

Notes and News

The Handbook of African Languages

WHEN the Institute undertook to produce a Handbook of African languages it embarked upon a task whose importance was equalled only by its difficulty. The profusion and diversity of the forms of speech, the numerous groups, some related and others apparently unrelated to each other, the paucity or absence of reliable data over much of the area, all make it impossible to construct straightway a complete Handbook worthy of the name. But it was felt that it was not essential to wait until perfection could be attained, and that it should be possible to produce a valuable reference book systematically presenting the known and verified facts. That such a Handbook will reveal gaps in our knowledge and provide a basis, and an incentive, for further research is an additional reason for prompt action.

After some three years of planning and preparatory research it has been decided that the Handbook shall be a cumulative work consisting of two distinct series of publications: first, a general survey; and second, special studies. The aim of the former is to provide a comprehensive survey of the linguistic situation over the whole of Africa, exhibiting the structural characteristics of each linguistic group and the interrelations of the languages composing it, the distribution of the individual languages, the number of people speaking them, and their use as administrative, educational, and literary media. Maps and select bibliographies will be included. The Survey will be in four parts, distributed as follows: (1) Bantu Africa, with a subsection on the Khoisan languages, to be edited by Dr. Malcolm Guthrie; (2) West Africa, to be edited by Dr. Westermann; (3) north-eastern Africa, to be edited by Dr. A. N. Tucker; (4) the Sahara and North Africa, to be edited by Professor A. Basset. The series of Special Studies will consist of more detailed descriptions of specific areas and groups of languages. Some of these can only be done after research in the field, e.g. a survey of the Fulani dialects and an examination of the area where the Bantu and Sudanic languages meet. Certain others can be put in hand immediately, viz. the Bantu languages (*a*) of eastern Africa and (*b*) of southern Africa; the Kwa languages of West Africa; the languages of Central Togoland; the Kanuri group of northern Nigeria and Lake Chad; and the Nilotic languages of East Africa and the Sudan.

Some preliminary brochures have been already, or soon will be, issued. Professor Clement Doke's *Bantu: Modern Grammatical, Phonetical, and Lexicographical Studies since 1860* (price 6s.) has been published for the Institute by Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Dr. Malcolm Guthrie's *Classification of Bantu Languages* is in the press. And Miss M. A. Bryan's *The Distribution of the Semitic and Cushitic Languages of Africa* (price 4s. 6d.) has now been published for the Institute by the Oxford University Press. Miss Bryan's book is an outline only, based on existing information: a fuller study of these languages will be included in the Handbook. If this series of publications serves to reveal the gaps in our knowledge and leads to their being filled, and at the same time secures the collaboration of workers in the areas concerned, its purpose will have been achieved.

'Mine Kaffir'

It is quite understandable that when a heterogeneous mass of men, whose native tongues are many and diverse, work together they need a common language other than gestures—particularly when the job is dangerous and lives may depend upon quick mutual comprehension. When the present writer visited a gold-mine in Johannesburg he was given a