

Notes and News

How to learn an African Language.

IN learning a foreign language every one will to some extent follow his own method, which he finds corresponds best with his special gifts and inclination. This method may ultimately lead him to the desired goal, but that does not necessarily mean that he has chosen the shortest way and that a better way might not have been helpful to him. A guide based on mature experience is the paper by Dr. Ida C. Ward which appears as a supplement to this number of *Africa*. We believe that in publishing it we are rendering a service to those of our members and friends who have to learn an African language. Dr. Ward's special qualifications for writing on the subject are shown by the facts that she has a long experience as a teacher of languages and phonetics, and is an expert in the study of African languages.

Five salient points are emphasized by the author and contain the gist of what she has to say: (1) Language is life, (2) language is necessary, (3) it is easy, (4) it is a serious matter, and (5) it pays. However desirable a technical preparation may be for the future student of an African language, he should never lose sight of the fact that African languages are not literary languages, and moreover differ so widely from any European tongue that they cannot be learned from books but must be acquired by daily intercourse. The personal element is here of far greater importance than in the case of European languages. From the beginning the student must win friends among the natives, he must learn to be attentive and to listen and must have the courage to make mistakes, not with the intention of being satisfied with them and with himself but in order to overcome them, and this he can do only when he is not afraid to commit them and be corrected by his native friends. He will then soon realize that no language, however apparently difficult, is an insurmountable barrier for one who has made up his mind not to be satisfied until he has mastered it so far that he feels it is a tool which he is able to use at will. He will then discover that the farther he progresses the greater the field of new discoveries which opens before him, and he will become increasingly assured that it was worth while to undertake the study. There is hardly anything more stimulating and enriching than to explore the mind and life of a people through its language. Europeans living in Africa without speaking the vernacular language do not really know what they are foregoing, and how much they are curtailing their possibilities of action. No one can feel at home with the savage who does not speak his language, and to live for any length of time in a country of which one does

not know the language implies a lack of courtesy of which no white person should become guilty.

Dr. Ward's advice and recommendations will be of use to any one who is concerned with African languages, but most of all to those working in Africa. There is no doubt that she will be grateful for criticism and suggestions from those who have personal experience; any such suggestions and criticisms will be used in a future edition and will help to make the paper an indispensable vade-mecum for every serious learner.

The paper is being republished in the series published in connexion with *Africa* as Memorandum XIV, price one shilling per copy.

African Food Values.

Most doctors in the African services agree that the native cannot advance much further until his food-supply is considerably improved. Intestinal parasites and trypanosomes may sap a large proportion of his energy, but ill-balanced or insufficient dietaries are responsible for most of his other physical ills. But in actual practice those who are faced with the problem of improving native diet are usually in a difficult position. They rarely know the nutritional values of the different foodstuffs consumed in their area. They are often unaware of the comparative work done in other parts of Africa by way of analysis of the same types of food. It is difficult for them to keep in touch with the growing body of literature dealing with human nutrition in general, and the special diet problems of tropical regions in particular.

It was to meet this situation that the Imperial Bureau of Animal Health kindly prepared, at the suggestion of this Institute, a set of tables giving the results of the analyses so far carried out on the different African foods. The material has already appeared as a technical publication of the Bureau and is now republished by the Institute with the addition of a bibliography, compiled from British, French, and Belgian sources, of the literature dealing with the problems of African diet and nutrition. This work is published as Memorandum XIII in the series published in connexion with *Africa* under the title 'The Food and Nutrition of African Natives: with tables showing the composition of some African foods and feeding-stuffs mainly of vegetable origin, and a Bibliography', and can be obtained from this Institute, price one shilling per copy.

It should be invaluable to the medical service and to agricultural and veterinary officers and others responsible for native development. The foodstuffs are arranged in alphabetical order and hence it is possible to find at a glance under such a general heading as 'maize' the comparative food values of the different species of this plant, whether grown in one area or in different parts of Africa. Each food is further allotted a reference number