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DIEDRICH WESTERMANN

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PROFESSOR DIEDRICH WESTERMANN, whose international reputation in the field of African studies needs no emphasis here, was intimately associated with the foundation and early development of our Institute. As a former missionary in Togoland and as Director of the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen in the University of Berlin, he attended the Conference at High Leigh in 1924 when the proposal to found an International Institute for the study of African languages and cultures was first formulated. He served on the provisional committee which gave effect to this proposal and, at the first general meeting of the Institute in 1926, he and Professor Delafosse¹ were appointed Directors of the Institute to serve with Hanns Vischer as Secretary General and Lord Lugard as Chairman.

Westermann's active participation in the work of the Institute continued, except for the period of the war, for thirty years and ended only with his death. In acknowledging a telegram sent to him on his 80th birthday (24 June 1955) he wrote: 'My collaboration in the Institute has been an outstanding event in my life. It was a pleasure and a high privilege to work together with men like Lord Lugard, Dr. J. H. Oldham and Sir Hanns Vischer, and also with my colleague Professor Henri Labouret. We were the initiators, and no doubt many mistakes were bound to be made by me, but now the Institute stands firm and my wish for its future is "vivat, crescat et floreat".'

From 1926 to 1939, though he was actively engaged in teaching and writing, he devoted a great part of his amazing energy to the development of the Institute. His memorandum on the orthography of African languages, commissioned by the Council in 1926, was published in 1927. Revised in 1931 and translated into French and German, it initiated the Institute's series of Memoranda and is still in demand. In 1926 also he started an inquiry concerning the textbooks used in African schools, and embarked on the compilation of a bibliography of works on African 'languages, anthropology, customs, folk-lore, native traditions and native life', from which were developed the *Africa* bibliography (published in the journal from 1929 on-

¹ On the death of Professor Delafosse the following year, Professor Henri Labouret was appointed Director.

'Africa', the Journal of the International African Institute, is published by the Institute, but except where otherwise stated the writers of the articles are responsible for the opinions expressed.

wards) and, later, the Institute's bibliographical card catalogue. He initiated the Institute's first publications programme by his proposal, in 1927, that two series of publications should be undertaken: a series of monographs, 'African Studies', on topics such as economics, marriage, art, &c., and a series of texts written or dictated by Africans in their own languages, with translations. The first part of this programme was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and by 1930 five monographs were in the press. The second series, in a modified form, was represented by Mofolo's book *Chaka, Akiga's Story*, translated from the Tiv by Rupert East, and Westermann's own publication *Afrikaner erzählen ihr Leben*. He also initiated the competition for vernacular books written by Africans, which was started in 1928 and continued until 1948. At this time also he organized the Institute's journal *Africa*, which started publication in 1928 and of which he was editor until 1940.

In 1933 Westermann proposed that the Institute should prepare and publish a Tribal Handbook, giving, in summary form, accounts of the peoples of Africa. This proposal was welcomed by the Council but was subsequently reluctantly abandoned for financial reasons. The project was revived in a new form in 1944 when, with the aid of a grant from the British Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, the Institute was able to undertake the preparation of the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa*, which is still in progress and of which thirty-three sections have now been published (including three published in France and two in Belgium). In 1939 Westermann had laid before the Council a proposal for the preparation of a *Handbook of African Languages*. This project was also to be implemented later, and the first of a series of studies in connexion with the Handbook was published in 1945. Throughout this period Professor Westermann made a number of visits to Africa at the request of the territorial governments to advise on linguistic problems—among others, to the Gold Coast in 1926, Sudan in 1928, Nigeria in 1929, as well as a lecture tour at South African Universities in 1929.

During the war he continued working—both teaching and writing—so far as conditions allowed, and published a number of articles and books. Although he said little about his experiences during those years, he certainly suffered privations, anxieties, and difficulties. It was a source of very great relief and pleasure to him that he was able to get in touch with the Institute again soon after the war and renew his collaboration in African studies. In 1947 and 1948 he came to London to collaborate in part II of the Handbook of African Languages, *The Languages of West Africa*, which was published in 1952; he and Miss M. A. Bryan being joint authors. While he was working at the Institute on this volume, the energy and intensity with which he applied himself to the task were as remarkable as were his modesty and his readiness to accept suggestions and criticisms and to recognize the merits of the work of other, younger scholars. In 1950 he was invited to become a member of the Institute's Executive Council, and attended its meetings, making valuable contributions to the discussions, until in 1953 it became evident that, although his mind was as active and his interest in African studies as lively as ever, travelling was making over-great demands on his strength. When he tendered his resignation the Council unanimously agreed that he should be made a life member.

His devotion to the Institute and to African studies never waned. He continued to write reviews for *Africa* and to take an active interest in *African Abstracts*. The

Institute had frequent occasion to consult him about linguistic and other publications and he was always ready to give advice and assistance.

Westermann was a prolific writer and his first major publication, *Wörterbuch der Ewe-Sprache*, appeared in 1905, a revised edition being published in 1954. He will long be remembered by scholars for the great contribution he made, over a period of nearly half a century, to the analysis and classification of the Sudanic languages in a series of publications which included detailed studies on Ewe, Fula, Kpelle, Hausa, Shilluk and many others. He also had a deep and informed concern for the social and moral problems arising from the impact of Western influences on African peoples and on these he wrote with wide knowledge and remarkable sympathy in 1939 in *The African Today and Tomorrow* (3rd edition 1949).

Diedrich Westermann was the outstanding figure in the development of African linguistic studies in this century. He was also one of the most imaginative, constructive and devoted of the group of missionaries, administrators and scholars to whose vision and industry the establishment and growth of the International African Institute are due. For his very great services to it he will always be honoured.

DARYLL FORDE

The Rev. Dr. E. W. Smith, who also was one of the founders of the Institute, writes: 'Westermann's appointment as Director and that of Delafosse emphasized the international character of the Institute. The fact that Westermann was German was a great help, for he was able to enlist the support of other German scholars and his name also carried considerable weight in the United States. His books on the Shilluk and other tribes showed him to be no mean anthropologist, and he strongly supported the new movement towards the study of contemporary culture change as contrasted with the historical school. He carried lightly his wealth of erudition and made no display of it. We were most fortunate in having a man of his eminence as our Director—a man, moreover, not only to be admired for his gifts and attainments but to be loved.'