

THE LION ON THE PATH, AND OTHER AFRICAN STORIES. Told by Hugh Tracey. Decca LK 49I4. I2in. (36s. 8d.)

MORE AFRICAN STORIES. Told by Hugh Tracey. Decca LK 49I5 I2in. (36s. 8d.)

THE BIRD OF THE VALLEY, AND OTHER AFRICAN STORIES. Told by Hugh Tracey. Decca LK 49I6. I2in. (36s. 8d.)

DOWN BY THE RIVER. African Stories. Told by Hugh Tracey. Decca LK 49I7. I2in. (36s. 8d.)

It is a big culture jump for a child to leave the European world of spoilt princesses who always get their man and enter a social system which takes for granted polygamy, the buying of wives for cattle and the rescindment of the deal if all does not go well, and the view of the women as working chattles. It is a little unreal for him to hear that an enemy can be punished by having his ears cut off, or his leg bone made into a flute and his skull into a drum. It is even a surprise for him to learn that the greatest magical gift a boy can have is to be able to call down rain at will. This information is all imparted in a most palatable form by the African stories on these records, and provided it is emphasised to the children listening to them that Africa has not only huts but also modern cities, and that the girls wear mini-skirts as well as beads, they provide a most enjoyable introduction to geography.

In fact these are some of the best records for children in the catalogue. The stories themselves are highly entertaining, with many unexpected twists which astounded, and in some cases shocked

the children listening with me, and did not allow their attention to wander for an instant. Hugh Tracey, the compiler and translator of the tales, is a delightfully humorous and dramatic reader of them. A great is the abundance of songs, often magical charms, which occurs in them, and which he sings in the original language (the stories are those of the Karanga people of Rhodesia) with brief interpolated translations. These, and the onomatopoeic descriptions of animals and actions, fascinated the listening children: gradually they made their way through the alien sounds to the tunes, until they were joining in the repetitive incantations with wholehearted pleasure. The records are thus - and of how few can this be said - an extension of and improvement upon the written material (the stories are published by Routledge & Kegan Paul.)

If a choice has to be made between the records, then the "Lion on the Path" is the best. It contains not only the nicest stork-story ever in "The Girl who forgot her Hoe," but also a splendid duel with a one toothed witch in "Tsimbarume, the hardened bachelor," in which the hero wins not just one wife, but a whole village full. C.W.

.....

MUSIC OF AFRICA SERIES: The Lion on the Path and Other African Stories. More African Stories. The Bird of the Valley and Other African Stories. Down by the River - African Stories. Written and narrated by 'Hugh Tracey.' Decca LK 4914/7. (four 12in., 36s.8d each)

The general title given to these records is misleading. They do not give us African Music but tales and stories written and told, without any musical accompaniment, by Hugh Tracey, who, by the way, is a leading expert on native African music and was responsible, I remember, for recording some of it many years ago. In the main the stories are of animals who are invested with personalities, somewhat akin to the Indian stories in Kipling's Jungle Books, and Just so Stories. Presumably although attributed solely to Mr Tracey they are based on African folklore but I have no sleeve to guide me on this point. Suffice it that they are admirably written and beautifully told in easy conversational style with just the right touch of drama and an occasional moment of suspense. For the most part there are three separately banded stories on each record side, which means that they are long enough for considerable detail but not too long to hold the attention of children throughout. It only remains to add that Mr Tracey's enunciation is crystal clear and he gives the impression of enjoying telling his tales, a point which children tend to spot more quickly than adults.

.....