

Ndebele Proverbs and Other Sayings By J. N. Pelling. Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1977, 133pp., Z\$1.00.

As I am not an author myself, every time that I am asked to review a book, or to comment on some other people's works, I am reminded of the words from Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*: 'He who can, does. He who cannot teaches'. It is with this caution in mind that I proceed to write a review on the Revd James Pelling's book *Ndebele Proverbs and Other Sayings*.

Any work on proverbs or popular sayings can never be original, in content at least. As R. Ridout and C. Witting (*English Proverbs Explained* (London, Heinemann, 1967), p.3) put it: 'To become a proverb, a saying has to be taken up and assimilated by the common people. In the process, its origin is forgotten. Once it has become proverbial, the saying is used as part of popular wisdom.' A book on proverbs is essentially a compilation or collation in one form or another. Proverbs in almost any language have their source in the collective wisdom of the people. In Ndebele, we now have two published works — that of Pelling, and an earlier book compiled by A. Nyamambi and P. Mpofu, *Izaga* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1975). Messrs Nyamambi and Mpofu's book is written entirely in Ndebele, and contains more proverbs and sayings than Pelling's collection. It is not unusual to have two or more books — even several books — covering the same topic. The question arises as to why an author would choose to write on a topic on which there is something already published, unless he has some point which he thinks the earlier writer overlooked, and he would like to bring this out.

Both *Izaga* and *Ndebele Proverbs* are described as being suitable for use by mature readers, especially those above the primary school level, and up to university level. The basic material which they contain is identical, save that the one published earlier, *Izaga*, contains more proverbs than *Ndebele Proverbs*.

There are, however, some differences between the two books. One difference is to be found in the arrangement of the proverbs in the two books. The proverbs in *Izaga* are arranged alphabetically, starting from A to Z. In Pelling's book, on the other hand, the proverbs are classified 'according to their meaning, the function they perform' (Pelling, p.5). To some extent, this is similar to the classification used by C. L. Sibusiso Nyembezi in *Zulu Proverbs* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand Univ. Press, 1963) to whom acknowledgement is made by Pelling in his introductory remarks. M. A. Hamutyei and A. B. Plangger in *Tsumo-Shumo* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1974) also adopt a similar type of classification. There are merits in this type of classification, *vis-a-vis* the alphabetical arrangement. One could say that this was an improvement on *Izaga*. Cross-reference is more easily handled under this type of classification. Also, the non-Ndebele speaker, looking for an appropriate proverb in a given situation, can refer to such lead headings as 'Good advice'; 'Gratitude'; 'Exhortation', etc.

Perhaps Pelling's real contribution to the subject lies in the fact that his book explains the proverbs in English, while *Izaga* is in Ndebele throughout. This makes the book useful to the non-Ndebele speaking public. The book could even have been much more valuable if it had been a straightforward translation of *Izaga*, with its improved arrangement, so that it could have contained as many proverbs as are found in Nyamambi and Mpofu's book. This way, those who are non-speakers of Ndebele could have had access to a bigger collection of Ndebele proverbs. And in several places, Nyamambi and Mpofu's explanations are better handled, and hence give a clearer meaning, than Pelling's.

Pelling's explanation tries to follow, to some extent, the pattern in Nyembezi's book. This consists of stating the proverb in the vernacular,

followed by a literal translation in English, and then some background information on the proverb where possible, and, lastly, the meaning of the proverb.

It is a pity that Pelling does not go as far as Nyembezi or Hamutyinei and Plangger do, to give the 'application' of the proverb, i.e. where and when it should be used, in what sort of situation. In some way, the use of a proverb can be inferred from its meaning. But for second-language users, for whom I presume Pelling's book was primarily written, the application part is, in my view, very necessary. Both Nyembezi and Hamutyinei and Plangger explicitly incorporate this feature of 'application' in their works. In Nyamambi and Mpofu it is somewhat embodied in their explanation of the proverbs, in a clearer form than in Pelling's book.

Having extensively used Nyembezi's book for over fifteen years, I am left with the feeling that Pelling's book is a potted version, in Ndebele form, of Nyembezi's book. Anyone familiar with Nyamambi and Mpofu's *Izaga* could view Pelling's *Ndebele Proverbs* as a shorter version of these authors' work, with English explanations. But the arrangement is different in Pelling's book, and perhaps better than that of *Izaga*.

University of Zimbabwe

C. M. SILEYA

A New Testament Wordbook English by R. A. B. Ewbank, Shona by M. Mutyandasvika, Ndebele by L. Dube. Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1979, 64pp., Z\$1.00.

The purpose of the booklet is clearly set out in the preface. It is intended to assist Shona and Ndebele readers of the New Testament by providing translations of some thirty common New Testament words. Among the translated words are such well known terms as Regeneration, Faith and Covenant. Bible references are given to help the readers understand the words in context. Nevertheless, the technique of translation is not one of nature's gifts to everyone, especially when it comes to translating words from English that have themselves been translated from the Greek or Hebrew.

As I have only a smattering of Ndebele, I can only comment on the Shona.

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| 1. BIRTH | : | <i>Kuzvarwa</i> |
| New or Second | : | <i>Kutsva kana kwechipiri</i> |
| Regeneration | : | <i>Kusikwa patsva</i> |

It is only with careful explanation and in context that such terms can convey the intended meaning. To say, 'Anobva aita mwana muchechek zvakare' means that he becomes a baby again, which is not what the Scripture says.

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| 2. CONSCIENCE | : | <i>Moyo wokuziva zvakanaka nezvakaipa</i> |
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Moyo is concerned with the will and emotions and not with judgement or knowledge. For example, 'Ane moyo wakashinga' means he has a strong will; 'Moyo wangu hauzvive' means I dislike it.

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| 3. MEDIATOR | : | <i>Mupupuri</i> |
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This word is a derivative noun from the verb *pupura* (to witness) and means a witness to the truth of someone's statement. The *mupupuri* need not be witnessing in one's favour or be mediating at all.