

INTRODUCTION

About a quarter of a century after they had built Fort Amsterdam on Manhattan Island, the Hollanders were making similar plans for a different continent in another hemisphere. Near the southernmost point of Africa, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet, they chose as the site for a fort the shores of Table Bay.

In 1652, by order of the Dutch East India Company, Jan van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape of Good Hope to establish a half-way haven for the Company's ships trading with India. Later, to save their sailors from scurvy, fresh vegetables and fruits were required; and emigrants from Holland were encouraged to settle and colonize the Cape of Good Hope.

The indigenous Bushmen and Hottentots—*strandloopers* (beach walkers) the Hollanders called them—were people of tiny stature who had always led a nomadic existence, and who had been driven down to the Cape by the larger Bantu races from the North. They at first proved hostile to the new arrivals, and workers had to be imported from the Malay Peninsula. However, the pygmies were eventually persuaded to help till the soil, and their mixed descendants are still invaluable workers on farms and in the towns.

Since those early days, great agricultural and mining industries have developed, and men from all parts of the world have gone there to live.

Before the close of the seventeenth century, Huguenot refugees from France had arrived and been absorbed so effectively by the Dutch settlers that, though there are many French names in South Africa today, no French is spoken. In later years immigrant peoples came from all over—England, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia; but the Dutch influence and language remained predominant, especially amongst the farmer, or Boer, communities.

Under the expert and busy hands of the pioneers, huge expanses of African veld began to produce maize, fruits, vineyards, etc., and to provide grazing for sheep and fodder for cattle and ostriches. Just as the people changed the face of the land, so the land changed the life and language of its settlers. In the isolation of the pioneer existence there was no possibility for the old type of village communal life, there was no time for the more elaborate expressions of the old Dutch language. So, with the new life, grew new customs and a new language, Afrikaans.

The metamorphosis of the word "veld" itself gives as good an illustration of this as any. Originally spelled in High Dutch "veldt", it meant "a field"; but transferred from tiny Holland to the great rolling spaces of South Africa, it came to mean "a vast, undulating plain", and the superfluous "t" was dropped. For many years Afrikaans—or the "taal" as it was called—was a spoken language only, with High Dutch being taught in schools. Indeed not till about 25 years ago were Afrikaans grammar books and dictionaries published. To-day Afrikaans has taken its place with English as an official language in South Africa.

The "taal" is understood and spoken by the many races of South Africa, white and colored, all having contributed their share to the folk-lore and folk-songs which have grown with it at the periodic "tikkiedraai's" or get-togethers. From the earliest days farmers and their families foregathered at these festivities from miles around, outspanning their big ox-wagons in the village square and camping there. Around the campfire they would exchange hunting adventures, recount incidents of their farm life, dance and sing. To the rhythms of the concertinas and guitars Afrikaans words were fitted to tunes they vaguely remembered from their European past.

These newly born songs were greatly influenced by the Cape Colored people, descendants of Hottentot, Bushmen and other strains, who acted as wagon-drivers, cooks, etc. Intensely musical, with a keen sense of humor, they took over many a musical phrase they heard and added words to their liking. In many cases their quaint versions were in turn adopted by the whites, and this continuous interchange probably accounts for the number of differing versions and the unintelligibility of some of them.

So there gradually developed a wealth of delightful and unusual folk-music with a flavor entirely its own, from which a small selection is here published for the first time in English.

As with most folk-songs, a literal translation was impossible if the lilting and "singable" character of the original was to be kept. Also many of the most popular Afrikaans versions were not the most suitable for English translation. However, for those interested, the best known Afrikaans lyric is given with its literal, though unsingable, translation. It is hoped that the guide to pronunciation, which had to be greatly condensed, will be found adequate.

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