

*Dr. Roy C. Abraham*

WE regret to announce the death in June last of Dr. Roy C. Abraham, the well-known Africanist and author of numerous studies of Hausa, Tiv, Idoma, Yoruba, Somali, and other languages.

Abraham's earlier works—on Tiv, Hausa and Idoma—were produced while he was an administrative officer of the Nigerian Government. His *Dictionary of the Hausa Language* was published in 1949 and is probably his best-known and greatest work. He had earlier published studies of Tiv and Idoma, and *The Principles of Idoma* (1935) was the first complete and practical grammar of a Kwa language, written before anyone had thought of applying the phonemic principle to West African tone languages. In *The Idoma Language* (1951) he reached a depth of understanding of the structure of Idoma which makes it no exaggeration to say that the more one knows about Idoma the more one appreciates the book. The same may be said of his *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*. When he undertook this in 1952, on his own initiative, he seriously underestimated the task that lay ahead of him. Instead of the three or four months that he expected would suffice, he spent four years on it and produced a work of richness and precision which lays a solid foundation for the beginning of serious scholarship in Yoruba. At the time of his death he was actively engaged upon a dictionary of Ibo. This material is now substantially complete and represents a fundamental advance in Ibo studies, though it is far from ready for publication. In this, as in so many other fields, the heritage which Abraham has left is a challenge to those who follow him. His books are not easy to read or study, but they well repay the effort.

Abraham's conspicuous qualities as a linguist were his quick incisive brain, his indefatigable zeal, and his concentration of effort whereby he was able to acquire so much knowledge of so many and diverse languages in such a short time. He will probably be remembered, not so much for his phonetic and tonal analyses of African languages—though he had a passion for, and did much pioneer work in, these fields—nor even for the grammatical analyses as set out in his grammars and *Principles*—though these again went far deeper into the language than had any of his predecessors—as for his dictionaries, with their conscientiously noted and comprehensive material and wealth of incidental sociological and other information. Like all dictionaries, they have their idiosyncrasies, but the painstaking attention to detail and care in cross-referencing are also a source of admiration to all those who have constant occasion to consult them. There is no doubt that Abraham's dictionaries, especially the Hausa and Yoruba, will stand as monuments to their compiler's industry, enthusiasm, and scholarship for a great many years to come.

(Contributed by Professor R. G. Armstrong, Dr. P. E. H. Hair, and Mr. F. W. Parsons)