

## J. R. FIRTH, 1890-1960

John Rupert Firth, Professor Emeritus of General Linguistics in the University of London, died on December 14 1960; his sudden death brings to an end an era in British linguistic scholarship.

Firth began his academic career as a historian and served for many years in India. His association with London University began in 1928 and continued in various capacities until his death. In 1944 a chair in General Linguistics in the University of London tenable at the School of Oriental and African Studies was created with Firth as the first occupant; he held this chair until his retirement in 1956. His name will always be associated with the London School of Linguistics, of which he was the founder.

If a man's scholarship is measured in quantity, Firth's output was not great; but the publication of his most important papers under the title of *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951* followed by *Studies in Linguistic Analysis*, a collection of papers by Firth and his colleagues, showed him to be one of the most stimulating, erudite, and original minds in the history of linguistic science. In addition, he had that ability, given to few of us, to be the master and create his own posterity in the shape of his disciples. There is living testimony of his success in the formation of his department of linguistics, in the creation of his own brand of linguistic theory, and in the number of colleagues and pupils who continue to teach, practice, and build on his theory.

Firth possessed many of the attributes traditionally associated with Yorkshiremen. Blunt, forthright, often ruthless in argument, his was a colourful character, and those of us who knew him could not fail to be impressed by his personality. He died engrossed in his subject and it is to be hoped that his scholarly executors will have more of his work for those of us who knew him and were influenced by him; this work, memories of the man himself and of his teaching are all of him that remain to us now. The most fitting testimony and tribute we can give to Firth is to echo the tribute of "The Times", that he was "often controversial, always lovable, and always worth listening to". We shall not see his like again.