

**A VOCABULARY
OF THE KAFIR
LANGUAGE**

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A Vocabulary of the Kafir Language by John Ayliff

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BY JOHN AYLIFF,

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INTRODUCTION.

Few persons, but those actually engaged in the Mission work, can form any idea of the difficulties presenting themselves to a Missionary on his entering his field of labour; the principal of which is his being unacquainted with the language of the people among whom he dwells. This difficulty is considerably heightened with a people who possess no books, as was the case with the Kafir nation previous to their intercourse with Missionaries. The Missionary on entering Kafirland was necessitated to obtain an interpreter, who was either a Hottentot, or some other native speaking the Dutch language, no others then being procurable: to make himself understood by his interpreter, he had to study the Dutch language, and the acquirement of the Kafir necessarily

became a secondary consideration. To obviate this difficulty, and to render the acquirement of the Kafir language a matter of greater facility, and that of the Dutch irrelevant to its attainment, has been the principal inducement to the author's prosecuting the work during the few and brief intervals of labour which fall to the lot of a Missionary.

The Kafir language being that of an uncivilized people, a paucity of words expressive of articles used by civilized nations will be observable. Hence the number of foreign words incorporated into it, which are in most instances derived from the Dutch or Hottentot languages; their migratory habits having frequently brought them into contact with the Dutch colonists and Hottentots.

From their ignorance of divine revelation, great difficulties were experienced by the earlier Missionaries to find appropriate terms whereby to describe the being and attributes of the Deity.

No legitimate word existing in Kafir to express the being of the Deity, a Hottentot word, *Utiso*, which has been incorporated into the language, was taken up by the

early Missionaries, and has continued in use ever since, though by the Hottentots pronounced *Utinca*; the literal meaning of which, as near as can be ascertained, (the Hottentot language being now nearly extinct, and that people all using the Dutch,) is, "my arm or strength," *ti* being the possessive pronoun "my," and *awa* meaning "arm or strength." It is difficult to decide what idea a Kafir forms in his mind from the use of the word, as he generally uses it as an exclamation or invocation when he sneezes; but, unless under Missionary instruction, it fails to produce any reverence. Numerous and varied have been the opinions entertained as to the propriety of using this word as an appellation of the Divine Being; some maintaining that the word *UAlanga* * would be far more appropriate.

* The description given by the Kafirs of the *UAlanga*, though implicit reliance cannot be placed on it, as their traditions descend orally from father to son, in consequence of their being ignorant of the art of writing and having no books, is, that it is a cavern in the east, where all the productions of the earth grew spontaneously luxuriant, and whence emanated the whole of created beings; first cattle, next mankind, and consequently the various beasts, birds, &c.: that many

This appears to have been the idea formed by the poet Pringle, who supposed it literally to allude to the apotheosis of one of the early Chieftains. Hence, in a poem called "Makanna's Gathering," he makes Makanna exclaim, "Mark! it is Uhlanga's voice."

But as the word *Utiao* is now so generally used, and no Kafir but understands the meaning of the name; it is doubtful if any utility would accrue from changing it.

No word being found in their language to express "faith," necessity has compelled the use of the word *uku kholo*, literally, "to approve." Also for the same reason *ubungwele*, literally, "purity," is used to express "holiness."

One great peculiarity in the language is, that the women speak a dialect, or rather numerous words, widely different to those used by the men. This arises from a custom called *uku Alonipa*, whereby the women are prohibited using their

unsuccessful attempts were made to domesticate cattle, till, one day, allured by the smell of blood, the cattle hastened to the spot, and, bellowing round it, were surrounded and taken by mankind; by whom they have been retained as a domestic animal ever since.

male relatives' names, or the emphatic syllable of the same in any word. There being no proper names in Kafir, a name is in some instances formed by adding the prefix *uku* to a noun or verb, and in others by some abrupt or fantastical termination to nouns. Hence arises the difference of words used by women of different clans; one will make use of a word that another, of a different clan, or even family, will not presume to use, but must appropriate some other word, lest she should name her husband, or some other male relative. A few examples are here given:—

ENGLISH.	KAFIR.	WOMEN.
Afar	Kude	Kutse
After, or Behind	Emoa	Empeta
Age	Ubudala	Ubutsala
Air	Umoya	Umklange- twa
To Anoint	Uku tambisa	Uku tyakisa
To Arrive	Uku fika	Uku tekela
Behold!	Bona!	Lozela!
Bosom	Izfuba	Izinamba
Butterfly	Ibadi	Ivivani
Boy	Inkwenkwe	Ixagi
Debt	Ityala	Iwuko

ENGLISH.	KAFIR.	WOMEN.
A Defence, or Shield	Ikaka	Isiketa
To Despise	Uku dela	Uku cela
Dream	Ipupa	Itongo
A Dug	Ibels	Iayiso
Egg	Iqanda	Ityanda

JOHN AYLIFF.

HASLOPE-HILLS,
October 6th, 1843.