

# *Deux Ans à Natal*

## *by M. Bourbon*

### *Introduction*

In this second instalment of *Deux Ans*, the focus shifts from colonial society in Natal to the Zulu kingdom of Mpande kaSenzangakhona and to the customs of the people he ruled.

As in the first instalment, so in this, much of the detail appears to be derivative, some of it bearing a tell-tale resemblance to information published in Adulphe Delegorgue's *Voyage dans l'Afrique Australe*, which had appeared in 1847, three years ahead of *Deux Ans*. However, indebtedness entailed neither appreciation nor obligation on Bourbon's part. The borrowings from Delegorgue are unacknowledged; and, in the one passage in which he does mention Delegorgue by name, he does so for the purpose of casting doubt on his reliability. Nor did indebtedness result in any identity of viewpoint between the two men. Most markedly this was so in their attitudes to the Zulu king and his people. Delegorgue was deeply impressed by Mpande, and in one passage described him as 'beautiful, superb, magnificent, imposing'; Bourbon was conscious of the king's guilefulness, and described him, unflatteringly, as 'a short man . . . broad and fat'. Delegorgue saw in the Zulu people living exemplars of the nobility inherent in the 'savage' state; Bourbon saw Zulu society as 'barbarous', and found in it little, if anything, worthy of admiration.

The fact that Bourbon offered an astringent antidote to the nineteenth century romanticism that paraded in some of Delegorgue's writing does not, of course, mean that his own credentials can be accepted without question. In the introduction to the first instalment of *Deux Ans*, the question was raised whether he had ever set foot in Natal, and there were a host of other questions besides. In a letter published elsewhere in this issue, Shelagh Spencer provides historical content for some of these queries, but not for all; and this second instalment of the book raises its own crop of new uncertainties.

If Delegorgue was a romantic, was Bourbon not, perhaps, a romancer? How true are the tales that he tells? In the section of *Deux Ans* published below, who was the Frenchman whom he claims to have found living as a Zulu homestead head? Who was the white woman who is alleged to have beguiled Mpande with her charms, and given the Zulu king riding lessons? And how historical were Jean Lemaire (alias J. Meyer perhaps?) and his pretty wife, whom Mpande fed and fattened for so long that their absence from the colony was seen as evidence of a break-down in black-white relations and a possible Zulu invasion. There is no question that Bourbon's reporting on Zulu convention and custom needs to be approached with a measure of caution. So, should the tales he tells not be handled with even greater care?

Bourbon himself piously declares that 'historical accuracy must always come first'. No one would challenge him on that point, if accuracy of reportage was, indeed, the purpose of his book. But was it? That is the unanswered puzzle of *Deux Ans*.

C. de B. WEBB

On 14 July 1848 I left Natal for the Zoula country with the intention of acquiring a small herd of cattle. I say 'small' because my trading goods were scanty and of little value. Urged on by necessity and accompanied by six Cafres I set off bravely in a wagon laden with provisions and drawn by fourteen oxen.

One must travel through barbarous lands in order truly to appreciate the advantages of civilization particularly in regard to locomotion. My journey, or should I say flight, from Paris to Le Havre the preceding year still fresh in my memory (sixty leagues in six hours), I felt my present position to be diametrically opposed, although my team of fourteen oxen was more royal by ten than that of olden times when:

‘Through the streets of Paris the indolent king was led  
By four yoked bullocks with slow and measured tread.’

The ‘indolent king’ had disappeared, for I was neither indolent nor a king, but the slow and measured tread remained the same. Mine was a conveyance which progressed at fourteen leagues a fortnight, rather like the Auxerre to Paris coach before the invention of steam boats and trains. Of course there is no semblance of a road in this benighted country. I travelled blindly on with no guide but the instinct of my Cafres who, they said, had done the trip many times and who navigated as best they could through these vast empty spaces. But I had faith in my lucky stars, and it is faith which preserves, even from wild beasts, when one has taken the necessary precautions. ‘Heaven helps him who helps himself.’

My journey lasted twenty days, twenty mortal days, and this was the unvarying routine of each day. At sunrise we started off at the pace which I have already described. At midday there was a full two hours break; the oxen grazed, my men slept and I made a little inspection of the provision bag, whose contents I watched over as a miser watches his money, to ensure that we did not starve before we reached our destination. At sunset the caravan stopped and we settled down as best we could to spend the night in the open. To keep the wild animals from our oxen, and from ourselves too of course, the Cafres lit a great circular fire which they were careful to keep going, taking turns all through the night, for the slightest negligence could prove fatal. As soon as all precautions had been taken and the sentinels placed on duty like the vestals of olden times around the protecting fire, we all retired to sleep; I inside my wagon, with my men underneath and the oxen tethered round about.

My sleep would have been peaceful but for the howls, inharmonious to the European ear, of the hyenas and panthers whose voracious appetites were apparently thwarted by our wall of fire. The Cafres who from experience knew themselves to be safe paid no attention, but I must admit that at first I did not sleep like the proverbial log. The horrible incessant growling was a real nightmare. I expected at every moment to see our fire go out, and the hyenas rush in on us and eat us all up, man and beast. But gradually I was reassured and seeing my servants so light-hearted I finally thought no more about it. One may grow accustomed to anything.

By the twelfth day the provisions were being depleted at an alarming rate for we were all men of healthy appetite. I was becoming seriously worried when, at about four o’clock one afternoon, I thought I heard a distant lowing, which gave me renewed hope. We came upon a *mouzi* where my men and I received patriarchal hospitality.

I had heard much in Natal of the *mouzis* or Cafre villages, but this was the first I had seen, and I thanked Providence for putting it in my way, like an oasis in the desert, at the very moment when my provisions were nearing their end. Besides I wished to observe these primitive men and to study their

customs. Ulysses himself did as much! I blessed heaven for having provided me so opportunely with such diversion. And although I risk delaying a little my visit to Panda, the reader will perhaps not be sorry to learn in passing of the nature of a *mouzi* and of the hospitality which is offered there.

All the *mouzis* are alike. They are greater or smaller according to the wealth of the *Om-Douna*, the chief or sultan. One would give a false impression of a *mouzi* if one compared it to a little village or hamlet in Europe, where a number of families cluster together, some wealthier than others, but unrelated to each other. A *mouzi* is composed of the members of one single family — a numerous family as is the case in all countries where polygamy is allowed, for example Turkey, Egypt, etc. The chief or sultan, *Om-Douna*, has as many wives as his fortune allows. His wealth consists of the herds which he can afford to maintain. His children are his servants and his wives his slaves.

But here the women are not stupidly shut up in a harem as they are in Turkey and among the Pashas of Egypt, where they do not work with their hands. With the exception of a few favourite sultanas, whom the chief honours with his particular attention while their youth and beauty last, all the women work, hoe the land, plant and harvest the maize, perform every task, except, a strange thing, milking the cows, which they regard as beneath them. This task then is performed only by the men!

The *mouzi* is built in a circle. In the centre is the cattle enclosure, more or less large according to the size of the herd; wealth, fortune, esteem are all vested here. Not far from the enclosure is the chief's hut and behind it, at some distance away, stand the more modest huts of his wives, daughters, sisters and female relatives. These huts which are often very numerous, are arranged in one, two or three semi-circles, with a space between them. The whole thing is protected on the outside against invasion from wild animals and ferocious neighbours by a hedge of dry thorns.

The huts have an age-old simplicity. Imagine a camp of beehives, enlarged to the height of a man, with no other entrance than a doorway eighteen inches high, and covered in straw; this will give you an exact idea of the Cafre *mouzi*. In the middle of the hut is the hearth built on stones where the food is cooked, and round about the men are squatting on their heels, or lying on mats. They sleep or talk while the women work for them.

It has been said that Paris is the paradise of wives, and the hell of husbands: among the Cafres it is quite the contrary, our world turned upside down.

The floor made of crushed stones and cowdung resembles a marble slab which shines with reflections. My host, whose name I did not know and who did not know mine, seemed to me to be what we would call a *bon bourgeois*, with a reasonable number of wives and cattle, neither too many nor too few — an advantageous state in a country where the chief has the power of life and death over all his subjects and does not lack pretexts for disposing of those whose goods he covets.

He entertained me to the best of his ability, for hospitality is one of their virtues. I did not want for curdled milk and roasted or boiled maize which is the usual food for the Cafres. It is not very refreshing, but when a stranger freely offers you what he has you must be satisfied. I was also served with a drink which reminded me a little of the cider we drink at home, and which pleased me very much, as does everything that reminds me of my native land. This drink called *tchouala*, is made from a kind of millet which they call *mabélé*, and is very pleasant to drink, especially when one is thirsty. I would

have preferred a bottle of Château-Margaux or of Gruau-Larose, but one must not be difficult. This is the recipe:

You leave the grain to ferment, sprinkling it from time to time; next you put it in the sun; then you crush it, add water and boil it in great pots. The next day when the *ichouala* is fermenting and bubbling like champagne, the friends and relations arrive in sufficient numbers to drink it to the last drop, for the excellent reason that this drink easily turns sour and would not be drinkable the next day. And I am inclined to believe, after what I saw, that even had it been possible to preserve it, none would have remained. But the excuse is valid: all must be consumed, and so they consumed it all.

I spent the night stretched out on a mat which was unrolled especially for me, with my head on a pillow — a pillow of wood in accordance with Cafre custom. One thing, however, worried me. Secure in my hut against invasion from wild beasts, I was attacked by thousands of enemies who, although less frightening, were as relentless: mosquitoes. I have never seen so many. The Cafres appear to be insensitive to their sting, but I who had so bravely resigned myself to sleeping on a simple mat with a wooden pillow, began to long for the civilized comfort of a mosquito net. There were also a few of those locusts which are so destructive to crops, but even though they ravage the fields, they leave the traveller to sleep in peace. And for the moment, that was all I asked. But mosquitoes — may God preserve you from them in such great numbers!

The next morning I was preparing to take leave of my host, when I noticed that the *mouzi*, which had been so peaceful the day before, was now a hive of activity. I tried in vain to discover the cause. One of my servants later provided me with the key to the mystery.

My host, that very day, was to marry off one of his daughters. As he had said nothing to me about it the previous day, I naturally thought that he had not intended to include me among the guests. Although I had no right to such an honour, I admit that I would have liked very much to sit, not at his table (for the table is a luxury unknown among the Cafres), but on the ground beside him, to enjoy the spectacle and to obtain an idea of a Cafre wedding. I had not this good fortune. Others in my place, for there are travellers who are quite unembarrassed in presuming themselves to be invited, would give you a complete description, to which their imagination would contribute a large share. But truth will out, and I have to admit, however painful to my pride, that my host allowed me to depart without the least invitation. I set off rather disappointed, I confess.

I was not two gunshots from the *mouzi* when my servant said to me, indicating a young Cafre dressed in the fashion of the country, which is to say almost naked, 'There is the bridegroom'. A fine outfit, I said to myself, to go and ask for a girl in marriage.

This boy was a pleasure to behold: his face handsome and expressive, shone with childlike joy. It was certainly a marriage of inclination that he was about to make. I approached him and entered into conversation, for I was beginning to speak and understand the Cafre language which is simple like all primitive tongues. He was bringing with him eleven cows, the finest that I had ever seen. I thought that this was his wedding present. He was in a hurry and quickly disillusioned me on this score.

We Europeans have a strange tendency to measure everything by our own yardstick, to regard our customs as the best, simply because they are ours and

to call savages, people who have ideas different from our own. It is a great mistake!

There is a good reason for every custom, and where the superficial observer might criticize, the philosopher often approves and understands. Other peoples have customs and usages and laws, whether written or unwritten, which we try in vain to replace by our own, believing that in our so-called civilized societies, men are happier than they are in those countries which we are pleased to call barbarous.

This young bridegroom, so spruce, so joyful, so happy, told me things about the matrimonial customs and conjugal life which would make the hair stand on end — of even the least prejudiced of Europeans. The cattle which this young Cafre was driving so proudly before him were, I shall not say the purchase price for that would not be gallant, but the means of exchange, the compensation if you prefer, for the beauty who had touched his heart. Upon arrival at the *mouzi*, the first thing he would do would be to offer ten of them to the father of his fiancée, while the eleventh would defray the cost of the wedding feast. The poor boy was taking his first step into conjugal life; this was only his first wife, acquired with his first eleven cattle. He frankly told me of how long he had had to wait to complete the required number; for one can understand that it is hardly possible to give credit in such a matter; cash payment only!

The eleventh cow nearly cost him his life. He got it in exchange for an elephant's tusk which his master had given him as his share of the booty after an elephant hunt in which he had conducted himself with bravery. His ambition and his hope was to increase gradually the number of his wives as he acquired elephant tusks or cows. 'The more wives we have', he told me, 'the greater our standing. Apart from the thousand services they perform, our wives give us daughters who are later exchanged, as their mothers were.' This then is the circle which we would call vicious, in which a Cafre's whole life turns! — to have more wives as he acquires more cattle and to have more cattle as he acquires more wives. So to preach monogamy among them is equivalent to preaching equality of fortune amongst us. No missionary would succeed in making a single convert.

'But jealousy', you will say. I have my answer ready for you. Jealousy is yet another of the thousand prejudices of European civilization, and I can confirm, from what I have seen and heard, that jealousy is unknown among the Cafres. The women, instead of rejecting their rivals, welcome them and every first wife of a Cafre will increase her work threefold so that her husband may become rich enough to acquire a second wife, then a third, etc. This attitude is strange, even unbelievable to us but it is nonetheless true, however unlikely it may seem.

According to this way of thinking, which is so different from ours, it is the interest of the community which is the most important. And as every community prospers by labour, it follows that the more women there are working for the common good, the greater will be the general well-being. I have already said that the man, the *Om-douna*, does nothing: he is the great consumer of the community, the sovereign lord and master!

On the twentieth day I reached the end of my journey, and entered the royal *mouzi* of Panda. In respect of its size and the number of huts, it was quite different from the one I had left a few days previously. According to custom, his dwelling was situated in a special enclosure at the upper end of the great

oval precinct. His 500 wives each had her own hut behind his.

When I arrived at the royal hut, 18 or 20 inches high (*sic*), and large enough to contain a hundred people with ease, I met one of the king's officials, to whom I explained the object of my visit. He hastened to inform Panda, who soon emerged from his hut to welcome me.

He is a short man of 40 or 45 years old, broad and fat. His face which appears rather hard at first encounter, reveals much intelligence and subtlety. He has a wide forehead and black eyes well set in a large handsome head. HM was very simply dressed and good Saint Eloi would not have been able to say to him, as he said to King Dagobert, that he was wearing his trousers back to front, for he hadn't any. This was one indispensable with which he dispensed. About his shoulders was carelessly flung a black garment which, however much I tried, I could not take to be a royal cloak. His head and feet were bare. This was my impression of the proud despot whose very name made all the Zoulas tremble and who, it was said, could mobilize 40 000 armed men.

I asked his permission to trade with his subjects for the cattle I needed. He asked me what I had to offer in exchange. I replied that I had little knives, etc. He nodded an acceptance and went back into his hut like a wild animal to its lair.

Many travellers have told me that they were very differently received by Panda, in solemn audience, according to the rules of Cafre etiquette. Perhaps they came bearing more than little knives, and perhaps they offered him valuable gifts, glass necklaces for example, which he loves. I, who had nothing to offer him, can only tell of what happened to me personally, and my whole interview was no more than I have just told.

A French naturalist, Monsieur Delegorgue, tells in an account which he published after his return to France, that he was shown into the royal hut with his companions and that, sitting on their haunches, in the Cafre fashion, they were honoured with a private audience. I believe him, since he says it was so, but I admit that it was an honour that I did not envy: the story of Retief and his 59 companions who were received by Dingaan his predecessor, was too much in my thoughts.

'The next day', he says 'wishing to be present at the king's levee, I arrived early. Lying flat on my stomach, and supporting myself with my hands, I put my head through the low doorway and made my way into the hut, where I squatted down as on the previous day. It was dark when first I entered, but I soon perceived, on the mats which were spread out on the ground, ten young girls with rounded bodies, completely naked, one of whom supported his head with her body, another his right arm, a third his left arm, a fourth, etc. etc. I thought I was dreaming.' It was a real paradise of Mahomet.

A traveller is very fortunate to be able to give his readers a description of such delightful scenes, but I have to admit that I have never seen such a sight, not at Panda's residence or anywhere else.

I hastened to join my servants, whom I had left with my wagons two miles away, for entrance to the royal *mouzi* was forbidden them. I then began visiting the surrounding *mouzis* to obtain the best possible exchange for my little pack of trading goods.

I wandered about at random, according to the inclination of my Cafres, who seemed devoted to my interests. They were very good people, who were not yet civilized enough to try to deceive me, which would have been easy enough.

My wanderings lasted ten days, and I had occasion to observe that I had

been very wrong to despise my little knives, commonly known as *Eustaches* in France, for they were exactly what attracted the most attention among these good people. Briefly then, for I am not writing particularly for traders who might wish to undertake the same journey, I bought in ten days, within a radius of 15 to 20 leagues, 75 cattle for the price of 5 or 6 shillings a head, all told.

To achieve this I was obliged to visit many *mouzis*. I was well received wherever I went, and I was offered the finest fare, whether of curdled milk (*amas*), maize or *ichouala*. As I travelled about, I continued to make my observations on Cafre customs.

I had the opportunity of seeing many groups of women, of whom the fattest appeared to be the most important. Distinction and nobility among them is reckoned by weight as I later had the opportunity of confirming. Their dress, almost as simple as the men's, does not restrict them. Women of quality wear a sort of leather garment called *om-gobo*, which hangs from the waist to the ground. Their naked backs and breasts are adorned with long necklaces of glass worn on the cross. On special occasions, they wear around their heads a ribbon of purple silk. Rakishly set above each ear and slanting slightly backwards, is a bunch of black widow-bird feathers.

The only clothing worn by the young girls is a belt, scarcely two fingers wide, made from skilfully fringed bark and, while pleasing in appearance to the curious beholder, confounds the indiscreet glance.

I admit that although the semi-nudity of these highly attractive girls seemed to me quite chaste, I could not free myself of my old prejudices, and ventured to ask one of my hosts why the privilege of dressing was reserved for the women and almost entirely refused to the girls. 'Why?' he repeated gravely. 'Because a marriageable girl must show herself as she is.' The reply was conclusive and I conceded defeat. The fact is that one would be insincere to complain.

Widows are not obliged to throw themselves on to a funeral pyre, as they do in India, but are completely free on the death of their husband. Not daring to aspire to the honour of belonging to an *Om-Douna* who already possesses 40 or 50 wives, they are usually quite content with an *Om-Phogazane*, a simple Cafre of lowly estate who, too poor to procure for himself a first wife, will not lose the opportunity of obtaining one free.

Among such people as these, one can understand that the law of succession must be very simple. The first male child, whom the father regards as superior to the others, inherits all the wealth. On the death of the father, *mouzi*, wives, herds, lands, all belong to him. Once again it is the old royal maxim, dating from the time when there were still kings in France: 'The king is dead; long live the king'.

I soon set off again for Natal where I looked forward to beginning my apprenticeship as a cattle breeder. The return journey was identical to the one which I have already described — the same slow progress, the same precautions against wild animals, the same monotony, except for an increase of anxiety on my part relating to my 75 cattle, my only hope for the future, alas!

I was travelling slowly along and, like '*la laitière au pot au lait*'\*, building a thousand castles in the air, when I thought I heard, coming from an isolated

\* The reference is to the poem of the same name by Jean de la Fontaine.

hut, some disjointed words, which brought me down to earth by recalling the language of my own country, which I still reproached myself for having abandoned in order to live a life so unsuited to my sedentary ways. I drew nearer — oh joy! It was a compatriot who, impelled like myself by the wish to see the world, and by a restless disposition, had become a Cafre in order to live the life of a little sultan. He had, as yet, only laid the first foundation stone of his harem, and was on the way to procuring a second. All he needed was nine cows to make up the required eleven.

I found him stretched out on his mat as lazily as a real Cafre, savouring the delights of idleness. I spoke with him for a little while. He tried to prove to me the superiority of the life he was leading, but I admit that he did not convert me. To live alone, with only a slave for company, to deprive oneself of every comfort, with only maize to eat, never to meet a living soul to converse with — this I confess would not be an existence to my taste.

I shall not say he appeared happy, but at least he seemed satisfied with his lot. He had no worries in the world, apart from the time of his next meal, and heaven knows what meals they were!

But I cannot leave the land of the King of the Zoulas without telling of a little incident in his private life. Shortly before my visit, a new immigrant from England had arrived to pay his respects, much as I had done, and from the same motives. Panda received him as he received all who come to him. He was 'short' as the English say, but polite enough for a king of his temper. In order to ensure his welcome, the immigrant had had the excellent idea of taking with him a young and pretty person, an immigrant like himself, who excelled in the art of the Franconi. She was a fine horsewoman and appeared before the astonished eyes of the barbarian king mounted on a richly caparisoned Arab horse, which she managed with a dexterity that was unknown at Panda's court.

Panda, bemused at the sight of such talent combined with such charm, offered a hundred cattle for the horse and fifty for the horsewoman. His intentions were honourable, for he wished her to give him riding lessons which were to extend over a period of three moons. The bargain was soon concluded, and the immigrant departed with his hundred and fifty cattle, chosen from among the finest and the fattest of the royal herd. The horsewoman and the Arab horse remained in the possession of Panda; the horse in full ownership and the horsewoman in usufruct for three moons — without the honey, I suppose!

The riding lessons began the next day and as Panda had great aptitude he made rapid progress, so that after fewer than twenty lessons, he believed he could challenge the woman's horse and even the rider herself. His pride was to be punished. At the appointed hour he appeared, prancing on the liveliest of his chargers beside the charming horsewoman mounted on her Arab, caparisoned as on the day of her arrival and awaiting the signal to start. The signal was given and they were off as though it were a steeplechase. The king was soon outdistanced so completely that his wily companion, borne like Mazeppa across the deserts, arrived the next day but one in Natal, safe and sound, and congratulating herself on the success of her subterfuge. Since that day, Panda wants no horsewoman — certainly not one with an Arab horse!

My return journey lasted 22 days. I had the good fortune to meet, during one of our last outspans, two Europeans, brave hunters, who were travelling in a large party and bringing back with them many elephant tusks, hyena and

panther skins, the spoils of their distant and dangerous hunting expeditions.

It is so pleasant on these journeys to find someone to talk to, and this unexpected encounter was for me and for them a real stroke of good fortune. Added to this the situation, which was agreeable enough for a desert, had the incomparable advantage of the proximity of a little stream whose pure waters provided a real oasis. I suggested making a halt of 24 hours. My proposition was unanimously accepted and, if universal suffrage were not the exclusive privilege of bipeds, my oxen would not have been the last to support the motion, for they were tormented with fatigue.

Monsieur de Talleyrand expressed this profoundly egotistical (*sic*) thought: 'Mistrust your first impulse for it is the best'. My first impulse was from the heart, my only thought being to welcome and entertain, as best I could, two strangers who, because we were far from Europe, our common motherland, had become immediate friends. But on second thoughts I realized that my provisions were almost depleted, and I knew from experience that travellers have hearty appetites. I took a quick decision, the only one possible. I needed a victim. I resolved to sacrifice one of my 75 oxen on the Altar of Hospitality. And so we all applied ourselves to the task; we killed, dismembered, grilled and devoured the poor beast, sacrificed to the demands of my predicament.

I have no intention (Heaven forbid!) of underestimating the European and Mauritian cooks whose culinary talents I have enjoyed, but I must say, in all honesty, that this ox done to a turn over an improvised fire in the manner of Homer's heroes, was a hundred times better than anything I had eaten of the kind. The fillet in particular, which my guests and I reserved for ourselves, was without doubt, in its simplicity, fit for a king.

Hunters are like travellers; they do not wait to be asked to tell of their prowess. Imagine how it must be when the hunter is also a traveller; doubly talkative and even, alas, doubly a liar, you will perhaps say! They told me so much that I need to order my thoughts before giving you the substance of what I considered the most interesting of their accounts. For the present I shall tell of a little episode that nearly brought about a revolution in Natal.

When I arrived back in Natal, I found the whole population in a state of excitement. 'Did you meet, on your visit to Panda', they asked, 'a man called Jean Lemaire?'

'Jean Lemaire? Who is Jean Lemaire? I don't know Jean Lemaire.'

'You don't know Jean Lemaire? It is impossible', they said.

Thereupon, there was a great to-do in Port Natal and the surrounding districts. And, as I like to know the reason of things, I soon discovered the cause of all the excitement.

Jean Lemaire was one of the richest farmers in Natal, rich in land and cattle. He was in the habit of going every year for reasons of trade, to visit Panda. The latter said to him one day, 'Lemaire, you come every year to see me, you give me gifts; all this pleases me very much, but I know that you are married. Why do you not bring your wife with you?'

'The desire for a woman is a fire that devours,

The desire of a Cafre is much stronger than ours.'

Jean Lemaire excused himself as best he could, saying that he feared being injudicious, infringing the laws of etiquette, etc.

'On the contrary', said Panda. 'You will do me much pleasure. Bring her, Lemaire, bring her.'

The following year Jean Lemarie set out accompanied by his wife, a good

Dutch woman who, unlike her compatriots, bowed to the wishes of her husband. They arrived at Panda's place and were received with all the appearance of great satisfaction. They were assigned a hut of honour. They were sent many pots of *tchouala* and, in addition, as a special favour from the king, a heifer to be killed, roasted and cut up as they wished. Jean Lemaire, by nature a man who enjoyed life, found all this to his liking.

His wife, deeply puritanical, began to be a little alarmed at the excess of politeness. 'Panda is still a young man', she said to her husband. 'He looked at me in a way that forebodes no good, and I think that for your honour's sake, as well as for mine, we had better leave as soon as possible.'

Unperturbed, Jean Lemaire, with conjugal cheerfulness, attempted to dispel the exaggerated fears of his wife and explained all the difficulties of their position. In short, he persuaded her to brave the risks of royal hospitality till the end. The poor woman, admiring her husband's calm approach in face of such danger, submitted to his wishes and promised to endure till the end.

The next day, Panda sends one of his aides-de-camp to inform Jean Lemaire that he expects him and his wife to come to dinner. A refusal is impossible, so they accept.

To dine with a Cafre, even though he may be a king, is not an attractive thing for a woman. To sit on the ground when one is in the habit of using chairs, to use one's fingers, when one has known the pleasure of forks; there is nothing very attractive in all this even for the wife of a Boer, however uncivilized she may be. Nevertheless Madame Lemaire, accompanied by her husband, presents herself at the appointed hour, with a smile on her lips, before Panda who receives them and entertains them, to the best of his ability. An ox, killed especially for them, a real 'fatted calf', forms the basis (solid I hope) of the Homeric feast which is offered them.

Jean Lemaire and his wife thought that they could get away with one helping. But, conscious of great honour being heaped upon them when Panda had their plates (plates, fie for shame!) refilled, the unfortunate couple found themselves in a cruel dilemma — either to perish by the assegai in case of refusal or, if they accepted, to die of indigestion.

The next day and every following day, Panda repeated his invitation. The formalities remained the same, as did the menu, which invariably consisted of a monster ox, killed every morning, for the purpose, and roasted over an open fire before their eyes. If Jean Lemaire had had the advantage of a little education, his memories of the classics would have come crowding back. But the poor man had no such associations to call upon, and believed quite firmly that no white man before him had ever been present at such a feast. 'Oh what a fine thing a little knowledge is', Monsieur Jourdain\* would have said.

Three months passed in this way. Monsieur and Madame Lemaire grew fatter by the day, thanks to the succulent diet provided by their host.

However, as all good things must come to an end and as Panda appeared to take more and more pleasure in their society and seemed not to tire of killing his finest oxen, Jean Lemaire dared one day to speak timidly of departure. He was, he said, extremely honoured by the hospitality of the king, but business and the demands of his trading interests recalled him to Natal, etc.

'Already?' said Panda, looking a little offended. 'You will please me to wait a while.'

\*The principal character in Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

Jean Lemaire, somewhat disappointed, and not knowing how to escape from the royal wasp's nest into which he had rushed headlong, waited on the king's pleasure for his release. For if you had no Arab horse, there was no possibility of escape without the king's permission, no means of sending news to family and friends who, during all this time, were becoming very anxious.

It was a trick on Panda's part, a trap into which he had drawn poor Jean Lemaire in order to assegai him and make off with his wife, who was indeed one of the prettiest farmers' wives in all Natal. That is what they said, and it seemed the more likely, as no one who returned from the royal *mouzi* brought back any news of the hostages; no one had dared to enquire about them for fear of incurring the wrath of Panda.

As usual the rumours gradually grew and supposition became reality: 'Jean Lemaire has been assegaied, it's obvious. Revenge! revenge!' The word was spread that Panda, anticipating that his crime would not go unpunished, had armed 10 000 warriors and that he was marching at their head to attack Natal.

The frightened farmers left their land and with their wives, children and herds sought refuge in the towns. The Cafre servants, all fugitives from Panda, fearing his anger and even more his assegais, abandoned their masters and fled into the bush. The Governor himself, to counter this new invasion and to reassure the inhabitants, sent troops to the Tonguela to guard the only practicable crossing.

Amidst all this commotion, I found myself the target of every question. In this matter of life and death, I feared that I would be suspected of knowing more than I admitted, and would be considered an accomplice of Panda. In the absence of the guilty party, who was beyond their reach, I feared I might become the scapegoat. Fortunately, one fine day when feelings were running so high that nothing would do but to cross the Tonguela and advance against the enemy, wagons were sighted some way off and droves of cattle; they drew nearer and who should it be? Why, Jean Lemaire and his wife, as cheerful and jolly as they were big and fat, and very surprised to learn of all the ridiculous stories that were circulating about them. The colony put down its arms and everything returned to normal. The farmers went back to their farms, the troops to their barracks and the servants to their masters.

But the reader will perhaps be pleased to know, as I was myself, how Jean Lemaire and his wife succeeded in escaping from the mire of difficulties in which they had foundered.

One fine morning Panda, in his usual scanty attire, went in person to seek out Lemaire in his hut. 'Jean Lemaire', he said, 'you have pleased me; you came to see me as a friend, and I received you as such. You may go now and to demonstrate my gratitude and my friendship, allow me to give you a little present. Here are 300 cattle which I beg you to take in memory of me.'

Even if these were not Panda's precise words, the 300 cattle which Jean Lemaire brought back to Natal were real enough. And to think that people had dared to condemn a man — a man did I say? — a king! whose behaviour is such that he overwhelms his guests with gifts in the manner of Alexander the Great.

'He has had Lemaire assegaied', they said, 'in order to steal his wife away.' In the first place, if he had wanted to, he could have taken the wife without killing the husband. And then the very idea that he wished to appropriate another man's wife, is simply one of the thousand prejudices of a civilization which is quite unknown to Panda, who with 500 wives already, would hardly

have deprived a man who had but one. And I must say, in his favour, that never had such an idea entered his mind. When he was told some time later of the flurry in Natal, 'I did not give a thought to that woman', he said, 'she is too thin.' It is well known that among the Cafres, a woman is valued, like fat cattle, for her weight.

Obviously, after such famous adventures, Jean Lemaire became the centre of much interest in this obscure little corner of the world. People came from twenty miles around to congratulate him; he was the hero of the day. His wife also had her share of the interest which attaches to those who have known great danger. And who has known greater — except her poor husband? Neighbours who found her a great deal plumper than before, were tireless in their conjectures, and the most malicious of them went so far as to say that Panda was a rogue, who had put her on a royal diet to fatten her to his liking, but that he hadn't had time enough. There was general agreement on one point — Jean Lemaire had had a narrow escape. Jean Lemaire was one of those men who, they said, would never set the Thames on fire. But this did not prevent him from being a great social success. On the contrary! I did what everyone else was doing — I went to see him. He welcomed me but would not speak freely of his three months of trial and tribulation at Panda's place. He had not yet recovered, poor man.

'But the 300 cattle have helped you to forget all that', I said.

'No indeed', said he, 'and I would not do it again for double the number.'

His wife, on the other hand, who appeared a few minutes later, seemed to enjoy telling of her adventures, and as she was not as tongue-tied as her phlegmatic husband, she gave me some information which I would regret not passing on to you.

Imagine my joy! She had witnessed a Cafre marriage; what am I saying? — three Cafre marriages! and as they are all alike, I shall describe only one; but I shall describe it truthfully, and not, as some do, by elaborating on the events and exaggerating beyond measure. Historical accuracy must come first.

A young Zoula of good family, for no others are received in the royal *mouzi*, had cast his eye upon a young girl, grand-daughter of Panda, the daughter of a daughter of one of his 500 wives. The young person, apart from the aristocratic advantage of royal descent, had in addition the advantage of being very shapely. Because of her physical and moral attractions, she excited the desire of all the dandies of the neighbourhood. Many rivals had stabbed each other for her sake. In short she was the belle of the *mouzi*.

After much hesitation, her heart finally led her to make a choice. A young Cafre, well-proportioned and brave, won her away from all his rivals. With the prior consent of the young princess, for she was a princess, he approached the parents and made his request. The family, who regarded him with some favour, had only one regret; he did not possess the required eleven cattle, for that is the fixed price. He had only five but they were all in calf. In view of the circumstances in his favour and in anticipation of the future, these cattle were accepted as ten. There remained the eleventh cow which was to provide the wedding feast; but one of the aunts of the young girl, a woman of great distinction, and a member of the Cafre nobility, made a generous gift of it to her future nephew who was filled with joy now that there were no more obstacles to his marriage with the beautiful Tamboussa; that was the princess's name; he was called Schala.

On the appointed day, all the men of the *mouzi* gathered together to

prepare to take part in the festivities. As these gentlemen had absolutely nothing else to do, they all arrived faithfully at the meeting place. In another place, in the shade of some isolated trees, numerous groups of young girls were to be seen, with the radiant bride in their midst. A thousand officious hands put the finishing touches to her toilet.

Suddenly, a beating of shields was to be heard in the centre of the *mouzi*. Believing this to be the announcement of a mock battle or of some war dance, one might have expected to see men armed to the teeth emerging from their huts. Not at all!

A strange spectacle gradually unfolded. All the old women of the *mouzi*, respectable matrons with their faces painted in stripes of red and white and their grizzled heads encircled with leaves, appeared armed with shields and assegais which their feeble hands were barely able to support, uttering hideous cries like starving hyenas.

Apparently, married life among the Cafres does not begin very cheerfully. The scene is awful to describe and more awful still to observe and continues for several hours, until these toothless Bacchantes, overcome with fatigue, are obliged to make way for others. Then the men advance *en masse* into the centre of the *mouzi*, where the female contingent is not slow to join them. Soon the singing begins, and heavens! what singing, with the usual accompaniment of clapping hands and stamping feet. When the singing stops — thank God everything comes to an end at last — it is the turn of the dance, a primitive dance if ever there was one. Faces are animated and bodies are contorted until the moment comes when the dancers, male and female, overcome by fatigue, can dance no more.

But fortunately, refreshment is not far off. Away with the barley syrups and the lemonades which are the delight of civilized balls! Cafre beer, *tchouala*, is flowing, sparkling, tickling the palate, and spreading joy all around. What pleasure to go to a wedding, the more so as it costs nothing. This is true for all times and all places.

After drinking, and I do not need to say that the hollow of the hand is the glass favoured by the Zoulas, after drinking one thinks of eating; what could be more natural? So with great ceremony the cow destined to provide the wedding feast, is led in before the assembled *mouzi*. At a given signal, chosen men rush upon the animal, strike it down before the eyes of the assembled gathering and in no time at all its flesh is smoking over the burning coals. When the cooking is done, men and women hungrily tear off pieces of meat, eat, drink and dance all at once until fatigue and satiety force them to rest.

Then everyone retires, the bridegroom last of all with his young bride, according to Cafre custom; but where does he retire to?

‘In heaven’s name, to his own house’, you will say.

‘With his wife?’

‘Of course, with his wife. You do ask strange questions’, you will say.

Not so strange as you might think! For indeed, the bridegroom does not retire to his house with his bride. He leads her calmly back to her own house and goes off wherever he pleases.

‘A strange custom’, you will say.

‘Perhaps, but that is how it is.’

To be brief then; two days pass in this fashion and it is only at the end of the third that he can anticipate his wedding night. Every nation has its customs, but it is apparent that this custom could only have taken root in a country

where polygamy is permitted. The chief victims of such a state of affairs are the poor devils who are only on their first eleven cows. Well, beggars can't be choosers.

Madame Lemaire, after having supplied me with the information from which I have drawn the greater part of the above account, was silent for a moment as if to draw breath; then she continued more or less thus: 'There is among the Zoulas a custom which I would like to see adopted elsewhere. This is an excellent custom which King Solomon himself might well have conceived of. It is simply this — that a man who deceives young girls is stabbed to death. This happens very rarely. However, I have seen an example of it. A young Cafre, smitten by a young and pretty Cafre maiden and not having the required number of cattle, resolved, whatever the cost, to precipitate the event. "Troy was lost for love." Some months later the treachery was discovered and the young man, convicted of abusing the innocence of the poor girl and of betraying the trust of the family, was put to death by the assegai without pity or mercy.'

Then turning to Jean Lemaire, who, in spite of his innocent appearance, had doubtless some youthful sin on his conscience, 'What do you say to that Monsieur Lemaire? Do you not think it an excellent means of protecting the virtue of young girls?'

'Certainly an excellent means, though rather violent', said Jean Lemaire.

'Rather violent! That's men for you,' went on his wife, who evidently harboured some painful memory. 'At least in that country, a man betrays only once Monsieur Lemaire.'

I conceded the argument without comment, but Madame Lemaire, as a betrayed woman herself perhaps, was oddly mistaken as to the morality behind the severe penalty, when she compared Panda with King Solomon. For this law does not aim to preserve the virtue of young girls but to protect property. After all what does it really mean to the Cafres to deceive a girl? It is simply a matter of stealing ten cows from her father. And according to their custom, theft is punishable by death.

The reader will perhaps be curious to know how a criminal case is investigated and judged in the kingdom of Panda. An insignificant theft had been committed in the *mouzi* of Souzouana, a man held in high esteem, who was, unfortunately for him, also very wealthy. The theft was reported to Panda by the plaintiff himself, a European traveller who, to his honour, soon repented of having done so.

The next day two captains appointed by the king to investigate, arrived with the plaintiff at Souzouana's place and were well received. Two days later, all the men of the *mouzi*, young and old, summoned from three leagues around and numbering 2000, had gathered in the main enclosure. I say men because the law, which is very gallant for a Cafre law, does not admit that a woman might be responsible for a theft. The commissioners asked the names of any absentees. The entrance to the enclosure was barred and one of the delegates said, 'If you know anything of the theft committed at Souzouana's place, reply *Vouma*; if you know nothing, say *Naba*. And remember that he who does not reveal what he knows by his silence renders himself as guilty as the culprit himself.' A voice arose from the midst of the throng, declaring that the author of the theft was the son of the chief of a neighbouring *mouzi*. They took hold of the accused, they bound him and they imprisoned him in a nearby hut. Panda was immediately informed by a messenger of the discovery of the guilty

party and the next day the culprit was no more.

But Panda was not satisfied. An execution had taken place certainly, but the outcome was not what he had hoped. 'My heart tells me that the real culprit is Souzouana', he said to his counsellors. In brief then, for the story is a long one and time passes, Panda ensured that, a few months later, and in connection with the same matter, Souzouana should be stabbed to death, and his fortune which had for so long excited the covetousness of the fierce despot, was confiscated in favour of the king. Some days before, Souzouana who had had a premonition of his death, was advised to flee.

'Never', he said, 'I am innocent, but if I must perish, I choose to die here among my own people.' and his wish was granted. Panda, like Djaka and Dingaana, his predecessors, has the right of life and death over his subjects, which simplifies civil and criminal procedures.

The right of succession to the throne is perhaps less respected than all the others. The rule is that the eldest son of the first wife should succeed his father; but a king who never has fewer than 500 wives, cannot fail to have a regiment of male children from among whose number the most ambitious does not delay in disposing of all his rivals. Thus Djaka, who had killed his father in order to take his place, was murdered by Dingaana his brother, who was in return defeated and driven off by Panda. Once he was king, Panda had all his other brothers put to death as well as all of his principal subjects who bore him a grudge. Of course all the inhabitants of the *mouzis* belonging to these victims were likewise assassinated to a man.

In everyday matters there is however a semblance of justice. Thus the king, in the exercise of his powers, is always assisted by three counsellors whom he consults before making a decision, but this is for form's sake only: these unfortunates tremble before him and would not dare to gainsay him; the assegai is ever present. There exists, however, alongside the barbarous despotism, an ancient custom which recalls the patriarchal government of primitive times. During the first days of December, when the maize is ripe, the people have the right, for three days, to demand of the king an account of his conduct. Then, at a great gathering, simple warriors come forward from the ranks, brave the anger of the king, make outrageous reproaches, force him to reply, threaten him even, and provoke him with scorn if his replies are not satisfactory. At these stormy annual gatherings, the king's party and the opposition are often on the point of attacking each other. But immediately after the close of these 'people's assemblies', order is restored and matters go on as usual.

If there is talk of war against a neighbouring tribe, the king calls a gathering of notables, comprising all his captains, to the number of 3 000. He hears their advice and bows to the opinion of the majority. If war is declared, he has the right to take command of the army or to retire (which he usually does) to one of his royal residences.

The territory is divided up under governors of his choosing, who are accountable to him for their actions and who are responsible for all their subordinates. The least negligence on their part is punishable by death. Are the taxes proportional to the resources of the people? No, but to the needs of the king who, like all kings, does not live cheaply. The women who have the honour of living near the royal *mouzi* pay their dues in kind, by providing a certain number of days labour on the king's lands. Men who can provide neither cattle nor grain, the proletariat in fact, are at the disposal of the king,

and must render any service which he might demand of them. Those who live by hunting pay their dues in skins, furs and elephant tusks.

When a district has the reputation of producing good *mabélé* or good maize, the king orders the inhabitants to increase the production in order to pay the Treasury a fixed quantity without affecting their own needs. If the population cannot meet the demand, orders come from the king that the inhabitants should pack up and go elsewhere. *Dura lex, sed lex!* A harsh law in our eyes, but nobody dreams of avoiding it for the excellent reason that the assegai is an irresistible argument. There are no extenuating circumstances, no exceptions, one must obey!

This tax is what we would call direct taxation. Indirect taxation is even simpler if that is possible. If it happens, and it often does, that as a result of excessive consumption, the herds of the king are too much reduced, messengers are sent out to the richest captains to invite them in the king's name to make over a certain number of horned beasts in the king's favour, a number fixed in advance to avoid misunderstandings. It is a sort of 'voluntary' tax that must be paid immediately on pain of death. In a case of emergency, the king simply confiscates without warning, according to his needs.

Historians seem to agree, and I do not really know why, in ridiculing that poor Roman emperor Domitian who amused himself by killing flies in his moments of leisure; an innocent pastime for an emperor. Panda is not so easily amused. When, like Nérée of old, he has counted his herds, reviewed his troops, ordered his women to sing and dance, he does not know what to do, if he has no neighbouring tribe to conquer. Then he invents a thousand phantoms: 'Such and such a captain', he says to himself, 'wishes to kill me.' At night he, like Pygmalion, is a prey to the most terrible dreams. And the next morning, to put an end to the nightmare which haunts him, he surrounds the *mouzi* of the captain who bears him a grudge, sets it alight and kills the inhabitants. A few days later, the herds of the victim arrive at the royal kraal and Panda, watching them file past, seems to breathe more easily: his heart is lightened . . . and his conscience is heavier.

The Zoulas have no religious belief or ceremony. It is only since 1824 that they have known that there is a God. An Englishman, Farewell, was the first to tell them these glad tidings, of which they take no heed. If by chance they talk of it—*Kospezou* they say, which means *Lord on high*.

It is a mistake to give the name of priest to the *iniangas* [doctors] who claim to heal the ills of body and soul, and who know how to exploit certain superstitions. Thus when a poor patient appeals to him, the *inianga*, instead of feeling his pulse and making him put out his tongue according to ancient and solemn practice, simply says in oracular tones, 'It is your dead brother living under the ground who is the cause of the sickness you suffer from.' The remedy is simple: sacrifice a cow to the shades of the dead brother and feast the bystanders. This is the remedy for all evils, which sometimes succeeds, as distraction is the best means of dispelling anxiety and relieving pain. Are our European doctors not doing the same when they send their patients to the seaside, the Pyrenees or elsewhere?

If, in spite of the universal panacea, the patient dies, he is buried, just like Monsieur de Marlborough\*, isn't he? Well, that is where you are wrong, because he is not buried at all. The family and friends of the deceased, those

\* The Duke of Marlborough immortalised in the burlesque song 'Marlborough se vat'en Guerre'.

who have generally taken part in the feast prescribed by the *inianga*, remove the body by means of ropes or branches, taking care not to touch it, and carry it some distance from the *mouzi*, and place it in a gully or in some thick bushes. The next day nothing remains: the hyenas have tidied up.

Talking of *iniangas*, I saw a strange sight one day, a woman on her knees appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of a calabash surmounted by a sculptured head with two eyes made of red seeds. Numerous glass necklaces adorned the neck of this hideous fetish. I asked the woman what it represented.

‘It is my child whom you see there’, she said. ‘I am caring for him so that he will grow big.’

‘Have you many like that one?’

‘No, he is the only one. I have never had another.’

‘But what a strange idea to take care of a calabash as if it were a child.’

‘It is on the orders of the *inianga* whom I consulted so that I might have a child like all the other women. He made me this one.’

‘At least the consultation must not have cost you too much?’

‘A cow — that is the fixed price.’

I picked up the calabash-child; it weighed 25 pounds. The calabash was full of iron ore.

And I pitied this poor woman who loaded her ‘child’ onto her back, according to the custom of that country, wrapped in an apron tied at the waist and the neck. She went calmly on her way, as happy as if she carried the fruit of her womb.

My first impulse was to blame the *inianga* for having so cruelly abused the credulity of this poor creature: but on consideration, I believed that I understood the inton of this Cafre philosopher, ‘Go woman, carry your burden, and when you have learnt what it is to care for a child, you will no longer torment me to find the means of bearing one.’

One must admit that the *inianga*’s advice was well worth a cow.

(To be concluded)

