

Deux Ans À Natal

The Reminiscences of a Traveller

by *M. Bourbon*

translated by *Fleur Webb*

Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain
With grammar and nonsense and learning,
Good liquor, I stoutly maintain,
Gives genius a better discerning.

So wrote Oliver Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer*. It is our hope that some genius, whether sustained by learning or by liquor or by both, will help solve the puzzle of the little piece of mid-nineteenth century *Nataliana* which we publish in three parts in this and the next two issues of *Natalia*.

Items in the French language about colonial Natal are rare. In this instance, to the charm of rarity is added the fascination of mystery. The little book which we are serialising in English translation appeared first in French in 1850. Written by M. Bourbon, and published in Mauritius, it went out into the world under the title *Deux Ans à Natal: Souvenirs d'un Voyageur*.

But, anyone who reads *Deux Ans* will soon find grounds for wondering whether M. Bourbon, in fact, ever visited the colony, let alone spent two years there. If he did, why is his text so littered with inaccuracies? Does his book, as the title suggests, consist of the 'souvenirs' of a traveller in the real world, or is it made up of the 'souvenirs' of a well-informed savant with a gift for romantic and whimsical invention? If the latter, what had this savant read to feed and fatten his creative spirit?

One source was certainly A. Delegorgue's *Voyage dans l'Afrique Australe*, published in 1847. Bourbon's account, given in translation in the pages that follow, of a herd of elephants destroying an African village at the head of the bay at Port Natal is, in the original French, almost word for word a transcription of a similar story on pp. 100–1 of volume 1 of Delegorgue's *Voyage*; and there are other passages in *Deux Ans* which clearly have a similar derivation.

But is it adequate, or fair for that matter, to categorize Bourbon simply as a plagiarist? Large parts of the book are reasonably accurate, and cannot be shown to lean on any prior source. At least one passage (an allusion to colonial Natal's labour 'problem' and the probable future need for imported Indian labour) is prescient in a way that suggests first-hand knowledge of conditions in the colony. Alongside these passages are others which, while they appear to be factual, are tantalisingly non-specific (e.g. the reference, which can be found in the pages below, to the merchant who became 'a kind of honorary French consul'). And alongside these, in turn, are still others, which appear to be neither derivative nor factual, but simply the products of a fertile imagination. What, for example, does one make of the star-crossed lovers — Natal's own Pyramis

and Thisbe — whose heart-rending story is told in this first part of *Deux Ans*? Did they really exist? And if they did, who were they, and when did they come to Natal?

So the questions can be stacked up. But underlying them all are the prime questions: Who was M. Bourbon? What was the course of his career? And, when, if ever, did he visit Natal? Only one person has so far been able to produce information with any bearing on those questions. That is the distinguished Africana expert and historian, Dr. Frank Bradlow, who has gathered together a number of obituary notices relating to the death in Mauritius in September 1881, of a much-loved and revered educationist and journalist, M. M. Bourbon, who 'lived his life with gallic zest', and was renowned for his wit and eloquence. (*Mauritius Argus*, 19 September 1881.)

Those obituary notices are a start — but possibly, of course, a false start! Not one of them, in the biographical information which it carries, makes any allusion to a sojourn in Natal. Can anyone else, therefore, contribute to untangling the *Deux Ans* puzzle?

C. de B. WEBB

In September 1847, as I was leaving the 'dark and inhospitable' shores of Bourbon (to quote the rather severe expression of Commander Laplace) for the 'lovely friendly island' of Mauritius, I chanced to encounter on board a passenger who told me so much of the wonders of Natal, that I resolved forthwith to accompany him on a visit to that African California.

Upon disembarking at Port Louis, I hastily gathered together a small supply of goods suitable for trading: blue cloth, knives, scissors, mirrors, etc. Although I had not much, it was more than enough, I was told, to offer in exchange for a magnificent herd of oxen, to settle down in princely fashion in Natal, and to lead the patriarchal life of a great rich farmer.

I lived for two years in Natal. I am far from having made my fortune, but at least my experiences might prove useful to others who intend making the same journey and who will perhaps be more fortunate than I was.

As you know, Natal (the coast of Natal) extends from the Bay of Lorenzo-Marquez to the Keis-Kamma river, the eastern limit of the Cape Colony. The name derives from its discovery by the Portuguese on Christmas Day 1497.

In 1824 the English founded a little settlement at Port Natal which was soon abandoned. Then came a great number of Dutch families from the Cape, seeking to escape from English domination. But several years ago the Dutch were expelled, and Port Natal today is under British rule.

There is no *port* at Port Natal, although there is a fine roadstead protected by a bar about 150 feet wide which is not without danger to the larger vessels. As we came in, I saw the wreckage of two handsome French three-masters which had run aground as they attempted the crossing.

The population of Natal has increased considerably of late. Almost daily one sees ships arriving from England laden with immigrants, numbering eight or nine hundred a month.

The principal town, Pietermarisbourg, boasts a population of no fewer than 10 000 Europeans. It is the seat of government. They have there double-storeyed houses, most of which are built of locally made bricks, with roofs of slate. The streets are wide and well laid, but not yet macadamised.

Three miles from Port Natal, where we disembarked, stands another, much less important town named Urban where the inhabitants number barely 1 500. The streets of Urban are obstructed by heaps of sand which render them almost impassable. The place called Port Natal is not even a village. There is not much to be found there apart from the customs offices and a few scattered huts.

The native population of the two towns, or rather settlements, for they do

not yet deserve the name of town, is not numerous and appears unlikely to increase in the near future. The Cafres have few needs and do not easily accept the domesticated state. It is interesting to note that one does not encounter a single Cafresse or Caffrine (whichever you choose to call them) — hence no maid-servants!

The population of Natal is therefore almost entirely white. There are English in great numbers, Germans, a few Dutch still, and very, very few French. I met a Belgian in Urban, who was engaged in a number of minor, rather lucrative trading ventures. He was at one and the same time, a wholesale dealer and a retail seller of land in both town and country, a provision merchant, a vendor of tiger skins and exotic as well as indigenous goods, and finally a kind of honorary French consul.

Many people in Mauritius speak of Natal as an Eldorado, a sort of promised land where it suffices simply to set foot in order to make a rapid fortune. To avoid disappointment and misunderstanding, I should explain the situation.

In Natal, as in all the countries of the world, money makes money. If one has nothing, one acquires nothing. If a man wishes to amass even a modest amount of money, he must arrive in Natal with some sort of capital, a sum round enough to enable him to buy a substantial number of acres, to clear the land, to purchase agricultural implements, to pay farm labourers, to fill the pastures with herds and, finally, to build a house if he does not wish to sleep under the stars.

Admittedly, the government sells the land cheaply, a shilling an acre out of town. One could hardly do better. The lots are six thousand acres, no more, no less, for six thousand shillings (1 500 piasters). One pays a fixed price, as one does for little pies — 6 000 acres for 1 500 piasters — it is almost a gift. But not all acres are the same. As there are as yet no surveyors in Natal, do you know how land is measured? You take a horse, a good trotter, and you put on its back a Cafre, trained for the task, who trots for half an hour in a straight line (as far as is possible) from north to south, then for another half hour from east to west. You place a stake at the furthest limits, and you are told: 'There are your 6 000 acres — take them and pay up!'

These 6 000 acres are usually virgin soil and wooded, so you have to clear them, then plough them, then sow them; in fact make them productive. And to do this what do you need? Hands, money, more money, and still more money! And even with money, if you have it, where do you find the labour? You cannot rely on the Cafres who are a pastoral people, and not agriculturists at all. Where will you find workers? In India perhaps — later. You need a house, unless you carry it with you ready-made, like a snail, or, like some of the immigrants, have it built at great cost by the speculators, who watch out for the new arrivals, as a cat watches out for a mouse.

The Cafre who is satisfied with boiled or roasted maize, lives very cheaply, but the man who is accustomed to live after another fashion, who relies on a well-stocked bazaar for his regular meals, may be caught unawares and forced to content himself with things which formerly he would have disdained. These 6 000 acres are thus worthless, even with sufficient capital to exploit them, and one can make no profit from them as things stand.

Doubtless (and this is the reckoning of the more patient and wise) the land must increase in value with time and the growing number of immigrants. The present owners will be able to divide up the land and sell, for five or ten shillings, that for which they paid only a shilling. (This is already happening on

the outskirts of the towns.) But one must be prepared to fold one's arms and wait for such opportunities. In fact one must be young and ready to sacrifice the present for the future. Many times have I attempted to console disappointed immigrants, and I must admit that this distant future of which I tried to give them a glimpse, appeared to them rather dark and disquieting. They continued to be concerned with the difficulties of the moment.

As I see it, the only possible industry in Natal today is cattle-breeding. Oxen are sold very cheaply — for next to nothing, if one is able to go into the interior to buy them. Pasturage is rich and abundant and the Cafres, who know no other trade, eagerly offer their services in return for one or two shillings a month, with or without food.

Ten miles from Port Natal I met a man well-known in Mauritius, who, under a charge of bigamy, married for a third time (so they say) to escape from the severity of the English law which, as everyone knows, does not punish trigamy at all, although bigamy is a capital offence. This man, whom I will not name, arrived in Natal with the first immigrants and, in return for 6000 shillings, became the owner of 6000 acres of more or less arable land. Today (that is to say four or five years later) this same property, not yet cleared, but enhanced by a fine house, extensive outbuildings and huge cattle paddocks, is valued at 20 000 p., not including the numerous herds which are fattening at no cost in the pastures, and which represent a considerable asset. It is generally reckoned that cattle sent to Port Natal in the condition required for export are worth a minimum of fifteen piasters a head. The milk of the cows is made into butter which is salted for export and even for consumption inland; the remainder serves to maintain a profitable piggery. A few Cafres, for the moderate remuneration I have already mentioned will herd the cattle, milk the cows, etc.

In the towns, income is derived quite differently. One buys, or rather, one used to buy (for at present the prices are higher) an acre for eight or ten shillings. On this land one builds, after a fashion, little houses which one then rents out to new immigrants at a price! Even greater profits are made by those who keep furnished lodgings (heaven knows in what manner they are furnished) for the use of those who come to take the air of the country and to seek their fortunes. This speculation is not without profit, as many people have in less than six months (I cannot claim that their gains were strictly lawful) found the means not necessarily of enriching themselves, but of operating on a larger scale and of making even bigger profits due to the greater number of victims to be exploited.

There is little or no trade. A few rare provision merchants sell, for their weight in gold, the tinned goods from their trader's packs, adulterated wine and spoiled brandy and liqueurs. I believe that a well-stocked shop would attract many customers in either of the towns and would make a fine profit. But in a country where luxury is not yet known, and where even the basic necessities are lacking, it would be folly to contemplate importing fancy goods and opening an expansive business of the sort that flourishes in Port Louis, where the wise man may join the philosopher of old in crying: 'What a lot of things I do not need'.

The Cafres, by inclination, and the immigrants, from necessity, are great philosophers of this sort. Both are satisfied with the bare necessities by way of outward ornament. Fashionable dressmakers and tailors would waste their time and trouble here.

I have heard, since I left, of a young pastry-cook, well-known in Mauritius, where his little cakes were all the rage, who has not found it possible to produce a single little pastry in Natal. He tells all who will hear him that he cooked his goose by leaving Port Louis for Urban, where threequarters of the houses are simply little huts, whose only aperture is a miniature door, in which immigrants are obliged to lodge for a rent of five piasters a month. In such a hovel, where one can only breathe by putting one's nose out of the door, how would it be possible to produce those culinary wonders which are the delight of gastronomes and the glory of civilized dinner-tables?

A strange thing! There are no doctors in Natal. I shall not presume to say it is for that reason that there are no invalids; one must not quarrel with the profession. The climate has something to do with it; a real Italian climate. Moreover one lives very soberly — of necessity it is true, but what matter? Sobriety is the mother of health, and I fear for the doctors and the druggists that this state of affairs will continue for a long time.

Lawyers are also unknown here. What a fortunate land, says some poor litigant whose resources have been drained by legal fees. There is no police force either, not the shadow of a policeman on the beat. Who patrols the streets then? I will tell you, for I have not yet enumerated all the delights of Natal. The Cafres are not the only indigenous inhabitants. There are present also in great numbers, lions, hyaenas, wolves, tiger-cats and a host of other quadrupeds which are very interesting to observe in a menagerie, well barricaded behind a good iron cage, but which one hardly wishes to meet face to face at a turning in the forest or at the corner of a street. These animals, whose ferocity varies according to the state of their appetites, never come out during the day. This is very considerate of them since they have the right to do as they please. But at night it is a different matter. Hardly has the sun set, when they sneak into the town and sniff at the doors which the townspeople, knowing their habits, are careful to keep well closed. And, let the unfortunate late-comer take heed, whether he be delayed by business or a lover's tryst. A hundred to one he will not return home. The night-watch of this new kind of police force is very effective. You will realise then that theft and nocturnal adventures are rare in Natal.

There are also snakes in great numbers. Following the advice given me on my arrival, I cannot recall ever going to bed without having inspected carefully all the nooks and crannies of my room and even my bedding — for that is their preferred hiding place — to assure myself that I was not harbouring one of these dangerous guests. I do not claim to be brave like the Bayards and the Chevaliers d'Assas, but I am not a coward. I confess, however, that I shall never forget how I was frightened one day by a gigantic boa. I still shudder at the thought.

At that time I was living in the country, ten miles from Urban. I was on a visit to one of my neighbours who was showing me his nursery of cotton, olive, and orange plants etc. As we returned to the house, I walked ahead into the sitting-room. Suddenly I saw, only three paces in front of me, a huge snake rearing up with its mouth wide open, hissing, and ready to dart forward and entwine me in its sinuous coils like a latter-day Laocoon. I was frozen to the spot and would have been done for, had it not been for the presence of mind of my host who was following behind me. Suspecting that something was amiss, he pushed me aside, closed the door and called his servants who made short

work of the terrible visitor. Do I need to add that, in spite of the repeated invitations of my neighbour, my first visit was also my last?

After the snakes, the tigers and the hyaenas, to talk of locusts is something of an anti-climax. Locusts are, however, along with the flooding of the rivers and the great rains, one of the most terrible scourges of agriculture in Natal. They come in their thousands, casting a shadow across the sun, and settle on the planted fields, which they ravage and destroy in a moment — it is worse than an Algerian Arab raid.

Talking of wild animals, may I, in passing, tell you the little story that was the topic of every conversation when I arrived in Natal, and which recalls the legend of Pyramis and Thisbe. It was just like that story of ancient times.

On the banks of the Ouse, not far from the city of York, lived a young girl of noble birth and a handsome young plebeian whom chance, or some powerful deity, had thrust together to their mutual misfortune. They loved each other tenderly, but the noble lords whose Gothic towers looked down on the fertile plains of that country, did not intend that an improper alliance should tarnish their bright escutcheon. Rendered desperate by the obstacles placed between them, and resolute in their determination to be together, whatever the cost, the two lovers agreed to abandon a cruel motherland, where happiness was denied them, and to go to some far country to seek the fulfilment they dreamed of. The name of Natal reached their ears. They heard this land described as a new Eden, free as it was of the vices and the prejudices of civilization, and they thought that they could do no better than to settle on those distant shores, blessed by Heaven and the African sun.

They set off, taking with them an aged relative who was to serve as a mother to the young and inexperienced girl. After an uneventful voyage which I shall not describe, their ship cast anchor off the coast of their dreams, which our travellers greeted with a cry of hope. Disillusionment met them as soon as they set foot ashore. This land, which they had pictured as green and pleasant, appeared lonely and arid; the mirage had vanished and only the desert remained.

However, in spite of the difficulties and the various disappointments which they had to endure, they were far from being unhappy; at least they suffered together. At some little distance from the town (for they did not wish to shut themselves up between walls which reminded them of Europe) two humble huts, like those of ancient times, became their temporary abode. There they were to wait until a holy minister should bless this union for which no sacrifice was too great. In one of the huts huddled the scion of a noble line, together with her discreet companion, while in the other, situated a mile away for the sake of propriety, lodged the amorous abductor. They met each day and charmed the sorrows of the present hour with hopes of future happiness.

One evening their conversation was more than usually prolonged. The moment they longed for was not far off and they felt they brought it nearer still each time they talked together of their plans for the future. Immediately after their marriage they were to leave Natal and return to England where they were to try and soften the hearts of their austere relations to receive them favourably like two prodigal children who had been punished and were repentant. It was midnight when they parted. The sky was dark and from the plain below there arose dull grunts, stifled murmurs, distant threats, which at this late hour would have frightened all but the most ardent lovers.

The next day, the young girl and her female companion waited, waited a long time;

‘But only the Cafre from the valley
Disturbed with the sound of his footsteps . . .’

the silence of their isolated hut.

At the hour when the sun dips towards the western mountains, unable to continue in this terrible uncertainty, her heart heavy with dire forboding, our Thisbe came from her humble cabin and set off in the direction of the dwelling where, she hoped still, her beloved was detained by some indisposition. She walked on, she entered the forest where the shadows were lengthening. Suddenly, at the foot of a tree, which must have been a mulberry, she saw . . . Those of you who have been moved by the misfortunes of our lovers, read no more. She saw some shapeless remains, bloody tatters, and lying beside the mutilated hat of the one she was to see no more, her own portrait which she had given him as a love token. This was all that the panthers had left. At this deadly sight, cold and still, the poor wretch shed no tear. She uttered one cry; then smiling, she turned and took the road back to her hut: she had lost her reason.

We will not tell you the names of the principal actors in this sad story; what good would it do you to know them? But if you wish to see one who was once so loving, so weak, so imprudent and so unfortunate, go to Bedlam and, if you can make yourself understood, they will show her to you.

They tell in Natal of many other adventures which, although less poetical and romantic than this one, are nevertheless full of local colour and are not lacking in interest for the keen observer of human nature. I met many times in the little town of Urban, where I often went on business, a butcher whose pitted and scarred face was horrible to behold and who himself told me the cause of the terrible mutilation of which he was the sad victim.

‘I was one day,’ he told me, ‘far out in the country hunting, when suddenly a panther appeared before me. What was I to do? To take flight was out of the question, for in two bounds my terrible adversary would have leapt upon me and brought me to the ground. I decided on what seemed the wise course, though it proved to be otherwise. I took aim at almost point-blank range and my bullet struck him right in the forehead. The wounded animal rushed furiously at me, sank his claws into my face and died without relaxing his hold. My companions, attracted by my cries, came running immediately and had all the difficulty in the world freeing me from my terrible enemy, dead though he was. They carried me home, more dead than alive, although I had not lost consciousness for a minute. The bones of my face were crushed as though in a vice and blood gushed everywhere. A whole year of treatment was not sufficient to heal my wounds, so you see I had a narrow escape.’

This man was awful to look upon; his face was hardly human; it was a frightening mask. Well, this man, in spite of his terrible lesson, went hunting again as frequently as before, and as far from the town as ever.

Apart from the unpleasantness of meeting with a panther or a hyaena, which is rare before nightfall, Natal is a real hunter’s paradise. Anyhow, hunting is the only possible diversion, and the best way of employing one’s time. The famous Egyptian ibis swarms there; the red partridge and other birds are so numerous and so trusting, that they virtually offer themselves to the murderous bullets. Quails, larks, woodpigeons, turtle-doves are at the

mercy of even the most inexperienced hunter. Their numbers are so great that even the clumsiest shot cannot fail. I know what I am talking about for in France, however hard I tried, I was never successful in killing any game, biped or quadruped, while in Natal, I counted my victims by the dozen.

Notwithstanding the remorse I felt at killing inoffensive creatures, who were trusting enough to come and take maize from the hens in my yard, I was not sorry to leave the inevitable piece of beef to my Cafres and to regale myself from time to time on some red partridge or morsel of Egyptian ibis, a treat fit for a king. But hunters worthy of the name find no enjoyment in such small game. They require quarry of another kind, and excitement at any price. They would willingly go out at night, if they were not afraid of being treacherously attacked, and confront hyaenas and all the other wild animals which hide away during the daylight hours. I can assure you that I have never had any such inclinations, but I have known in Natal so many intrepid and experienced hunters that I can understand, after all I have seen and heard, this passion for hunting carried to the extent even of risking one's life.

Now take lion hunting for example, many of my readers would not care for it I wager. Well, I have seen (it must be seen to be believed), I have seen hunters who, for reasons of serious indisposition, have been unable to participate in the hunt, and who have almost wept with despair. In such circumstances, I would soon have been consoled, and yet I took pleasure in stories of these adventures, where hardship doubtless outweighed enjoyment, but where danger doubled the price of victory.

I knew intimately one of these intrepid lion hunters. I can still hear him telling me of his first success. He was a worthy Hollander, not by nature a braggart, and one whose reputation had long since been made in the land.

'I was,' he told me, 'still a child, entrusted to watch over my father's horses, when I saw a lion and a lioness prowling about, waiting for a favourable moment to seize their prey. I was unarmed but, as our wagons were not far off, I went to look for the gun which my father, who was absent, always kept loaded. Half an hour later, the lion was lying dead with a bullet through his head. This early success encouraged me, and since that time, whenever anyone wishes to be rid of dangerous neighbours, they call on me.'

They tell me that this man, who must have been about fifty at the time, had killed more than 300 lions in his lifetime. He went lion hunting as others might go to the theatre or to a ball for the pleasure of it, and not in order to sell the skins, which are only worth ten or twelve piasters in Natal. He gave me some very interesting information about the habits of the king of beasts: the lion, taken unawares, flees at the approach of a man, a child or even a dog. But beware the hunter who would come between him and his prey! The lion will share with no one, and if there is a confrontation, one of the contenders is sure to be killed. The proof that this noble beast is full of generosity, if not of disdain, towards man, is that he rarely kills the hunter who has wounded him and whom he has at his mercy. His revenge is limited to a few bites which leave deep memories, it is true, but which do not kill.

They tell in Natal of one of these intrepid hunters who, in seven years, twice found himself beneath the claws of a wounded lion. All that happened was that he had a bad fright, a few broken limbs, and some deep imprints of teeth and claws.

The Cafres, armed only with the assegai, go lion hunting on horseback, not in order to make a more rapid escape after the attack, but to leave behind

them a prey for the lion, which enjoys a substitute revenge and forgets the real culprit as he attacks the innocent victim. These people, whom we call savages, have invented another ingenious method of ridding themselves of the dangerous intruders which threaten their herds. They never attack them as civilized hunters do, for the sole pleasure of killing and boasting of it later, but simply to protect their possessions in legitimate defence. At about ten or eleven at night, fifteen or twenty of them gather round a dead ox, which the lion had attacked the previous evening, and to which he is bound to return. For even if one is a lion, one can hardly eat up a whole ox in less than two meals.

The lion arrives at the appointed hour; his majesty eats when he pleases. Then one of the Cafres, the bravest among the brave, protected by a great shield of buffalo hide, thick and tough and concave in shape, approaches his terrible adversary and casts his assegai. The lion starts up and leaps at his attacker who, falling flat on the ground, covers himself with his shield. The furious animal roars and attempts to tear with his teeth and claws the upper surface of the shield, which resists all his efforts. As he returns to the attack with increased strength and fury, he is encircled by a band of armed men who are watching for their opportunity. He is attacked and stabbed by twenty or even a hundred assegais. He thinks that the man he holds pinned beneath him is responsible and attacks him relentlessly while his strength lasts. But soon the lion grows weak and falls beside the Cafre under the shield, who emerges only when the king of beasts shows no further sign of life.

I could tell you also of hunting hippopotamus, buffalo and crocodiles, etc., but after having heard of the lion you would not be impressed. I shall make an exception in the case of the elephant, who deserves this favour. If the lion is king of the beasts, the elephant is the giant.

This is the story I was told the very day I arrived in Natal. A herd of elephants (for these animals always move in herds of 15, 20 and sometimes even, in the interior, of 80 or 100), well, a herd of 5 or 6 elephants, a kind of vanguard probably, had crossed the upper regions of the bay during the night, and had advanced across a farmer's lands, along a pathway that leads into the forest and up a hill. At the end of the path stood a *mouzi* (Cafre village) composed of a dozen inhabited huts which were unfortunately not protected by the hedge of dry thorns. The first elephant crushed one of these huts, probably unintentionally. Upon hearing the cries of the startled inhabitants, the colossus fled. Those following him did the same, trampling through the *mouzi*, and crushing huts, animals and people beneath their feet. I have seen near the bay of Natal, the footprints of one of these elephants. They were three and a half feet deep, and wide enough for me to hide in if I needed to.

But there is scarcely any elephant hunting in the territory of Natal as such. It is only beyond the boundaries, in the interior, which was formerly Dutch and is now English, that one can have some idea of this kind of hunt which, according to the accounts of travellers, surpasses in excitement the hunter's wildest dreams.

One must cross the Tonguela river, the northern boundary of the country of Natal, venture into the land of the Zoulas, and request a safe conduct of their dreaded and formidable king, Panda, either to arrange for the exchange of cattle with his subjects, as I was obliged to do myself, or to hunt elephants which he himself prizes for their ivory.

Here it becomes necessary, in order to give the reader an idea of the

customs and usages of these unknown lands, to enter into some explanation. People have a vague notion, from reading the Cape newspapers, that the Boers or Dutch farmers, were driven from Natal by the English bayonets and assailed by the Zoulas. But why so much conflict over such wild and desolate lands? This is what so many people do not understand, and what I myself would still be ignorant of, had circumstances not brought me to the spot.

It is a sad and bloody story, which I shall tell as briefly as possible. In 1820 the eastern part of the Cape Colony which was separated from the country of the Cafres by the Groote-Vish-Rivier, was left uninhabited by reason of the departure of the Dutch farmers (Boers) who, to escape from the continual invasions and pillaging of the Cafres, had moved to the towns.

In order to replace them, new colonists (Settlers) were brought from England in such numbers that two towns sprang up as if by magic: Port Elizabeth and Graham's Town. The Boers shortly afterwards returned to their former dwellings, hoping to live in peace because of the increase in the population. But the Cafres began their raids again just as they had in the past.

Finally in 1836 the Boers, complaining of insufficient protection from Sir Benjamin D'Urban, then governor of the Cape, emigrated once more. They numbered 1 700 men, women and children under the leadership of Pieter Retief, a man of great simplicity and dauntless courage. 'Let us go beyond the deserts and seek a new promised land', he told them. Scarcely had this large nomadic colony crossed the Great River (Oranjie Rivier) than they were obliged to find grazing for their numerous herds. A tribal chief, Massilicatzi, a hundred leagues away, sent 10 000 men against the Boers, who were taken unawares.

However, at the first cry of alarm, they prepared to defend themselves. The Boers took up their guns, the women loaded, and the children passed the bullets. The Cafres, surprised by the resistance, beat a retreat, taking with them a large proportion of the herds; that was all they wanted.

The earth was littered with dead bodies lying all around the camp. The women had taken part in the combat with the desperate courage which God has given mothers to protect the lives of their children. Several were seen to break the heads of men who attempted to penetrate the enclosure by crawling flat on their stomachs like snakes. More than 600 Cafres were left dead on the field. Massilicatzi, hearing of the defeat of his warriors, whom he believed to be invincible, had several of his men stabbed to death on their return because they had not obeyed his express orders to bring back 'ten white women and ten white houses' (Boer tents). In vain they tried to explain that the emigrant women were not the sort to allow themselves to be carried off so easily; the assegai performed its task and all was soon over.

One hundred and twenty leagues away in the south east, another tribal chief, Dingaana, hearing of the good fortune of his neighbour, and furious not to have a share in the booty, sent 25 000 armed men against him. Massilicatzi, beaten at the first encounter, was forced to move further inland, taking with him the remainder of his people and his numerous herds.

Retief, taking advantage of the dispute between the thieves, made his way towards Natal, where he arrived after seven days journey. He made his camp on the banks of the limpid Tonguela and then set off for Port Natal (17 October 1837) where he was courteously welcomed by a few Englishmen (original settlers) to whom he confided his intention of requesting an interview with Dingaana to discover his attitude towards the new immigrants.

I have before me all the authentic papers concerning the long and disastrous pilgrimage, and I regret that I can give here only a short résumé of them: the letters of Retief to Dingaan, the replies of the latter, with a cross instead of a signature etc. I shall quote only, in translation, the address of the English residents of Port Natal to Pieter Retief:

We, the undersigned inhabitants (original settlers) of Port Natal, hail with sincere pleasure the arrival of the deputation of emigrant farmers under Pieter Retief, their governor. We beg that they will present our good wishes to their constituents, and assure them of our desire to meet them as friends and eventually as neighbours, and of our wish that a mutual good understanding may at all times prevail between us.

(Followed by 14 signatures).

This paper like all the others proved that the greatest harmony reigned at that time between the Boers and the English settlers at Port Natal.

On 8 November Retief wrote to Dingaan from Port Natal to thank him for cattle taken back from Massilicatzi after his defeat. 'That which has befallen Massilicatzi', he said, 'makes me believe that God Almighty, who knows all things, will not permit him to live much longer. God's great book teaches us that kings who behave as he has done, are severely punished and are not permitted to live and to reign for long. In friendship, I must tell you the great truth that all, black or white, who will not hear and believe the word of God, shall be wretched.'

These are certainly good and fine words which, frankly addressed to a barbarian king, have the charm of old-fashioned simplicity, and give a good impression of their author. The postscriptum of this letter deserves to be transcribed in its entirety. It will give an idea of the kind of war waged by the Cafres against their neighbours, and of the profit they derive from it even when they are defeated and driven back with losses.

'I enclose', adds Retief, at the end of his letter to Dingaan, 'for the information of the king, an account of those assassinated and of the cattle stolen by Massilicatzi: 20 white and 26 coloured persons massacred, including 9 women and 5 children; livestock stolen from 27 owners; 51 saddle horses, 15 young raising horses, 945 milk cows, 3 726 stock cattle, 50 745 sheep and goats, 9 guns and 4 wagons.'

Retief set off immediately to find Dingaan at Ungunklunklove, arriving there after five days' journey. Dingaan would only give him audience on the third day after his arrival. And when the leader of the immigrants had expressed the wish to settle south of the Tonguela, Dingaan found a thousand pretexts for delaying his reply: a great number of his cattle had been stolen and he was obliged to suspect the Boers as foreigners, etc. But when Retief promised (a promise which he fulfilled) to bring back the cattle stolen by others, the king of the Zoulas agreed to sign the act of cession.

Accordingly on 3 February 1838 Retief appeared for the second time before Dingaan who, the next day, signed the act of cession with his royal cross in his own hand.

On Monday 5th (a day of mourning for the poor immigrants), Dingaan, who seemed much preoccupied, came and sat in his great armchair (in the upper part of the *mouzi*) with his two principal regiments lined up to left and right. At the invitation of the chief, Retief entered the enclosure with his companions who numbered 59, all of them unarmed as a token of peace. The

king ordered his troops to entertain the guests with singing and dancing. Barely a quarter of an hour later, Dingaan arose, entoning a chant which the Boers did not understand: it was the sentence of death. On hearing the chief's voice, the Zoulas fell upon the Boers, bound them, and dragged them to a hillside close by, where they were tortured and put to death. The heart and the liver of Retief, wrapped in a piece of cloth, were carried to Dingaan according to his commands.

Thirsting for blood, these barbarians set off for the wagon encampment where Retief had left the wives and children of his unfortunate companions. There the carnage began again with renewed fury. It is estimated that 347 women and children perished in this horrible massacre.

On 16 December 1838, the Boers under the command of Pretorius, took a terrible revenge on the barbarians near a river which has since been named Bloed Rivier (river of blood). More than 3000 dead were left on the field of battle. On 20th, the victorious Boers arrived at Dingaan's capital which was a smoking ruin. The king had fled the day before, leaving the town in flames. The Boers made their camp on the hill where Retief and his companions had been massacred. They claim that in a wallet lying beside the skeleton of their unfortunate leader, they found the act of cession of Natal to the Boers, with the signatures of the king and six of his counsellors. Was it to nullify the act of cession, which he appeared to regret, or simply for the barbarous pleasure of spilling blood that the king of the Zoulas had, in so cowardly a manner, assassinated the cream of the immigrants? Nobody knows. Be that as it may, to conclude the story of the cruel despot: in January 1840, the Boers undertook a last expedition against him, which drove him beyond the boundaries of his territory where he was killed by his neighbours and natural enemies, the Ama-Souazis.

Over and above the death of the tyrant, the prize of this victory was 40000 head of cattle. Panda, his brother, with whom he had long dealings of bloody strife, was then chosen to assume the royal heritage and supreme power over all the Zoula tribe, men and beasts.

Panda, according to the Cafres, had incontestable rights to the succession. Dingaan, who had assassinated one of his brothers, Djacka, in order to become king, wished also to be rid of Panda, who bore him a grudge. The latter lived in princely fashion near the Omatagoulou river, not far to the north of the Tonguela. Dingaan sent for him. Panda refused to obey, and sought refuge in the territory of the Boers, requesting their assistance against Dingaan: he preached to the converted.

In May 1842, following a vain attempt three years earlier, the Governor of the Cape, with the intention of bringing about an end to the hostilities between the Boers and the Cafres, sent to Natal 250 troops with 60 wagons drawn by 600 oxen, and accompanied by 250 Cafre servants under the command of Captain Smith, who took the title of Commander of Natal in the name of Queen Victoria.

The Boer leader, Pretorius, refused to recognise him and, strengthened by fresh reinforcements, he called on Captain Smith to leave Natal with his troops and to abandon arms and ammunition. In reply, Captain Smith prepared to begin hostilities. Soon afterwards, a few canon shots were fired by each side, and several skirmishes took place between the English troops and the Boers, without any decisive result, until the day (25 June) when the English frigate, the *Southampton*, cast anchor at Port Natal.

The disembarkation was effected in twenty minutes, and Lieutenant-Colonel Cloete had no difficulty in meeting up with the forces of Captain Smith, whose position was beginning to give cause for anxiety. The Boers, who numbered 600, saw that all was lost, and abandoned their camp the same day. They withdrew six leagues from Port Natal, from which position they began negotiations with Lieutenant-Colonel Cloete. On 15 July, the Boers signed the act of submission, which is here literally translated:

Pietersmaritzburg, 15th July 1842.

We, the undersigned, duly authorised by the immigrant farmers of Pietersmaritzburg, Natal, and the adjoining land, present on their behalf our solemn declaration of submission to Her Majesty the Queen of England, and, in addition, we accept the following conditions which have been imposed on us:

1. The immediate return of all military and civil prisoners.
2. The surrender of all canons under our command.
3. The restitution of all property, public or private, in our possession, confiscated by us for our profit.

(Followed by the signatures of the President and members of the Council.)

In consequence, a general amnesty was granted to the Boers, with the exception of four of the principal leaders who had a price put on their heads (£1 000). But none of them suffered the fate of Joseph who was betrayed by his brothers.

This, then, is a short account of the history of the colony of Natal up until the day of the *Proclamation of the apprehension of persons exempted from the amnesty* by Sir George Thomas Napier. From that time, the Boers, determined in their resolution to remove themselves from the domination of the English authorities at the Cape, withdrew further into the interior, where their numbers increased due to the arrival of great numbers of Dutch immigrants and where, free and independent, they led the patriarchal and quasi-phalangist life which they had won by so much sacrifice.

(To be continued)

