

INDIAN LINGUISTIC FAMILIES.

By J. W. POWELL.

NOMENCLATURE OF LINGUISTIC FAMILIES.

The languages spoken by the pre-Columbian tribes of North America were many and diverse. Into the regions occupied by these tribes travelers, traders, and missionaries have penetrated in advance of civilization, and civilization itself has marched across the continent at a rapid rate. Under these conditions the languages of the various tribes have received much study. Many extensive works have been published, embracing grammars and dictionaries; but a far greater number of minor vocabularies have been collected and very many have been published. In addition to these, the Bible, in whole or in part, and various religious books and school books, have been translated into Indian tongues to be used for purposes of instruction; and newspapers have been published in the Indian languages. Altogether the literature of these languages and that relating to them are of vast extent.

While the materials seem thus to be abundant, the student of Indian languages finds the subject to be one requiring most thoughtful consideration, difficulties arising from the following conditions:

- (1) A great number of linguistic stocks or families are discovered.
- (2) The boundaries between the different stocks of languages are not immediately apparent, from the fact that many tribes of diverse stocks have had more or less association, and to some extent linguistic materials have been borrowed, and thus have passed out of the exclusive possession of cognate peoples.
- (3) Where many peoples, each few in number, are thrown together, an intertribal language is developed. To a large extent this is gesture speech; but to a limited extent useful and important words are adopted by various tribes, and out of this material an intertribal "jargon" is established. Travelers and all others who do not thoroughly study a language are far more likely to acquire this jargon speech than the real speech of the people; and the tendency to base relationship upon such jargons has led to confusion.