

## **Concept of Race.**

### ILLUSIONS OF MASTER GROUPS, CLASSES AND CASTES.

*Address by* DR. E. BEAGLEHOLE *to the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand.*

Dr. Beaglehole, dealing with the subject "Concept of Race," proceeded to analyse how the theory of race superiority had grown into being, and how it was falsely based. He pointed out that psychologists and sociologists have tested and measured the mental capacities of different ethnic groups without so far discovering any inherent differences that cannot be plausibly accounted for by imperfection of measuring instruments and extreme variation in the socially inherited nature of men's culture.

Examining the contact of widely-separated ethnic groups such as occurs between the English and Indian in India, between the negro and white in the United States, and between the pakeha and Maori in New Zealand, Dr. Beaglehole pointed out that the kind of general relationship pattern governing the contacts varied. In some cases it was of caste nature, in others it more nearly approximated to a formalised set of class relations.

Taking India as a classic instance of the caste system, Dr. Beaglehole pointed out that the membership of any of the five principle castes resulted solely from the fact of being born into it, movement and intermarriage between the castes being forbidden. This caste system was also represented in the United States, where the whites assumed the superior caste and the negroes were relegated to the inferior. Intermixing was almost a crime, except that the whites expected the privilege of relations with negro women, while the reverse relation was considered one of the most shocking of all crimes. The United States differed from India in its application of the caste system, however, in that within their separate cells the whites and negroes might rise and fall in status.

Dealing with the relation of the races in New Zealand, Dr. Beaglehole said that they were more nearly governed by the development of a still amorphous, yet none the less very real, class structuring of New Zealand society. The factors governing the class system, Dr. Beaglehole said, might be roughly outlined as these: the society was hierarchically ordered: upward mobility was permissible, but downward mobility from one stratum to the next was possible but not praised: intermarriage between classes was not forbidden, though the higher classes disapproved and the lower classes approved. Relative homogeneity of attitudes, ideas, beliefs and practices appeared among members of each class. Thus there was a class consciousness, a factor in which income or wealth might be one, but not necessarily the only factor.

In comparison with England, Dr. Beaglehole pointed out, New Zealand class lines were not so strictly or openly defined, but there was plenty to remark on when the Dominion was viewed from this angle. The position in New Zealand was that each of the ethnic groups ordered itself on a well-defined class system. The key point which defined the problem of culturally determined group relations was the fact that Maori classes and white classes did not coincide. White practice, Dr. Beaglehole said, showed a tendency to rank most Maoris in a group which coincided with that of the lowest white group.

Dr. Beaglehole remarked, however, that the incidence of this classing varied in various parts of the Dominion according to the wealth and relative numbers of each ethnic group in the particular locality.

Summing up the question of race concept, Dr. Beaglehole said that it was a tool for the physical anthropologist and the human biologist, but a matter to be avoided by the social scientist. The social scientist needed to work with concepts of class relations and caste rather than with race concepts if he was to estimate truly the social processes involved in the contacts of ethnic groups.