

THE DICTIONARY OF SOUTH AFRICAN BIOGRAPHY

The establishment of a Dictionary of South African Biography has become a reality and we rejoice in bringing to the notice of our readers this new and important undertaking in the field of historical research in South Africa.

The need for such a standard work has long occupied the minds of historians, journalists, librarians and researchers in general. Mindful of the monumental achievements in this respect in many Western countries — in the case of Sweden a dictionary of national biography was commenced at the time when the Great Trek was taking place in South Africa, and in several countries like Germany, Belgium and Great Britain the series of volumes has already reached or passed the seventy mark — there were voices raised from time to time expressing the wide-spread desire to co-ordinate such biographical data as we have and to make a start somewhere.

At least three of our universities made proposals and offered hospitality, should state aid be forthcoming. To these appeals the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* added its voice in 1959 and 1960. In the course of 1961 the Minister of Education, Arts and Science decided to establish, as from the beginning of 1962, a Dictionary of South African Biography. A Board of Control (under the chairmanship of Prof. C. H. Rautenbach, and including several historians and heads of universities) was appointed. Dr. W. J. de Kock, formerly of the Department of History at the University of Pretoria, and subsequently Professor of History at the University College of the Western Cape, was appointed editor in chief with headquarters in the South African Public Library in Cape Town.

The brochure announcing the launching of the DSAB, which appeared at the beginning of this year, stresses the fact that this will indeed be a national undertaking offering scope for the co-operation of scholars both in South Africa and abroad who will be invited to contribute, and aiming at the production of a standard work of reference envisaging a degree of scholarship, objective evaluation and completeness comparable with similar publications in other parts of the world and combining the best features of existing dictionaries of biography.

We hope to publish more detail later this year on the aims and method to be employed by the DSAB; meanwhile, it may suffice to say that a series of about five volumes (an identical series in Afrikaans and English, to be published simultaneously) is contemplated. Each volume will contain approximately 600 biographies of varying length, with full bibliography, and due provision will be made to include the "lesser figures" whose contribution to our national past may have been unspectacular yet important enough to justify their inclusion. Manuscript sources will be used wherever possible.

The *Dictionary of South African Biography* c/o South African Public Library, Cape Town, invites researchers and members of the public to write in and to apply for forms on which suggestions for biographies to be included, as well as information on historical sources, references and addresses of

descendants of prominent South Africans can be filled in.

We wish to support this appeal very cordially and to express the hope that the DSAB may provide a stimulus for biographical enquiry in general which still offers such attractive possibilities to those who approach our primary sources with love and patience.