THE PRESENT STATUS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

By Professor RALPH LINTON
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The anthropologist modestly delimits his field as the study of man and his works; the most ambitious claim ever staked by any scientific investigator. Under such a definition there is no branch of human knowledge or activity which does not fall within the scope of his interest. Even astronomy or atomic physics can be included on the basis that, although the phenomena with which they deal are extra-human, the technique for investigating these phenomena and all knowledge which has been acquired regarding them are parts of man's culture. However, there is a wide divergence between the high hopes embodied in the anthropologist's delimitation of his subject-matter and the actual content of the science as it exists to-day. Anthropology was one of the last sciences to take form, and by the time it appeared it found the center of its hypothetical field already occupied by a series of other disciplines with well-developed techniques and extensive bodies of knowledge and theory. Whatever its ambitions, anthropology was compelled to find a place for itself in those areas which had not already been preempted. It became a sort of peripheral science working in the corners and interstices not covered by the older disciplines. Thus in the study of physical man it found itself confronted by the vested interests of anatomy, physiology and more recently genetics and turned its attention to the study of human variations and the classification of human types. In the study of individual behavior it has encountered the vested interest of psychology, while in the study of group behavior it has been confronted by history, sociology and economics. Its response to the challenge of the last three has been characteristic of its whole course of development. With history it evaded the issue by turning its attention to the great stretch of

1 Address of the retiring vice-president and chairman of the Section on Anthropology, Indianapolis, December 30, 1937.