

Captain Allen F. Gardiner's Natal Journal for 1838

ALTHOUGH I had to struggle against every obstacle which was thrown in my way by the white inhabitants of Port Natal, the natives continued to arrive at my settlement of Hambanati. A village had already been built and a considerable tract of land in patches brought under cultivation. On our first arrival (1837 — 5th June) the grass was as high as our heads and we lived partly in tents and partly in the waggon. A house of native construction but on my own plan . . . was built, which we inhabited until a more substantial one of wattle and daub was completed into which we then removed, the first being pervious to every hard shower which frequently caused us great inconvenience. As soon as we had quitted our long thatched abode, the partitions were taken down and the whole thrown into a place of worship; it served also for a school room. The Sunday services had previously been held in the open air. Our family prayer which was at 8 o'clock in the morning was held in the native-built house and was always open to them. Several attended besides our own native servants. Every part was interpreted. For some time school was held every day, but feeling that this trenced too much upon the time which should have been devoted to the acquirement of the language, it was changed to each alternative day. As the crops however began to ripen, the children gradually fell off, and as their attention was requisite in order to guard the corn from the birds it was at length discontinued for the season.

The system in the school was entirely oral. Catechisms were translated and the children taught to repeat the answers etc. The routine of public instruction was the following. A *general* subject was selected for consideration throughout the whole of each week, and appropriate portions of Scripture, illustrating and inforing the doctrine or duty involved, expounded on each alternate morning throughout the week. On the Sabbath morning a text embodying all was expounded, and the whole subject matter with the three other portions of Scripture explained during the past week were brought under review in the discourse. At the intermediate weekly services the portion of Scripture explained the preceding morning was again read and a brief abstract of the exposition repeated, after which the people were invited to ask questions and were in return questioned as to what they had heard the day before, and explanations given. The same method was pursued on the Sunday afternoon when the whole of the people were present, and it was surprizing to find how much Scripture knowledge they had thus acquired in a very short time. It was some time before I hit upon this method, but I have been much encouraged in following it up—indeed on its very commencement it was evidently acceptable to the people and calculated to interest and encourage them. On the very first day on which it was adopted some of them immediately said, 'Now we shall know the words. We could not understand before but now we shall understand'. As I have so fully tried the effect of this method and feel persuaded that it is well adapted for the

instruction of the heathen, I will just give an example of the routine —

General Subject (Faith)						
Monday	..	..	..	..	..	John 3 v 14-16 and 36
Tu	..	..	..	..	..	Do. Questions
W	..	..	..	..	..	Mark 10 v 46-52
Th	..	..	..	..	..	Do. Questions
F	..	..	..	..	..	Mark 2 v 1-12
Sa	..	..	..	..	..	Do. Questions
Sunday	..	..	..	..	..	Acts 3 v 1-16
„	Afternoon	..	..	..	..	Do. Questions

Until the arrival of the Dutch emigrant Boers all was going well and we had much to encourage us in the work; but after the wanton massacre of Retief and his party and the war which ensued, the minds of the natives were so possessed with the desire to profit in the struggle by the pillage of cattle that it was with the utmost difficulty I could restrain them from joining the Port Natal people and engaging in the war. The white inhabitants of Port Natal having set the example and accustomed their native clans to attack Dingarn it was no longer prudent for me to remain in an insulated spot 30 miles distant from Europeans and within a night's march of the Zulu army. Instead of defending Hambanati I had every reason to believe that the greater part of my people would run away upon the appearance of a hostile force, and as Dingarn had taken offence at my having received for one night a runaway chief named Issegwabana with his people, who had fled for their lives, we were in nightly expectation of an attack from the Zulu army. The letter which I subsequently sent to Dingarn explaining the cause of this apparent breach of treaty was never delivered, it having arrived just after the massacre of Retief's party.

It was, however, my positive duty to examine and sift out as far as possible the report brought by Issegwabana, which was no less than an intention on the part of Dingarn to murder the Dutch Boers at the Tugela and the American missionaries in that vicinity. From replies to my letter conveying the result of these enquiries to Mr. Champion and Mr. Owen¹, it was considered by them evident that the tale brought by Issegwabana was a mere fabrication in order to ensure a better welcome on his reaching Port Natal where he and his people immediately afterwards went. As a matter of prudence therefore (Dingarn having already signified his intention of attacking me), as soon as all the missionaries with their families had passed forward in safety, we also removed to Berea. There it was my intention to remain until it should be prudent to return to Hambanati.

On the very next day I rode to the Port, where Mr. Owen was staying, and saw the assembly of the rabble who that evening set out under their white leaders to pillage cattle from the Zulus and cooperate with the Boers in the war. Their heads and loins were bound with strips and shreds of white calico to distinguish them from other black people, and altogether their appearance was most wild and grotesque. They were nearly 1000 men, but not more than 400 or 450 carried muskets; the remainder bore shields and spears.

The mission to the Zulus had already been broken up and the only hope that remained to me was a return to Hambanati at some future period, but from the fuller information recently obtained as to the plans and proceedings of the emigrant Boers it was evident that my work at Hambanati was concluded. Their treatment of the natives, their intention to employ them all either as slaves or as

servants, added to the opposition they have ever evinced to their being instructed, led me to infer that a free settlement such as mine could never exist or at least that the ultimate object would be wholly frustrated immediately on the arrival of the Boers. They would occupy the whole country, absorb all the natives, and thus my whole plan of concentrating them around a mission station would be defeated. Already I had contracted for bricks to erect a church—a work which was only suspended on account of the unsettled state of the country — but I considered that it would now become almost useless as it would neither be practicable to collect the natives and protect them as before, or to supply them with the quantity of land necessary for the support of their families.

These were the principal reasons which induced me to decide on leaving the country and propose to the people at Hambanati a plan for removing them in a body to some more secure spot in the neighbourhood of the Cape Colony. With this view I returned to Hambanati to explain the project and obtain their decision regarding it. Having given them sufficient time to deliberate and a distinct intimation that should they engage in the war with the Zulus they would forfeit any claim to my protection, they all unanimously expressed their desire to accompany me. It was therefore agreed that I should go to the Colony and if practicable select a spot for a new settlement — that in the mean time they should rendezvous on the Umzumvubu, where I proposed D. V. to meet them and convey them to their locations. My property was left in their charge and provisions appointed for the journey to the Umzimvubu.

Having returned to Berea and taken my passage by the *Mary* schooner then in the harbour, we removed to the Point and pitched our tent under some trees where Mr. Owen was also encamped. Here we awaited the sailing of the schooner. On Sunday evening, March 25th, we took leave of Port Natal with feelings that may be imagined better than expressed, accompanied by Messrs. Champion and Venables and Drs. Adams and Wilson, American missionaries, who were also returning to the Colony.

We reached Algoa Bay on the 30th and landed at Port Elizabeth on the following day. Enquiries were immediately set on foot and every effort made for the accomplishment of the object I had in view, but all were equally discouraging. The last six or seven months had been a period of excessive drought, the cattle were lean, many hundreds had died, and every article of consumption had risen in value at least 100 per cent. Butter was scarcely to be procured at any price, and milk was very exorbitant. It was my intention to leave my family at some convenient place on the route and to proceed in the first instance to Somerset. Horses were out of the question but even bullocks for a waggon were not to be procured. My agent, Mr. Button, had actually offered to pay for the cattle that might die on the road, but this was no inducement. Under these unexpected circumstances I made a particular calculation of the total expenses incident upon the whole undertaking, including the six or seven months which it would be absolutely necessary to provision the people (in number about 500) from the period of their actual arrival until their first crops should be gathered. At the present rate of produce and the advanced prices of every article, even in the district to which we proposed going, it was quite evident that my present means would be wholly insufficient. We thought of borrowing money to some extent, but it could not be undertaken. I was therefore, of course, necessitated to abandon it entirely. To this conclusion I came indeed with much reluctance, but still I felt it was a duty I owed to my family, and that if it had been the will of God, a

way would have been opened for its completion without involving me in debt which I should not have been justified in incurring.

Letters were immediately written to Port Natal explaining the whole circumstances and recommending the natives under my control, as I could not remove them, to adhere to Mr. Owen for instruction. These, by the kindness of Mr. Shaw (Superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission), were sent overland.

Having again with mutual prayer commended ourselves to the Lord and implored His guidance, we felt it was our duty still to devote ourselves to the heathen and under Divine guidance we now look forward to the period when we may commence a similar work among the aborigines of the opposite continent, South America. The Patagonian Tribes of which I had seen something and heard much during two visits to Chili were the especial object of our regard and to them we proposed by the blessing of God to proceed.

A letter was accordingly written to my agent, Mr. Dickson, at Cape Town apprising him of my wish to secure passage to Buenos Ayres, but should there be no direct communication, to Rio Janeiro. We set out from Port Elizabeth on the 6th April, but did not reach Rondebosch near Cape Town until the 5th of May. It was a period of great activity among the farmers as the first rains had fallen after a long period of drought and all their ploughs were in requisition, so that we found great difficulty in hiring either horses or bullocks in the course of our journey overland. Sometimes we were stopped entirely for one, two and three days, which occasioned our being so long upon the road on this journey. We crossed the Pass called Sir Lowrey's over the Hottentot Holland mountains which is exceedingly fine. Two days after reaching Rondebosch, I heard of the loss of several of my people who, contrary to their avowal, joined in the war—thus shewing that my hinderance in seeking for them a new settlement was a Providential appointment.

Transcribed and edited by C. de B. WEBB

Note:

1. Rev. G. W. Champion of the American Board Mission, and Rev. Francis Owen of the Church Mission Society.

Suggested reading:

Brookes, E. H. and Webb, C. de B., *A History of Natal*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1965).

Kotze, D. J., *Ed., Letters of the American Missionaries, 1835-1838*, (Van Riebeeck Society, No. 31, Cape Town, 1950).

Cory, G. E., *ed., Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, (Van Riebeeck Society, No. 7, Cape Town, 1962).

Wilson, H. C., *The Two Scapegoats*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1914).