

FOREWORD BY J. J. FAHRENFORT

Professor emeritus of Ethnology at the University of the City of Amsterdam

The study of unlettered peoples which we call Ethnology, Ethnography, Social Anthropology, and Cultural Anthropology has recently concentrated more on the present circumstances and changes in the social organization of such peoples than on what might be called antiquarian ethnology. Scholars have come to recognize that it is not only of interest to study social development before the appearance of powerful Western influences, but also to examine the responses of the "primitive" cultures to the continually closer contact with the West.

Nonetheless, the detection of sociological laws inherent in the social structures of the past is also important, the more so where these laws appear to be equally valid for more advanced societies. In "Slavery as an Industrial System", H. J. Nieboer has given what in my opinion is a classic example of what can be achieved in the field of sociology by combining the functional with the comparative method. It is, however, not clear why he has limited himself to a definition of slavery according to which a slave is the property of his master. The concept of property is not exact: it conveys a whole range of gradations from an absolute to an extremely weak right of disposal. Nieboer did not in fact require this conceptual limitation for his thesis because his argument is equally applicable to compulsory labour in which the operator is not the owner of the labourers in his service.

This point is developed clearly by Dr. Kloosterboer, against various backgrounds. Even after slavery was declared unlawful over the entire world, those whose interests were involved found many ways to create compulsory labour when free labour was impossible or difficult to obtain. The fact that conditions are rapidly changing, particularly with the emancipation of many former colonies, does not mean that all compulsory labour has already disappeared. But even when it has done so, the delineation of a piece of social history, especially of one in which the pattern is so consistent, will retain its importance for every student of the social sciences in the broadest sense of the term.

A m s t e r d a m, December 1959