

Book Reviews and Notices

TRAVELS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, Volume 1

by ADULPHE DELEGORGUE

translated by FLEUR WEBB, introduced and indexed by STEPHANIE J. ALEXANDER and COLIN DE B. WEBB

Durban, Killie Campbell Africana Library and Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1990. 359 pp. R49,95.

What a mixture of delight and horror awaits the reader of this enthralling book! The delight stems from the story itself, Delegorgue's enthusiasm for life, Fleur Webb's masterful translation from the original French, and sketches of pristine Natal. The horror results from Delegorgue's tales of wanton bloodshed on his hunting forays. No matter what one's reactions to these accounts, the book is important historically, sociologically and biologically.

Delegorgue was an acute and astute observer of everything around him. One of his most consuming passions, second only to hunting, was the collection of information and specimens of natural history. His identifications were mostly accurate and his interpretations of natural phenomena far more honest than was the custom in those days, the years of the first half of the 19th century. Indeed, he was moved to write 'I have never been able to understand how anyone, after having travelled the world, should find it necessary to lie'. He viewed wildlife with a strange mixture of brutality and compassion, a mixture bred no doubt of the Africa he found spread out before him as a stage on which were enacted scenes of animal and human violence, and even barbarism.

This translation of Delegorgue's *Travels* starts with a short 'General Introduction' by the well known historian Colin de B. Webb, presently Vice-Principal of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. Webb outlines the history of the production of the original *Travels* and of Delegorgue's background. He draws attention to Delegorgue's 'self-righteousness and criticism of others', which he ascribes to the Frenchman's relative youth, but cautions also that Delegorgue himself 'was not beyond error; nor was he beyond exaggeration'. I can forgive him these indulgences, however, since most of his criticism of others was based on sound knowledge and judgement, remarkable in one so young.

This part of the introduction is followed by an assessment of Delegorgue as a scientist, written by the Pietermaritzburg zoologist Stephanie Alexander. Her treatment of Delegorgue is fair, penetrating and highly readable. Ms Alexander points up his strengths and his weaknesses, both as a person and as a scientist, emphasizing again his youthfulness, his enthusiasm and the mixture of dedication to biological collecting and destruction of wildlife, which he brought to his travels.

Fleur Webb then interpolates a 'Translator's Note' before the main text. In this note she describes how she has tried to maintain the flavour of the original

French text, yet has used South African terms where the English equivalents would not have conveyed the right atmosphere. She wisely retains Delegorgue's original spellings of Zulu and Dutch words, which come over somewhat amusingly, yet each is quite unmistakable and even pronounceable. Indeed, so well has Ms Webb done her job that I could find only one mistranslation in which, on page 166, she gives the name 'cattle egrets' to what are obviously oxpeckers clambering about the buffaloes.

There is so much in this book that one could single out to dwell upon. But there is no space to do more than touch here and there on the richness of Delegorgue's experiences. He told his tale with vigour, leavened now and then with humour. He travelled with Boers and Zulus, chiefs and ordinary men. He knew Dingane and Mpande. He saw battles between Boer and Zulu, and he saw great elephant hunts, sometimes involving thousands of Zulu warriors. He travelled on foot across Zululand, from the upper Umfolozi to St Lucia, through bush and forest and swamp. He overcame disease and discomfort. And all this in his early twenties (he was only 23 when he arrived in Cape Town and 24 when he travelled north from Port Natal). Remarkably he was able to communicate with all kinds of people, none of them French-speaking. How accurately he has reported his conversations with the Zulus must remain speculative, but he must have had a good working knowledge of the language to get by as well as he did. Certainly the Zulus spoke no French!

Adulphe Delegorgue left France in May 1838 on board the brig *Le Télégraph* and arrived in the Cape after a journey whose tedium was alleviated by observations of seabirds. His descriptions of the town, the people and the countryside all attest to his lively powers of observation. On 1 September of the same year he left Cape Town for travels northward, first to Verloren Vlei, then further afield to the Olifants River, Clanwilliam and the Cedarberg. He recounted his meetings with the *spring-book*, from whose flesh the local people made *beulton* and from whose hide they cured their *kros*. This is a sample of the charming spellings so freely invented by Delegorgue.

Back at Verloren Vlei, Delegorgue realized he must leave this country 'where there was nothing worthy of the attention of a naturalist'. So much for his discernment of the uniqueness of the Cape Flora! But this was one of very few such arrogant lapses. He made the acquaintance of the Swedish naturalist Wahlberg during his preparations to leave for Natal. They departed together and, after stopping off in Port Elizabeth, arrived in Port Natal without incident.

Here Delegorgue discovered a wealth of wildlife. His descriptions of the birds are particularly pleasing and accurate. He also unwittingly discovered myriads of small ticks in his wanderings, a scourge for which any excursion in Natal is renowned even to this day! His lyrical descriptions give the reader an indication of his own wonder at the new marvels that he met with almost daily: of the plumcoloured starling he wrote, 'Some, like the blackbird, *Leucogaster*, left behind a long trail of fire in which blue deepened to violet, warmed to purple, and then burst into flame as it caught the sun's rays.' (The plumcoloured starling's scientific name is *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*.) Such encomiums contrast strongly with the bloody scenes of hippo and elephant hunts in which he participated later. His writing vacillated between incredible brutality and extraordinary sensitivity.

Delegorgue's view of people was incisive and his descriptions of them sharply focused. He regarded the Afrikaner with disdain — a person devoid of culture — and the Zulu with admiration and affection. He saw the Zulu nation

as civilized and tended toward the ideal of the 'noble savage'. He also tended in his perception of himself to be smug and decidedly superior to those around him. This conceit reveals itself for example in his perception of the Afrikaner's regard for his oxen as opposed to that of his women: 'My God what oxen!' exclaimed Delegorgue, 'Alas! what women! The first deserve to be much more highly praised, the second much less so.' He also entertained a pretty dim view of missionaries, with the possible exception of the Moravian Brothers at Groen Kloof. He accused the missionaries generally of being involved in petty politics for their own benefit and of being unscrupulous. The good Dr Grout, who set up a mission station in Mpande's territory came in for a special lashing from Delegorgue's pen!

Throughout, no matter what the activity, the reader is treated to a South Africa unspoilt and pristine. Even Delegorgue himself was moved to describe scenes of breathtaking beauty amid the appalling waste of hunted mammals. One moment he was looking over the Umfolozi River on a scene that 'recalled the earliest days of creation', which man could chance upon only 'where men are few and the innocent echoes repeat no sound of gunfire.' The next he bemoaned the fact that the hippos in this bucolic scene are too far away to shoot! And this same man was responsible for the shooting of enough game to fill a ship 'of 786 tons burden' in only eight months. The valleys of the Zulu country fairly echoed with the sound of his gunfire.

This is an important book. It is also an outstandingly good read. Let us hope that Volume 2 is not too long in the making, so that we can follow the adventures of the indomitable Adulphe Delegorgue in his further explorations of Southern Africa a little over 150 years ago.

GORDON LINDSAY MACLEAN

KINGDOM AND COLONY AT WAR

by JOHN LABAND and PAUL THOMPSON

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and Constantia, N & S Press, 1990, 358 pp. illus. maps, R88,55 (hardback), R55,55 (paperback)

It's hard to believe that it's over ten years since Laband and Thompson first broke new ground with their *Field Guide to the Zulu War*. Since then, they have established themselves as the foremost academic historians working in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War field. John Laband, in particular, has made a major contribution to this perennially fascinating campaign by re-shaping our understanding of the way the Zulu kingdom responded both politically and militarily to the threat posed by the British invasion. One of the drawbacks of the academic approach, however, is that one's most original work is often consigned to obscure publications of great intellectual weight but little circulation: *Kingdom and Colony at War* is an attempt to correct that, since it is a collection of no less than sixteen papers by the authors, all but one of which have previously appeared in journals which, it's fair to say, are not well known to the general public.

Between them, these papers cover a wide range of lesser-known aspects of the war. John Laband continues to explore the Zulu kingdom in studies which assess the cohesion of the Zulu polity under pressure, undermining the popular

image of a monolithic state united in its resistance — it's sobering to reflect on the degree of success the British had in ultimately prizing the *izikhulu* from their King — and consider the performance of its army in several important battles during the war. There is a thorough reassessment of the crucial battle of Khambula, seen from a Zulu perspective, and the one new article in the book, 'O! Let us go and have a fight at Jim's!', is a much needed analysis of Zulu movements at Rorke's Drift. He also includes a detailed account of the war on the Transvaal/Zulu border, a running guerrilla fight which has scarcely been mentioned in most histories. Paul Thompson's articles chiefly consider the response of colonial Natal to the war, and in particular the reaction of the main urban centres and rural communities to the potential threat of invasion following Isandlwana. Of particular interest, given the lasting obsession with the events of 22 January, is his examination of the role of the NNC at Rorke's Drift, and his account of British sorties across the Mzinyathi border after Isandlwana. Where appropriate, most of these articles are illustrated with extremely detailed maps prepared to their usual impeccable standard by Helena Margeot and Ramond Poonsamy of the University's Cartographic Unit. There is also an extremely comprehensive list of source material, which in itself is an invaluable aid to any future researcher.

Taken together, these articles represent a remarkable body of work which presents a much broader picture of the scope and effect of the war than has hitherto been understood. Quibbles? A few. It's nice to see an academic work which takes its illustrative content seriously, though more could have been made of this: several of the photos are reproduced very small, and would have benefited from more informative captions. In particular, it would have been nice to have known when some of the portraits were taken. The sketches of Captain Cramer of the 60th Rifles are a real find, and deserve to be more widely seen. Also, the attempt in the introduction to separate this book from popular histories of the war, and put it in a class of its own, may be deserved, but it smacks of intellectual snobbery!

Nevertheless, the work of Laband and Thompson is already extremely influential amongst students of the Anglo-Zulu War, and *Kingdom and Colony at War* serves as a summary of their achievement so far.

IAN KNIGHT

STORIES FROM THE KARKLOOF HILLS

by CHARLES SCOTT SHAW

Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1990, 233 pp. illus. R39,95

VERANDAS IN THE MIST: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE DARGLE, HOWICK AND KARKLOOF

by BRIAN KEARNEY

Natal Regional Committee of the National Monuments Council, undated (1990?), 56 pp. illus. R25,00

In 1972 the second issue of *Natalia* noted the publication of Charles Scott Shaw's book, and now after twenty years a revised and enlarged edition has appeared. This book has much in it to interest anyone with any knowledge of, or connection with, the Natal Midlands. It is a study of the Karkloof area, in the

form of a collection of the stories of some of the settler families who farmed there. Its general setting of the Natal historical stage relies on Bryant, Mackeurtan and Barbara Buchanan; and writings of various public figures and family historians provide the more local and specific content. Photographs from family albums, of individuals, school, sporting and regimental groups, and some of the farms mentioned, illustrate the text. So, for example, we read paragraphs from Bishop Colenso's and John Sheddon Dobie's journals, giving descriptions of their first visits to the Karkloof area. There is a well-written and fascinating reprint from a 1967 issue of the *Lions River Advertiser* in which Mrs Christopher recalls her childhood in the village of Howick in the 1890s, and Mr Shaw has quoted from various settlers' memoirs to be found in the Killie Campbell Africana Library. One is grateful to the author for bringing these accounts to light and giving them a wider readership, but the complete absence of any index, or detailed reference to such sources, severely limits the usefulness of *Stories from the Karkloof Hills* as the piece of historical work it purports to be. On pp.23–24, for example, an account is given of an attempted robbery near Curry's Post, when sawyers from the Karkloof bush attacked a vehicle conveying government gold from Ladysmith to Maritzburg. Mr Shaw introduces his account with the words 'A manuscript in the Natal Society Library tells of the first adventure at Currey's Post . . .' but does not mention that the incident was described, and the same manuscript was quoted, by Hattersley in *More Annals of Natal* (1936). To the general reader, this will be of no consequence, but those who might wish to use this book as a starting-point for further research will often be thwarted by its inadequate references.

Having presented much material in Part 1 about the notable families and their fortunes in the Colony of Natal, Mr Shaw devotes Part 2 (about one-third of the book) to autobiography, and in doing so captures much of the atmosphere of farm life in Natal between the two world wars. Accounts of an idyllic existence on the home farm *Talavera* and of schooldays at Merchiston and Hilton College reveal the author's own personality and developing sensitivities, and also the physical and social environment that were shaping the lives and attitudes of countless white boys and girls who had the good fortune to grow up in that most beautiful part of Natal.

The book ends with seven pages of family trees, especially interesting and useful to readers who need genealogical facts as well as the human stories. The early farming families of the Natal Midlands understandably married their sons and daughters off to each other, and for those who like to know who is related to whom, this concluding section contains information of value out of all proportion to its length!

There is no doubt that Charles Scott Shaw's *Stories from the Karkloof Hills*, with its attractive cover photograph of the Karkloof Falls, is keenly studied not only in that green and pleasant land itself, but among the younger generations of those early farming families, in various parts of South Africa, and beyond.

The publication of Professor Kearney's book at about the same time as the second edition of Charles Scott Shaw's is a happy coincidence, as the two can be regarded as companion volumes. (This does not apply to their physical format, however, as Shaw's book is a conventional soft-covered volume, while Kearney's is a rather unusual 285 mm square.) *Verandas in the Mist* is clearly a 'low budget' publication, which is understandable, given that it was sponsored by the National Monuments Council rather than by commercial interests.

The academic reason for the study seems to be summed up in Professor Kearney's paragraph (p.10) on vernacular response.

It is always interesting to observe the way in which the strong architectural concepts of an immigrant people give way to more pragmatic ones of greater appropriateness and eventually to a regional vernacular. This not only incorporates the necessary responses to a new land with a different climate and landscape and different building resources, and probably a new style of life, but also retains the seeds of stylistic images of the other country which are not easily forgotten.

There is also a more immediate and practical reason:

(The National Monuments Council) . . . believes that appropriate publicity needs to be given to the remarkably rich architectural heritage of the province and hopes that such publications may assist both the understanding and care of this heritage.

Kearney traces the development of farm buildings from Voortrekker and British settler times to modern adaptations and additions. His general discussion of such aspects as farmhouse plans, avenue approaches, roofs and house forms, stylistic exceptions, construction techniques and many others, is followed by detailed examination of some forty buildings – mostly farmsteads, but including some noteworthy buildings in the town of Howick. The descriptions of various elements in the developing vernacular, and of individual buildings, are accompanied by good illustrations in the form of old and modern photographs, sketches, drawings, paintings, site plans, floor plans and roofscape sketches.

Of special interest among the illustrations are reproductions of landscapes, architectural studies and house plans by Mark Hutchinson, who arrived in Natal in 1861 and obviously spent much time in the Howick-Karkloof area. A collection of his works is in the Howick Museum, and Kearney gratefully acknowledges permission to use some of them in his book. Clearly, economic constraints forbade colour reproductions, but attention is now drawn to the collection, and those who wish to see the originals know where they are.

I am sure that this book is of great interest to architects and architectural students, but its chief virtue seems to be its clear and attractive presentation of architectural-historical research to the layman, who may have a particular interest in social history, or in conservation of the man-made environment, but who equally may have no more than a general desire to be better informed about significant and visible links between past and present.

The discussion of buildings and their setting is by no means all technical: the men and women who built them as places to live and work in are not overlooked. Professor Kearney acknowledges biographical information obtained from *Stories from the Karkloof Hills* and from Shelagh Spencer, whose biographical register of Natal settler families is well-known. This reviewer's comment on the family trees included in Charles Scott Shaw's book will be recalled if it is mentioned that *Verandas in the Mist* also has a genealogical page headed 'Families and farms — showing the inter-relationship between the Trotters, Shaws and the Fannins, and the farms of the descendant families.'

In his Introduction Professor Kearney describes the country between the Dargle and the Karkloof thus:

It is an area of superb scenic beauty, with rolling hills given over to pastures and plantations and with natural forest remaining along the hilltops and in the clefts of valleys. These ranges of hills include the Karkloof, which at its highest point reaches about 600 m above sea level. Until recent times the area was well covered with indigenous bush including sneezewood and yellowwood. The area is generally well-watered, with many streams . . . It is also an area of comparatively rich farming land where successive waves of settlement have taken place over time.

In *Stories from the Karkloof Hills* and *Verandas in the Mist* this well-endowed tract of land, and some of its people and its habitations, are fittingly recorded and celebrated.

J.M DEANE