

A Bibliographical Note on Hannah Kilham's Linguistic Work

IN the early decades of the 19th century, Hannah Kilham,¹ a widow and a schoolteacher, became interested in problems of education, especially religious education, first in England and later in West Africa. For English schools she produced a series of books on spelling, English grammar and religious instruction: and she followed these up with a number of works intended for schools in Africa. The latter are the subject of this note.

Her writings for African schools were intended for pupils whose mother-tongue was other than English, and they therefore concerned themselves, to a greater or less extent, with various African vernaculars. Since at this date these were largely unstudied, Hannah Kilham's books were pioneer efforts in African linguistics.

Her first linguistic work, however, dealt with a language, not of Africa, but of the American continent.

- 1818 A short vocabulary in the language of the Senecan nation, and in English. [Anon.] London: Printed by W. & S. Graves. Pp. 35.

Apparently Hannah Kilham had become interested in missions in America not only to the population of African slaves but also to the Red Indians. The booklet noted above contained a reference to another work "Phrases and Religious lessons in the language of the Senecan nation," which was to follow; but it does not appear to have been issued.

In 1819, Hannah Kilham contacted two West African sailors and began to learn the main languages of Senegal, Wolof or Jolof, and Mandingo.

- 1820 Ta-re wa-loof. Ta-re boo Juk-à. First lessons in Jaloof. [Anon.] Tottenham: Printed by George Stockwell Coventry. Pp. 24.
- 1823 African lessons. Wolof and English. In three parts. [Anon.] Part First. Easy lessons, and narratives for schools. London: Printed for a Committee of Friends for Promoting African Instruction, by William Phillips. Pp. xi, v,

¹ Hannah Kilham, *née* Spurr (1774-1832); *Dictionary of National Biography*; Joseph Smith *Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*, ii, 58-61.

55—Part Second. Examples in grammar, family advices, short vocabulary. [Same imprint] pp. 64.

—Part Third. Selections from the Holy Scriptures. [Same imprint] pp. 53, [1].

- 1827 African Lessons, Mandingo and English. Elementary sounds and general spelling lessons: a short vocabulary: examples on the nine parts of speech and a few scripture sentences. [Anon.] London: for the Committee of the Language Institution.

The 1823 work contains the following explanation of Hannah Kilham's aims.

The following elementary Lessons were attempted from an apprehension that the most certain means of promoting a friendly and beneficial intercourse with the natives of the African continent, would be to reduce their native languages to writing, to prepare in them lessons of elementary instruction for the use of Native Schools, and to form by degrees translations into these languages from the Holy Scriptures. . . .

Should it be considered by some that the acquisition of English might be a greater advantage to the natives of Africa than the cultivation of their own various languages, it may be answered, that even this object will doubtless be best effected by forming elementary books in the African dialects, which may serve the natives as a key for the acquisition of English.

The 1823 work also stated—"a vocabulary and some remarks on the grammar of the Wolof language are in manuscript, which are proposed to be printed." This latter work never appeared.

An account of, and tribute to, Hannah Kilham's work in Jolof appeared in J. Dard, *Dictionnaire Français-Wolof* . . ., 1825, p. xiii. Hannah Kilham's remaining works were produced for schools in Sierra Leone.

- 1827 African school tracts. 1st, General spelling lessons. 2d, Outline for early translation. 3d, Lessons for children, in three parts. 4th, First lessons in numbers. 5th, Definitions of the nine parts of speech. 6th, Selections from the Holy Scriptures, for translation. [Anon.] London: Printed for a Committee of the Society of Friends, for Promoting African Instruction; by P. White. Pp. viii, 8, 24, 60, 12, 16, [1], 20, [2].

Each part has individual pagination.

The following parts have individual title-pages: "Outline for early translation," "The nine kinds of words," "Selections from the Holy Scriptures, for translation."

- 1828 Specimens of African languages, spoken in the Colony of Sierra Leone. [Anon.] London: Printed for a Committee of the Society of Friends, for Promoting African Instruction, by P. White. Pp. xi, 47, [1]; 1 plate.

All Hannah Kilham's linguistic writings were published in very limited editions and few copies have survived. As early as 1845, a French scholar referred to—"les Specimens de mistress Hannah Kilham, imprimés à Sierra-Leone [this was incorrect] et devenus très-rares aujourd'hui" (*Mémoires de la Société Ethnologique de Paris*, II, 1845, II, p. 49). The British Museum appears to have no copy of several of these works, including the African School Tracts.

The *Tracts* cited above are those bound in a single volume at Friends House Library. As the tracts are paginated individually, it is not certain that the volume is complete. The Introduction states:

The following School Tracts are prepared to succeed the Elementary Lessons.

1st, Little Vocabularies in the African Languages . . . Three of these little sketches are prepared for the press, and one in addition has been already printed.

2d, Tables of Leading Words and Sentences for early Translation.

The second item is clearly the Outline for easy translation cited above, but no vocabularies in African languages appear in the volume examined. A French scholar has indicated that he found several vocabularies in a work which he describes simply as Kilham 1827; while a German scholar similarly refers to "Elementary Sounds, 1827" (A. Meillet & M. Cohen, *Les langues du monde*, p. 526, 547; *Journal of the African Society*, xi, (1911-1912), 219).

Since all the vocabularies referred to are found in the 1828 *Specimens*, it is possible that the scholars have erred. But on the other hand, it may be that a tract, containing vocabularies, is missing from the volume examined. In any case, the vocabularies themselves have been seen. At Friends House Library can be found 30 sheets of lessons in African languages—each sheet on one language, and mainly a short vocabulary. Possibly these sheets were bound together (with a title-page) to form a pamphlet, though each sheet is printed as a separate handbill.

No date appears on the sheets, but the same vocabularies, differently arranged and with a handful of variations in the list of words, are to be found in the 1828 *Specimens*. Perhaps then these sheets were the basis for the 1828 *Specimens*: and they may well have been issued individually, and perhaps as a set, in 1827.

Between 1828 and 1832, when she died, Hannah Kilham prepared some "Picture Lessons" in West African languages. No copy of these has been found, and probably they were never printed (S. Biller, *Memoir of Hannah Kilham* (1837) p. 441).

Hannah Kilham's linguistic work, though crude by modern standards, was a worthy pioneering effort in an untracked field, and has been commended as such by a modern student of African languages (A. Werner: "English Contributions to the Study of African Languages" in *Journal of the African Society*, xxix (1930), 117). Of the 30 vocabularies of 1827-1828, at least a dozen represented languages which had not previously appeared in print. Hannah Kilham's emphasis on the value of vernacular instruction in African education was well-nigh unique in her own day, but has been fully justified by progressive experience.

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Recent Publications

Brief Guide to the contents of the East Riding County Record Office, County Hall, Beverley. January, 1960.

Included are the following:

- DDQR. Records of the Society of Friends—deposited by Hull Preparative Meeting. Detailed calendar available.
- Elloughton* (afterwards *Cave*) *Monthly Meeting*: minutes 1669-1783. Sufferings 1665-1775. Epistles 1657-1760. Certificates and disownment 1721-1784.
- Kelk* (afterwards *Bridlington*) *Monthly Meeting*: minutes 1669-1773. Sufferings 1652-1752. Epistles 1690-1772. Disownments 1669-1773.
- Owstwick* (*Holderness*) *Monthly Meeting*: minutes 1669-1788. Sufferings 1655-1792. Epistles 1675-1788. Disownments 1669-1787.
- Bridlington Preparative Meeting*: Women's minutes 1735-1791.
- Owstwick Preparative Meeting*: Women's minutes 1706-1768.
- Welwick Preparative Meeting*: Women's minutes 1702-1792. Epistles 1702-1790.

Of the 725 men and women whose lives are recorded in the latest volume (O.U.P., 1959, 105s.) of the *Dictionary of National Biography*—who died, that is to say, between 1941 and 1950 inclusive—five are stated to have been Friends: Sir Joseph Barcroft (1872-1947), physiologist; Sir Arthur Eddington (1882-1944), mathematician and astrophysicist; J. Rendel Harris (1852-1941), biblical scholar, archaeologist and orientalist; Sir George Newman (1870-1948),