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SPECIMENS OF DIALECTS:

482

SHORT

VOCABULARIES OF LANGUAGES:

AND NOTES

OF COUNTRIES & CUSTOMS

IN AFRICA.

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BY JOHN CLARKE, MISSIONARY.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  
ON THE  
ACCOMPANYING SPECIMENS  
OF THE  
AFRICAN DIALECTS.

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1. By means of these Specimens, the countries where the language is the same—where it varies a little—and where it departs more widely from the tongue chiefly spoken in the district, may be seen.

2. It may also to some extent be ascertained where the language becomes essentially different in one country, from that which is spoken in the country adjacent.

3. The Specimens shew the variations of dialect in the same language, given by different natives of the same country; e. g. in the Ibo language the following words respectively signify Man, Dimkwa, Maddo, Okay, Uoika, Wawoke, Woke, Wokay.

4. The differences of pronunciation as given by different writers on those languages, will also appear from the Specimens given. The differences as given by “Mollien” are not so great, in some cases, as his orthography would indicate, as he has introduced some of the peculiarities of the French method of spelling words.

5. A number of districts and towns not before heard of are here mentioned; and, in the accompanying observations, many more names of towns and districts, where the various languages are spoken, will be noticed;—only a few of these towns appear upon the map.

6. These Specimens are the result of eighteen years’ attention to this interesting subject, in the West Indies, and in Africa. I have found

them exceedingly useful in obtaining for me a ready access to the confidence of the African; and wherever I have met a black man, and ascertained that he came from Africa, and recollected his native tongue, and have had time to enter into conversation, I have put questions such as these, "From what part of Africa do you come?" We shall suppose he answers "From the Guinea Coast." I go on, "The Coast of Guinea is very large?" "Yes, Massa." "What name has your country?" "Aku." "Indeed! Then in your country you call Man, Okuni?" "And Woman, Obini?" "Fire, 'Nna?" "And Water, Omi?" The poor man stares in wonder, and asks, "Have you been in my country?" "No, but I know something about it." He readily believes this, and I obtain the information I desire, or that which he is able to supply. Should the person give me the name of a town or country of which I have not before heard, suppose the town Oss; the word *Woke* for man, shews me it is in the *Ibo* country, and on the Delta of the Niger. By means then of these Specimens, countries can be classified, and names of towns before unknown, take their respective positions in Biafra, Ibo, Benin, Aku, &c., according to the country to which they truly belong.

7. One disadvantage, however, is inseparably connected with the *media* through which I have collected these Specimens of Language; and that is, that, in some cases, the natives with whom I have conversed have belonged originally to countries far distant from the sea; have been brought from those countries at a very early age, and spent many years in intermediate localities before reaching the coast. While residing in such intermediate localities, they have acquired the languages, or dialects, of those parts, and to some extent forgotten their native tongues; so that the words given by them as spoken at the places to which they originally belonged, cannot always be depended upon. From this cause some mistakes may have arisen in the present work, which may afterwards be removed by more accurate sources of information.

8. The labour employed in collecting the Specimens has not been useless. It has been connected with the high object of making known the Gospel. The service the Specimens have done me, has amply repaid the care and patience required in collecting them; and if any other missionary use them as I have done, where Africans are found, he will soon prove their wonderful power in dispelling fear and jealousy, and in winning confidence, and will be repaid most amply for the attention necessary to acquire a right knowledge of the sounds of these African words.

9. The poor slave on the Coast of Africa has too long been taught, that if sold to the white man, it is to be eaten by him upon the sea! His fear, and jealousy, and dread, on this point, have grown with him from infancy. When this is kept in mind, the missionaries cease to wonder that children fly before them, and young men tremble at their approach; and that slaves from the interior shrink behind the free men, or steal away into the woods, and suppose the time has come when they are to be sold to the white monsters from the salt water, who have no land to supply them with yams and rice, and who buy to devour the unfortunate black man, who is sent from his native land.

10. Connected with these Specimens, are vocabularies of some African tongues, notes on different parts of Africa, and its customs, and lists of countries near to the parts from which those natives came with whom I have conversed. The grand object of all is to shew to the Church of Christ, and to the Missionaries of the Cross, a little more respecting the land to be taken possession of for the Redeemer, and the mighty work of acquiring languages, and translating the word of God, which lies before us, ere Africa can hear in her own tongues the Gospel of Jesus, and read in her thousand dialects the wonderful works of God.

Some have thought that to teach English to the African, is the best mode of conveying light to his mind; and, as far as it is practicable, it may be taught. In connection with the reading of the African language, we have always taught English; because, on the coast, the people as traders, have a powerful inducement to learn it; but it would be folly for a missionary in the interior parts, to expect to be able to do this to any great extent, as no object, sufficient in the eye of the African, is seen to induce him to make the acquisition. As well might we hope to persuade the worshippers of the Grand Lama to learn English, for the purpose of leading them to forsake idolatry, as to seek to induce the African to acquire English, in order to draw him away from the superstitions of his fathers. The African is wedded to those superstitions, and believes they are right; and in order to change his ideas on these points, it is needful that the missionary should make himself master of his language. By such acquisition, he will shew his diligence, perseverance, faith, and love; and will attain to a power, not otherwise to be possessed; and, with the aid of the Most High, among the people to whose interests he devotes his days, he will confer a blessing which will stretch in its happy consequences through time into eternity. Thus multiply missionaries for each land; and let no one attempt too much, but each labour diligently to cultivate his own district, and the land shall become the garden of the Lord.

The work is before us in Africa, and in other parts of the earth. "The field is the world." Where are the labourers? May the God of the harvest raise them up, and send them forth, and "pour out his Spirit from on high!" "Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God shall bless us." "God shall bless us, and all ends of the earth shall fear him."

J. C.