

Protection of the Aborigines of Australia

THE series of three articles by Dr. Donald F. Thomson, reciting his experiences among the aborigines of Arnhem Land, which appeared in *The Times* of July 5-7, will have been followed with close attention by all who desire a wider application of scientific methods in the approach to the problems arising out of the contacts of Western civilization and peoples of backward culture. A preliminary account of Dr. Thomson's work appeared earlier and was noted in NATURE of January 8 (p. 68). Dr. Thomson, as he himself expresses it, was 'loaned' by the University of Melbourne to the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia to visit, establish friendly relations, and make an anthropological survey of the native tribes, who had been responsible for unrest and trouble in Arnhem Land in 1933. His expedition, as is now well known and as he records, was completely successful in getting into touch with tribes reputed unapproachable, and as a result of his investigations lasting over the two years 1935-37, he was able to present to the Federal Government a report in which he, as an anthropologist, suggested certain measures to be taken if this interesting and, in their way, attractive people were to be saved from degradation and extinction. That extinction is their inevitable fate, unless immediate steps for their protection are taken, is patent from Dr. Thomson's alarming discovery that the number of aborigines in these tribes has fallen lower by far than was thought. Further, he was able to point to the grave injury which is being inflicted on the aborigines by well-meaning but mistaken philanthropy. A people who had established an equilibrium in the technique of existence in a country of difficult conditions are abandoning their traditional mode of life to obtain the inadequate benefits of a weekly ration and a few of the cast-off rags of civilization, to their irretrievable detriment.

DR. THOMSON suggests as the immediate need of the situation the complete segregation of the aborigines on an inviolable reserve. The aboriginal reserves are in theory already 'out of bounds' for the white population, but in practice this has not been observed. He is also of the opinion that control of all aborigines should be handed over by the State Governments to the single control of the Federal Government. Dr. Thomson was able recently to explain his suggestions in fuller detail than was possible in *The Times* before the Committee on Applied Anthropology of the Royal Anthropological Institute (as reported in *Man* of July). After analysing the causes of depopulation and alluding to the failure of missionary effort to turn the tribesmen into gardeners, he went on to suggest that the policy of complete segregation should be supplemented by a legal code adapted to native conceptions, the creation of a special native-affairs service staffed by anthropologists, working as mobile patrols, and additional medical service. Further, that the system of segregation should be maintained until a constructive development policy has been worked out for those aborigines who are already detribalized.

An Expedition to North Rona

A SMALL expedition left the Summer Isles by Fishery Cruiser *Vigilant* for North Rona on July 11. Dr. and Mrs. F. Fraser Darling of Tanera expect to spend six months studying the social behaviour and environmental influences on behaviour of the Atlantic or Grey seal, *Halichoerus gryphus*. Dr. Fraser Darling has already published researches on the social life found in the red deer and in several species of birds. His work on the Grey seal began with a four months expedition to the Treshnish Isles in 1937. The gregariousness apparent in these seals is of patriarchal type and entirely different from the matriarchy of the deer herds and the communities of pairs which constitute breeding flocks of birds. Dr. Fraser Darling's expedition is a private venture, but the cost is being defrayed in part by a fellowship from the Carnegie Trust and grants-in-aid from the Royal Society, the British Association, the Institute for the Study of Animal Behaviour and the Challenger Society. The Fishery Board for Scotland has co-operated generously in the all-important matter of transport. North Rona lies fifty miles north-east of the Butt of Lewis and is a rock-bound islet of less than half a square mile in area. The Atlantic seal repairs there to breed in large numbers from September to November, and the island is also one of the few breeding places of that interesting nocturnal bird, Leach's fork-tailed petrel.

Engineers and International Affairs

IN his address to the North East Coast Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders, when he received the diploma of honorary fellowship of the Institution on June 24, Rear-Admiral G. H. Rock, of the Constructive Branch of the United States Navy, made special reference to the education of engineers and the participation of engineering organizations in international affairs. In educational circles in the United States, there has been an astonishing increase in the interest in such matters. All the leading nations, he said, are exporters and importers of education in its various forms. There are about 8,500 foreign students in the colleges and universities in the United States and an even larger number of American students are studying abroad. In the academic year 1936-37, 204 American professors were either studying or teaching in foreign universities, while at the same time in American colleges and universities there were 175 foreign professors. No professions are more concerned with international activities than those of shipbuilding and ship operation, and he suggested that institutions such as the North-East Coast Institution should lend encouragement to the improvement in the education of naval architects and marine engineers, encourage successful professional men to assist actively in teaching, make more suitable arrangements for ensuring young engineers more reasonable opportunity for employment, and arrange for a more general exchange of students between Great Britain and the United States. Admiral Rock recalled that he received a part of his education in 1890-92 at the University of Glasgow, and he was then sometimes bewildered by