

## The time-bomb ticks on

IN 1969 the Institute of Race Relations in London produced a massive report on race in British society, and in particular the problem of the coloured immigrant. *Colour and Citizenship* was a mine of information, not all of it very palatable. It also had some strong recommendations to make on the subjects of education and employment.

Broadly, the report recommended that the Race Relations Board "should make full use of its powers to initiate investigations". It continued, amongst other things, to say, "it is essential for a non-discriminatory employment policy that records be kept which distinguish employees by ethnic origin." This would be seen by some as discriminatory in itself, but there was felt to be no other way to determine whether minorities were afforded equal opportunities.

Five years later, the House of Commons Select Committee on Race Relations (in a report issued last week) is still loath to grant the Race Relations Board legal powers to initiate investigations, being dissatisfied with the preventive work it has done so far.

But how does all this affect the scientist; surely this is a matter with which he may have some general liberal sympathy but is it not really an affair for the industrial shop-floor?

About 2% of the population of Britain is coloured immigrant or of immigrant descent. West Indians comprise half this figure, Indians and Pakistanis another 40% of it. By 1986 the 2% will be up to 3% or maybe 4%, depending on immigration policies and fertility. It is erroneous, even now, to assume that the distribution by age of this section of the population is such that the children of coloured immigrants are not yet at an age at which others seriously consider further education, say 16 to 21. The percentage of immigrants in this age bracket is close to the percentage of the general population in the same bracket. Two percent of those eligible, in terms of age, for a university education are immigrants or of immigrant descent.

The next question is, obviously, how many are getting a university education, and it is at this stage that problems arise. Every university campus is, of course, a very multiracial affair but many of those contributing to this are temporary immigrants, in Britain for educational purposes. It is impossible to get statistics about permanent immigrants at university; these figures do not exist, indeed some university registrars expressed surprise that we should wish to know the numbers, as in order to be scrupulously fair they could not possibly ask of candidates for admission anything more probing than their place of birth.

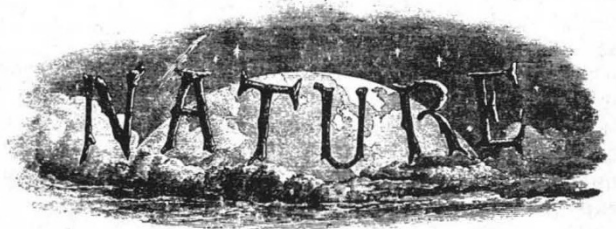
This seems a wrong if well intentioned policy, and the sooner it is rectified in universities the better; the select committee has come to a similar conclusion in the more general fields of employment (duplicating the 1969

proposals of the Institute of Race Relations).

Those who do not learn from history are forced to relive it, and there are the clearest lessons from recent American history. American experience—with a much larger minority group population—is that passivity in matters of race relations leads to greater alienation. It was simply not good enough to bemoan the lack of suitably qualified applicants and place the blame elsewhere—in the schools, in the social system or whatever. Accordingly the whole process of acquiring staff as well as students in many American universities, and particularly those with government contracts, is a complex business of satisfying law enforcement agencies that positive steps have been made to recruit minorities. This is a tedious process in many ways, and is both irritating to the academic community and somewhat humiliating to the minorities involved. On the other hand, blunt as it is, it is the only tool available to ensure that at least those who have some aspirations towards higher education do get reached.

It would probably be wrong at present to go for measures as drastic as this in Britain if there is any hope that lesser measures can succeed, and there may be a few years left before alienation is so total amongst some immigrants that the thought of a university education is anathema. But the next few years will require some positive action—one idea widely supported is that since many immigrants only discover in their twenties that they have unrealised potential for which higher education would have been beneficial, universities should come to terms with a fairly regular intake of more mature immigrant students. Another need expressed by workers in areas of high immigrant numbers is for more people from places of higher education to visit their community, not to announce that they are lowering standards for immigrants, but to give potential students the challenge of raising their own standards.

## 100 years ago



LADY BARKER'S "LESSONS ON COOKING"  
*First Lessons in the Principles of Cooking.* By Lady  
 Barker (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874).

IN this little volume the authoress has proved beyond all manner of doubt how completely she is the right woman in the right place. Surely nowhere could the Committee for the National Training School for Cooking have found a lady superintendent better fitted than Lady Barker to put life and spirit into the scheme which they advocate, or one more thoroughly qualified to train and marshal the feminine bands that are now being drilled under her supervision in the South Kensington Schools of Cookery to invade and revolutionise the kitchens of the future in every part of the empire.

From *Nature*, 10, 283, August 13, 1874.