



---

Zulu Proverbs

Author(s): Fr. Mayr

Source: *Anthropos*, Bd. 7, H. 4. (1912), pp. 957-963

Published by: Anthropos Institut

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40443906>

Accessed: 06-08-2018 10:30 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Anthropos Institut* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Anthropos*

## Zulu Proverbs.

By the Rev. Father FR. MAYR, Pietermaritzburg, Natal.

The genius of a nation is mirrored in its proverbs. If it be so, a collection of proverbs of the Zulus should be a welcome contribution to the Ethnographic Review "Anthropos". Working under this supposition I brought this small collection up to 150 distinct proverbs with their literal translation and explanation of how they are used.

These proverbs clearly show how sententious the wisdom of the Zulus is and how shrewd their thoughts are. In some of them we find the very maxims which are current in Europe, dressed even in a similar, but more often in a different clothing. Other proverbs tell us at once that we have to do with savages, hunting in the wilds of Africa, herding their flocks of cattle, indulging licentiously their craving for plenty of meat, beer and wives, or engaged in war and troubled by superstitious fear of all kinds. Yet even then we find good qualities as well, especially a sense of justice and noble pride; so much so that it can well be said of a Zulu that he loves only those whom he fears. If a Zulu was in the wrong and knows it, he will like the master the more for having given him a good thrashing. Again we find him very sensitive to ridicule which upsets him more than the severest reproach. Some proverbs refer to historical facts of the time of the Zulu kings in the first half of last century; others refer to fables which are as old as the hills, rivers and mountains. Of most of these and many more proverbs which could be quoted must be said that they are admirable for their brevity and force.

1. *Inhlwa aibanjwa ngekanda isavela*. The winged termite is not caught by its head as soon as it appears. — Wait till you have heard the whole story before you judge or even answer.

2. *Ubude abupangwa*. Height is not reached in a hurry. — Do not be too hasty.

3. *Aku'qili lazikota emhlana*. There is no cunning person whoever licked himself on the back. — Said of someone who has attempted some trickery beyond his cunning, and been found out.

4. *Amaqili katengani*. Cunning men do not deal with each other. — May be said of two people who know each other too well and keep in distance of each other. (The burnt child dreads the fire.)

5. *Akulahlwa imbeleko ngokufetwa*. The child's sack is not thrown away after the death of one child. — Because there might be another child forthcoming and the sack required to carry same. Therefore: Never despair in adversities. (Never say die.)

6. *Upakati kwomhlana nembeleko*. He is between the back and the sack (in which a Zulu mother carries her child on her back.) — Said of a person who has a great protector to assist him.

7. *Ul'iqili eli 'ntete zosiwa emuva*. He is cunning, whose locusts are roasted last. — Said of one who manages to get more than the rest of people.

8. *Isihlala 'ndawonye sidhla amajwabu*. The sitter-in-one-place eats the skin-scrapings. — Said of a lazy person who is poor on account of his indolence. (When work flies out of the window, poverty comes in at the door.)

9. *Induku aina 'muzi*. The stick has no kraal. — Where there is much fighting and quarrelling the family will not flourish.

10. *Aku 'qaqa lazizwa ukunuka*. No polecat ever smelt its own stink. — Nobody recognises his own faults.

11. *Kuhlonitshwana kabili*. It is respected twice (on both sides). — If you want others to respect you, you also must respect them.

12. *Ukubona kanye ku 'kubona kabili*. The see once is to see twice. — I have experienced it once, and do not want to experience it again. (Once caught, twice shy.)

13. *Impi yomndeni aingenwa*. A family war is not entered. — Is best left alone. Warning not to interfere in a matter. (Leave wellenough alone.)

14. *Yek' ukwenz' amandhla esambane*. Alas! for the labour of the ant-bear (who digs a hole and then does not lie in it). — Exclaimed by one who finds that he has worked for others and not for himself.

15. *Isala 'kutshelwa sabona ngomopo*. Who will not be told, will see by the blood-flow. — Who does not like to listen to warnings must learn by bitter experience.

16. *Ujojo umi ngoti lwake*. The Kafir-finch stands by its own stick (perch). — Used of a pertinacious person who sticks to his own ideas.

17. *Kudhla umndeni kwotamele izibankwa*. The family circle eats and the lizards bask in the sun (look on). — Strangers cannot expect the attention given to one of the family.

18. *Aku' nkwali epandela enye*. There is no partridge that scratches for another. — Everyone looks after his own interests, or, each one must look out for himself.

19. *Iqina lipum' embizeni*. The buck has got out of the pot. — (There is many a slip twixt the cup and the lip.)

20. *Iko' eyikotayo*. The cow licks the one that licks her. — Said of people who help one another.

21. *Libunjwa lis' eva*. The day is worked while it is still fresh. — (Make hay while the sun shines.)

22. *Amate abuyele kwa 'sifuba*. The spittle has returned to the chest. — Said in time of disappointment after great hope and expectation.

23. *Iso liwela umfula ugwele*. The eye crosses a full river. — (Desire goes beyond the possible.)

24. *Umzimba uzwiwa ng' umniniwo*. The body is felt by its owner. — Each one feels his own pain.

25. *Ngizidhlise ngobami*. I have poisoned myself with my own poison. — It serves me right.

26. *Aku 'ndhlela ingayi ekaya*. There is no road which does not lead home. — Sometimes used as a threat of revenge. (All roads lead to Rome.)

27. *Aku 'mfula ungahlokomi*. There is no river that has not its own sound. — Everyone has his own qualities.

28. *Igeja litengwa ngokubonwa*. The hoe is bought after being seen. — (Look before you leap.)

29. *Ngihlezi pezu kwegeja litshisa*. I am sitting upon a hot hoe-iron. — Used when in uncomfortable circumstances, surroundings or great trouble.



*Calling Ornaments*



*Chief's Hut*



*Beating a Skin*

*Making Kanchuba for wife*



*Hut + Dances*



*Day after*

*Food life*



*Day after*

*Chief's House + Dances*



*House*

*Chief's House + Dances*



*Milking + Dances*

Primitive life of Zulu.

Anthropos VII.

30. *Mus' ukusipula izinselwa njengaba Twa.* Do not throw away the gourds like Bushmen. — The Bushmen did not know the usefulness of the gourds. (Waste not, want not.)

31. *Isela litshaya umuntu ngegula ebusweni.* The thief strikes somebody else with the milk-vessel in the face. — He does so that he gets bespattered and people think it is he. A wrong-doer when found out, wants to put the blame on someone else.

32. *Aku 'ndhlovu esindwa umboko wayo.* There is no elephant which finds its trunk too heavy. — Self-chosen burden is not felt.

33. *Akuko 'qude elasindwa imizwezwe.* There is no cock which finds its spur too heavy. — Used like no. 32.

34. *Usele pansi njengamafinyila.* He is left on the ground like mucus from the nose. — Said of someone who is not liked by anybody.

35. *Us 'ubanda njengekala lenja.* He is now as cold as a dog's nose. — Said of somebody who is quite ashamed of what he has said or done.

36. *Indhlu yegagu iyaneta, eka 'nompinjana iyafulelwa ngesikohlala.* The house of the bold talker lets in the rain, but that of the man with the little throat may be covered with mucus from the throat. — The work of the proud is bad, but that of the humble is good.

37. *Uhlekani uhlekekile nje?* Why do you laugh after you have been laughed at? — Said of one who does not feel his shame.

38. *Uqalaza ngani, amabele ajabile?* Why do you look boldly, your breasts being disgraced? — Said of a woman, who got a child before marriage.

39. *Ucakide uhlolile, imamba y 'alukile.* The weasel is at ease, the mamba (snake) having gone out. — (When the cat's away the mice will play.)

40. *Puma 'cakide! wadhliwa imamba.* Come out, weasel! or you will be eaten by the mamba. — Might be said as a warning to someone who has done wrong.

41. *Lixoshwa kanye l'esabe.* Once hurt (the eye), it is always in fear. — (Once bitten, twice shy.)

42. *Satunywa ugwai sagijimela iboza.* He (the fool) was sent for tobacco and brought the medicine (*Mschosma riparia*). — Said of someone who alway does the opposite to what he is told.

43. *Uqala ngamanzi, impupu ungakayigayi.* You begin with (boiling) the water before grinding the corn. — (Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.)

44. *Ungenwe ipela endhlebeni.* He has a cockroach in his ear. — Said of or by a man who has somebody persistently pestering him, e. g. for the return of a loan.

45. *Usenga inkomo nenkonyana.* He milks the cow with the calf. — Applied to an immoral person who does not respect the closest relationship.

46. *W'ande emlonyeni.* He is big in the mouth. — Applied to a person who talks much and does little.

47. *Imvou ibulala indhlovu.* A sheep kills an elephant. — A small thing may be more powerful than a big one.

48. *Amahlaya alala insila.* Jokes are covered with dirt. — Somebody's jokes are nasty and hurtful.

49. *Ungibambele inyati ngopondo*. You held a buffalo by the horn for me. — You delivered me into the hands of my enemy.

50. *Ingwe ibuzwa kwabapambili*. The tiger is enquired about from those further on. — You should seek your information from those who have better knowledge.

51. *Imbila yaswela umsila ngokuyalezela*. The cony got to be without a tail through having given directions (to others fetch him one). — If you want a thing done, do it yourself.

52. *Ungitshuye ngemfe ipindiwe*. You struck me with a doubled sweet-reed. — You deceived me.

53. *Uti ngiy'isilima senkomo y'ini?* Do you think I am as foolish as an ox? — Which is driven to be killed without knowing it. I do not want to put myself into danger.

54. *Isikuni sibuye nomkwezeli*. The lighted firebrand has returned with the one tending the fire. — Said of one who while attempting wrong, has been injured himself. (The biter has been bitten; he burnt his fingers.)

55. *Ukuni lwazal'umlota*. The fire-log begat ashes. — He brought forth a good for-nothing thing or worthless child.

56. *Inkonyana yomdhlandhla yeqa la kweqe unina*. The calf of the wild buck leaps there where its mother has leaped. — Said of bad child who has followed the bad example of its parents.

57. *Udhlala ngegeja, kuzilwa*. You are playing about with the hoe when one should not work at all. — You are doing what is not permitted.

58. *Ukwela pezu kwendhlu, unge'nja*. You climb on the top of the house, as if you were a dog. — Said to a young person who abuses old and respectable people right and left.

59. *Ingwe idhla umniniyo*. The tiger eats its owner. — Like 54.

60. *Aku 'mango ongena 'liba*. There is no hillside without a grave. — Death is everywhere.

61. *Umuntu muntu, kukwa 'Fabase y'ini?* Is there only one person, is it Fabase's kraal? (Where all are said to have died with the exception of one.) — Said when people excuse themselves for not doing a work which should be done.

62. *Uhlonywe otini njengentete*. You are on the top of the stick like a locust. — Applied to somebody who respects nobody.

63. *Ungidhlisa imbuya ngoluti*. You feed me on weed with a stick. — You trouble me exceedingly.

64. *Umuntu o'manxiwa kamili 'mbuya*. A person, on whose kraal-sites does not grow any weed. — Who does remain long enough in one place. (A rolling stone.)

65. *Ababuyi bapambili ziyakunqanda umvundhla*. The turners back are on ahead, they (dogs) will cut off the hare. — Applied to anything whose escape is cut off.

66. *Sidukuza oswini lwenkabi*. We are wandering in the belly of a bullock. — We do not know how this will end.

67. *Ukasela eziko*. You are creeping to the fire-place. — Like a small child. You bring yourself into trouble.

68. *Ngayinyatela emsileni*. I trod on its (snake) tail. — I touched your weak point.

69. *Ulunya lwabatsha luyapindana, olwezalukazi lupindana ngomlilo* (or *ngogwai*). The harshness of young people brings other harshness back, that of old women is repaid by refusing fire (or snuff). — Evil for evil.

70. *Ukala nga'so linye*. He weeps with one eye. — He is insincere.

71. *Zinqunywa amakanda, ziyekwe*. The heads being cut off, the rest may be left. — The main things have been said, never mind smaller details.

72. *Upembela emoyeni*. He is lighting a fire in the wind. — Said of a person who favours strangers, whom he might never see again, rather than his own people.

73. *Inkonyana enhle ekotwa unina*. The finest calf is licked by its mother. — It is better for a child to lose its father than its mother.

74. *Umbeki wenkosi akalungi*. He who makes the chief does not live (long). — Benefits are returned by ingratitude.

75. *Womupemba ungaw'oti*. You will get up the fire but not warm yourself at it. — May be used as a threat to express that a person will not live to reap the benefits of his labour.

76. *Aku 'langa litshona lingena 'ndaba zalo*. There is no sun that sets without its affairs. — Every day has its own troubles and events.

77. *Soyicel 'ivutiwe*. We'll ask for it (meat) when it is cooked. — Wait and see the end.

78. *Ukupa kuzibekela*. To give is to provide for one's self. — To give does not make one poor.

79. *Igugu liyadonsiswana*. A good thing is pulled both ways. — There must be something good and attractive in each of two persons, who like each other.

80. *Isihlahla asinyelwa*. The bush (to which you run for shelter) is not defiled (with stool). — Do not return good with evil.

81. *Yanya yadhla (inja)*. It stooled (the dog) and then ate. — May be said of a girl, who after having rejected a sweetheart again returns to him.

82. *Elemfana livunwa 'muvu*. The word of the poor man is allowed afterwards. — When the powerful has already carried the day.

83. *Ijubela ladhla indhlovu*. The wood-shaving killed the elephant (by striking it in the eye). — Used of a small matter producing a serious result.

84. *Ibizelo ladhla ikondekazi*. The summons ate the she-baboon (caused her death). — Used of a person for whom the summons by his chief has turned out ill.

85. *Aku 'sibonda saguga namaxol 'aso*. There is no stake that grew old with its bark still on. — Age tells upon everyone.

86. *Guga 'sitebe, kade uzidhlela izinhlubu namakasi*. Grow old, eating-mat! long have you eaten ground-nuts and their coverings. — May be said of an old person whose good days are past.

87. *Upanga umdaka, line-pi?* You are in a hurry to plant, where has it been raining? — Said of people, who are married too young.

88. *Umtente uhlab' usamila*. The umtente grass pricks while still young. — Said to a young man that he should breed (children), while he is still in his prime.

89. *Intendele iwe enkudhleni*. A partridge has dropped in the yard. — Said of (or to) someone who has had good luck.

90. *Umenziwa kakohlwa, kukohlwa umenzi*. Who received injury does not forget, the one who injures forgets. — Requires no explanation.

91. *Aku 'nyoka yakohlwa umgodi wayo*. No snake ever forgot its own hole. — Nobody likes to ruin his own home.

92. *Umzungulu ubopa womile*. The (bark of the) umzungulu (*Dalbergia obovata*) tree binds when dry. — Do not make too small account of a feeble person. (He may be as useful as the dry bark of the 'umzungulu'.)

93. *Isizungu sabulala inkonyana*. A feeling of loneliness killed the calf. — May be said of or by anyone who feels lonely and wishes a wife or company.

94. *Yaiti iyakwendela erkosini*. She thought she would be married to a chief. — Said of a disdainful girl, who refuses one lover after another.

95. *Aku 'soka lingena 'sici*. There is no sweetheart without some fault. — Nobody (nothing) is perfect.

96. *Umhlabati aunoni*. The ground does not get fat. (However many are buried in it.) — Exclamation of lamentation over a dead friend.

97. *Ohlab' eyake k'alelwa*. He who slaughters his own beast is not forbidden. — With your own things you can do as you like.

98. *Injobo itungelwa ebandhla*. The man's loin-dress-tail is sewn in the company of other men. — Do not do all by yourself but ask others for advice.

99. *Wolibamba lingatshoni*. Catch it (the sun) before it sets. — A threat, you escaped once but I'll get you later.

100. *Isitsha esihle asidhleli*. A nice plate is not (long) eaten off from. — To lament the damage done to any nice thing or the death of a dear child.

101. *Akayikudhla ezitsheni zabantabake*. He will not eat out of his children's pots. — A deadly threat to say that he will not live long enough for that.

102. *Ikiwane elihle ligcwala izimpetu*. The nice fig is full of maggots. — Used of a nice looking young person who is bad. (A whited sepulchre.)

103. *Utand' ukubukwa njengesiyepu*. He is a person who likes to be looked at, like a long-haired goat. — Said of a vain person who likes to be admired.

104. *Ukuhamba kuzal' induna, kuzal' insikazi*. Life brings forth sometimes a male, sometimes a female. — We must take things as they come.

105. *Litshonela 'nxanye*. It (the sun) sets out of my way. — Said by a person who is in trouble or very ill; and does not mind whether the sun rise or set.

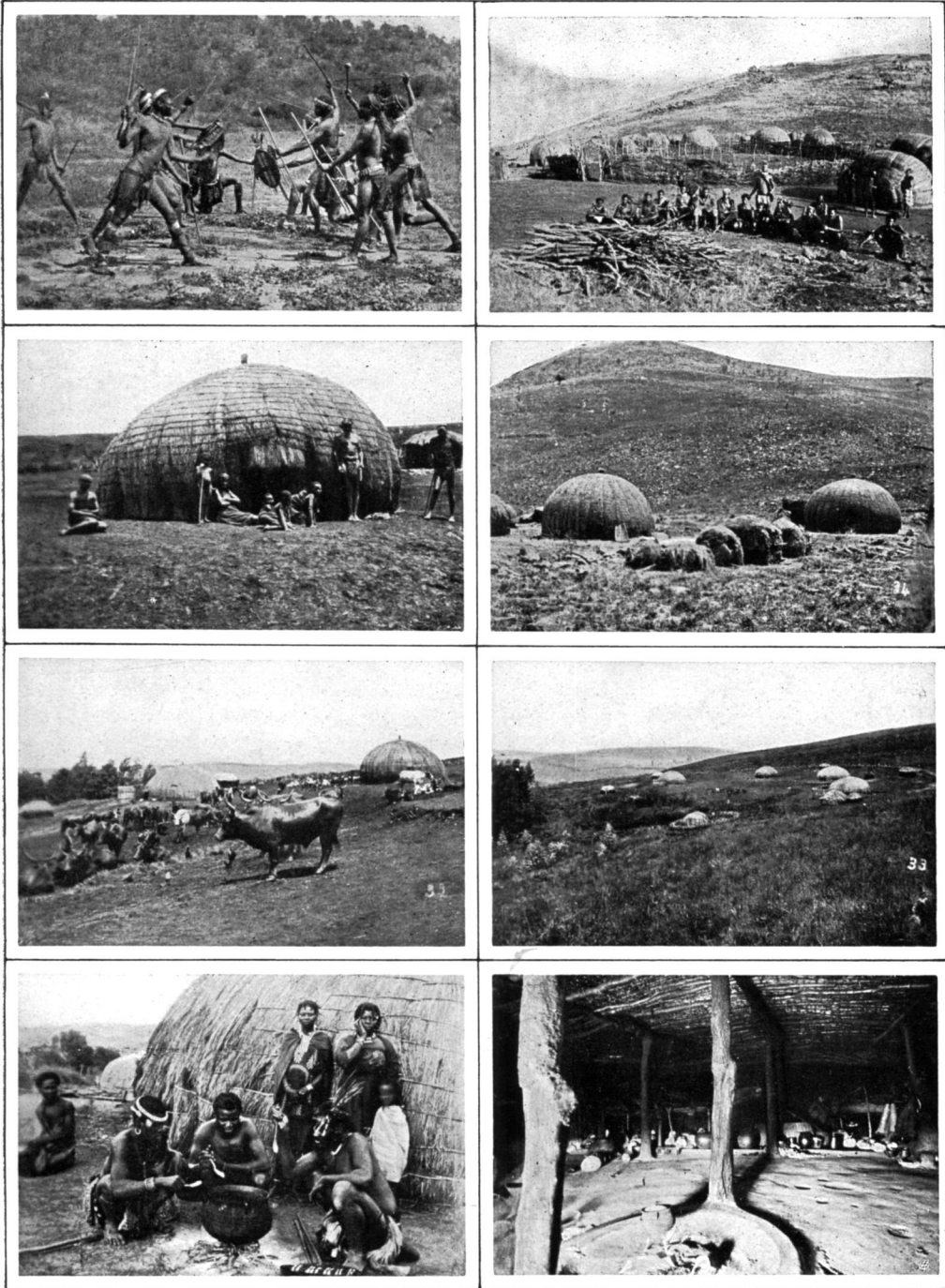
106. *Inxeba lendoda alihlekwa*. The wound of a man is not laughed at. — Because you do not know whether you will not have similar trouble or illness.

107. *Litata os' emnyango limponse emsamo, ati obes' emsamo limponse emnyango*. It (the land) takes one who is at the entrance (of the hut) and throws him to the back-part (of the hut), and one who is at the back it throws to the entrance. — Makes the first last and the last first or the poor rich and the rich poor.

108. *Elisina 'muva liyabukwa*. That (company) which dances afterwards is looked at (most). — Who speaks last is listened to best, gets the best attention.

109. *Ungiqube ngamadolo*. He has driven me along on my knees. — He told me to go ahead, he would follow at once, but he has not done so, but left me to go alone.





Primitive life of Zulu.

Anthropos VII.

110. *Enetunga aisengelwa pansi*. Who has a milking-pail should not be obliged to milk on the ground. — Said of or by one who misses very much something which he lent to another.

111. *Ungisengela esigujini*. You milk for me into a calabash. — Used if somebody encouraged another to a bad deed promising to keep it secret but exposes him afterwards.

112. *Z'ona nga 'mvu 'nye*. They (sheep) die through one. — On account of one bad child all children of that kraal get a bad name.

113. *Ukuhlab' indhlabu ekasini*. To pick out the nut from its shell. — If some people are anxious to keep a fact secret and another person reveals it publicly.

114. *Iqudu latsh' amanzi*. The smoking-horn dried up as to its water (with which it is partly filled when smoking). — Said of one whose eager desire has been disappointed or self-confidence has been abashed.

115. *Kwa' Zulu kusavutshwa ngoludala*. In Zululand it (the porridge) is still stirred with the old spoon. — Are still the old Zulu customs in existence?

116. *Wakatshwa indhlovu esifubeni*. He was kicked by an elephant on his chest. — Used of one who cannot keep a secret.

117. *Akana' sifuba*. He has no chest. — He cannot keep a secret.

118. *Iti ingadhla amatambo ijwayele*. A dog that may eat the bones gets accustomed to it. — Used when asking for food or anything for a second time.

119. *Uti angigeqe amagula, ngiy 'emuka y 'ini?* Do you think I'll clear out all my milk-vessels going away? — Do you expect I tell you all my secrets?

120. *Ushumayela ngoba azalelwa esitebeni (emqubeni)*. He talks because he was born upon an eating-mat (upon the manure in the cattle-kraal). — (He was born with a golden spoon in his mouth.)

121. *Isiquzi esingadhli 'nselelwa za 'muntu*. An inguana that does not eat anyone's pumpkins. A good-natured man who does nobody harm.

122. *Bahlangene pezulu, pansi ba 'mahele*. They are joined above, underneath they are full of holes (like trees). — Their friendship is not sincere.

123. *Wabola ubotshiwe*. It (the roll of tobacco) rotted still bound together. — One who acts as if he could do great things, but is good for nothing.

124. *Sobona 'nyoni zowadhla*. We will see the birds which will eat them (*amabele* = Kafir-corn). — We will see who will take this girl in marriage.

125. *Nang' ungaxa emabutweni, ibuto linge 'lake*. Look at him thrusting himself among soldiers when the regiment is not his own. — Said of one who interferes in other people's business.

126. *Umkuwu uvutiwe*. The wild fig is ripened. — You mean to do something. There is something in the air.

127. *Uti ngilinde amaconsi ebanzi*. Do you think I am going to wait for larger drops? — I had enough of it here, I am going before greater troubles come.

128. *Injalo (imben) yapum' edunjini*. It (the seed) is so, it came forth from the ground-nut. — (He is a chip of the old block.)

129. *Kwam' mpunzi idhl' emini, kwa 'macanca*. At the place where the wild buck eats in the day time (without fear), where there is freeliving. — Used of a free-living, loose kraal.

