

GUIDE TO CAPE DUTCH.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The history of the Cape Dutch is intimately connected with that of South Africa.

When the Dutch settlers arrived at the Cape during the latter part of the seventeenth century, they found the country in the possession of an inferior class of natives; whose language, as well as their habits, proved unacceptable to civilized Europeans. The process, therefore, which set in almost immediately was one of teaching the roaming Hottentots the language of their new neighbours, who had come with the intention of becoming their masters. This process was completely successful from the first, the savage tongue easily giving place to the civilized speech of the Europeans. There are no instances on record of the Dutch acquiring the clicking speech of their swarthy neighbours for the sake of facilitating intercourse, whereas there are many of successful efforts on the side of the aborigines to learn the superior tongue of those who had come to invite trade and stimulate the virgin soil about the Cape mountains to produce its wealth.

Now the language of the Hollanders about that time was elaborate and difficult, and proved too much for the simple native. When it was given him to handle, he simplified it, and in an altered form handed it back to the soldier-agriculturist on his farm and the housewife in her kitchen. They, in their anxiety to adapt themselves to a new country and a new life, took it as amended. Nor was it long before between master and servant a

medium of conversation sprang up, unlike indeed the rich mother-tongue of the former, yet intelligible to both, and by common consent accepted as a sufficient means of intercourse. This coming down on the masters' part for the sake of convenience was not without effect. Both master and mistress were unwarily caught in the snares of this simplified vehicle of thought, and soon made common cause with their Hottentot servants in using a vernacular shorn of its inflectional beauty. And so there came into existence a language afterwards known as Cape Dutch, and of late years curiously designated as the "Taal."

This language has specific characteristics :

It is sufficiently like the Dutch of Holland to mark it out as an offshoot of the language of Vondel.

It has many traits to remind the learner of strong German influences which were exerted during the period of its formation by the influx of settlers from the North-East of Holland and the adjoining North-Western parts of Germany, and during the last hundred years renewed by the work of German missionaries. It contains a certain number of Malay words which were introduced from Java by hosts of slaves drawn from the Dutch Indies. The French Huguenots who emigrated to South Africa after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and whose influence on the race became so strong by reason of fecundity on the one hand and habits of thrift and enterprise on the other, abandoned their own language by order of the Dutch East India Company, and embraced that of their adopted country, with such determination that hardly a trace of French was communicated to it.

On the other hand the influence of Biblical language on a religious people was great and marked. The patois they had accepted as a medium for the exchange of ordinary thought to a large extent made room for better language whenever loftier themes were handled or prayers offered. Then the Scriptures were their guide, from which they borrowed every expression of reverence, and each word which in their limited every-day vocabulary found no place. And as it happened that many of these people were ardent students of Holy Writ, the speech of South Africa remained much purer than would otherwise have been the case.

There are now two distinct varieties of Cape Dutch used in South Africa. The one may be set down as a real patois, low and undeveloped, dependent on circumstances and locality, easily influenced, and becoming more and more Anglicised;—the other, a language lacking the grammatical niceties of the Dutch of Holland, and the shades of meaning which necessarily adorn a tongue of which the learned make-use, besides discarding much of the idiom of the North—but none the less expressive, and with a scope scarcely, if at all, diminished; a language fit for the pulpit and platform, though lacking somewhat in expressions for modern ideas, and wholly in technical terms.

This language is used in churches and in courts; it is the language heard in the Cape Parliament, and taught in schools. The other—the real patois—is a much-needed accomplishment for travellers, settlers and every one else whose lot connects him with up-country life. *It may in fact be called indispensable to all South Africans.* The opportunities for using it are many and varied, and as the above-mentioned better class of Cape Dutch can be developed out of it, by the acquirement of a larger vocabulary, the knowledge of it cannot hurt anyone. It consists of a limited number of Nouns and Adjectives, mostly all thoroughly Dutch, but with no declension except a plural ending, hardly any Pronouns, some Adverbs, a few Conjunctions and Prepositions, a fair number of Verbs, whose stem-parts only are used with a most limited conjugation, and lastly a crowd of Interjections drawn from various sources, all of which parts of speech may be supplemented by English ones whenever opportunity demands, or the degree of education of the hearer permits.

It is to this real Cape patois that the present volume seeks to introduce the reader. The higher forms of Dutch are amply provided for by Elementary and Commercial Grammars, to which students are referred, and which have been issued by the publishers of this "Guide."