example in his account of the system of ritual exchange in the Trobriands in his "Argonauts of the Western Pacific", while further examples to which reference has been made are afforded by the refusal of the peoples of Africa to commercialize their cattle, or their reluctance to abandon the use of the hoe for more efficient means of cultivation. It is, however, neglect of this principle of the relativity of any given system of values which has vitiated or caused the neglect of the study of primitive economy.

Applying this principle to the people of Tikopia, Prof. Firth shows how in the instance of food, for example, the bare biological need is transcended by values of a non-nutritional order, as a means of meeting social obligations, the responsibilities of kinship, and other ritual requirements; or again in fishing, it is not the remunerative value of the catch which will determine the direction of effort, but ritual which demands that the first catch should be a shark, rather than the less difficult and more profitable flying-fish. Thus the general trend of this investigation may be summarized as showing that the system of values which it might be argued applies to 'economic man' becomes a matter of social relations, and must be considered in the light of that fact, requiring in the study of primitive economics a profound modification in the usual line of approach.

Prof. Firth has produced a most valuable and stimulating study, which will repay careful consideration, not only by the anthropologist, but also by the administrator and others who have to come into intimate touch with any people of backward culture.