

CHAPTER II.

SHADES OF LANGUAGE AND WHERE TO EXPECT THEM.

The Cape Dutch has none of that perplexing redundancy of other languages which gives more than one name to an object. Its vocabulary is delightfully limited, circumscribed by the actual needs of expression. Besides, from Cape Point to the Rhodesian wilds it is absolutely the same language.

The shades of it, or types of it, depend, more than in any other language, upon the range of ideas of the user. One who is familiar with it looks at the man opposite him before he decides what Cape Dutch to use in replying to his questions. The words employed are in every way identical in all cases—all depends on the choice. To understand this, the population of South Africa needs only to be studied—in which nearly every element avails itself of the common vernacular as a second language. Englishmen, Americans, Hollanders, Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, Poles, Armenians, Kafirs, Basutos, and Zulus have all alike acquired it. The percentage of Dutch Afrianders proper is not a large one, and these even use it side by side with that other language which regularly edifies them when in church, at family worship, or studying the news of the day.

Perhaps the best representatives of Cape Dutch are to be found among the Malay population of the Cape peninsula, whose worship is conducted in a foreign tongue, and the Bastards born and bred at German mission stations, where Cape Dutch forms the only medium of expression. Among either of these classes one may find a readiness of speech unalloyed with foreign elements which provides easy vent for all sentiments and every feeling, though confined to the narrow limits of a patois.

Efforts have at various times been made to lead the Cape Dutch up to the standard of the language of Holland. These

have failed, and are sure to fail. The endeavours of Holland teachers in that direction, which induce them to introduce Holland reading-books into their elementary classes, spring from mistaken zeal. The Cape has no need of the polished speech of Holland. To introduce it would be to add one more difficulty to the complex language question. The language of South Africa is confined between the geographical borders of the country, and must be strictly so. The vernacular is handy and good in its way, but its birth and growth are both local. No good purpose is served by the introduction of foreign polish, however well it may fit. The use of Cape Dutch is extensive enough, and the inherent power of the South African language is sufficiently developed to ensure for it a long life. It would seem to be meant to merge into and exert its influence over the language of the future, which may become a useful mixture fit for the wide domain of a United South Africa. For a long time to come the public press and the public platform will keep up the similarity to Dutch which 200 years of use have not appreciably diminished.

And whereas the propriety may be maintained of requiring a study of Holland authors for the higher educational tests prescribed by the University, the language taught in schools should be the medium tongue between that of Holland and the low patois, which every child should learn, and which may yet prove to be a most potent factor in the successful fusion of the races on South African soil.

