

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF NATAL

by
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EDINBURGH: D. MATHERS AND J. MENZIES
PERTH: P. R. DRUMMOND

Price Fourpence
[1850]

Introduction

The following letter was written by a young man, who left his native country for the new settlement of Natal, in November last, with the *Ina*,¹ from Glasgow, the only ship which has yet sailed from Scotland for that colony. It was intended solely for a circle of friends; but, in consideration of the many persons interested in the probable success of this new emigration field, either from having friends already settled there, or having it in contemplation to proceed thither themselves; or from sympathy with these pioneers of civilisation — the best missionaries to the heathen — the agricultural settlers, who, leaving behind them home, with all its endearing associations, boldly venture across half the globe, among a race of reputed savages, carrying with and diffusing around them, in their new country, the arts of civilised life, and the influence of practical religion; as well as the great scarcity of reliable information regarding Natal, it has been judged advisable to offer it to a larger circle. The accounts of Natal hitherto published have been very contradictory; and the letter being written without the least idea of its being printed, will be some guarantee for its presenting, at least in the opinion of the writer, a fair statement of what he has seen. It will be evident to the reader, that though not over elated, he is, upon the whole, not disappointed.

A word on his qualifications to write what may possibly in some degree influence others in their decisions on such an important matter as the choice of a settlement: The son of a small farmer, early accustomed to

labour, his hand much more familiar with the plough than the pen, he yet possesses an education superior to most of his class even in Scotland; and though not very favourably situated for access to books, he had contrived to procure and digest a very considerable quantity of the superior cheap literature circulated so extensively of late years. The subject of emigration had occupied his thoughts for a long time, and everything bearing on it was eagerly read; so that when the Government decided on colonising this new district of South Africa, he was able to compare, at least theoretically, the prospects of success in it with those in the Scotchman's own colony of Upper Canada, and was induced, along with his father, to try his fortune in a quarter of the world which only, a short time before, would have been reckoned among the very last to which a Scottish peasant would have thought of emigrating.

As some may take up this pamphlet who have not previously paid any attention to the subject of it, we take the liberty of offering them a few extracts, showing some of the different opinions which have been expressed regarding it. The situation of the colony is to the northward and eastward of the Cape of Good Hope, and may be generally described as lying between the sea and the first range of mountains which form the boundary on the northern side. In extent, it is about the size of Scotland. The proposed capital, Pietermaritzburg, is situated about 31 degrees south latitude, and 31 degrees east longitude.

The following is from Sidney Smith's popular little work, *Whether to go, and Whither*:²

"The climate is the most salubrious in the world. Uniformly mild, subject to no extremes of temperature, with all the equability, and none of the atmospherical moisture, of New Zealand, it is nearly as abundantly watered, of far richer soil, and within half the distance of Europe. Its productions, indeed, of coffee, rice, cotton, indigo, sugar, aniseed, indicate a somewhat warmer temperature than the former; but it is conceded on all hands that the heat is never excessive, or calculated to render field labour very oppressive. Pulmonary and scrofulous diseases are quickly cured by a residence in the district, and ague is entirely unknown. The soil is capable of producing most of the vegetable treasures of the tropics, and all those of the temperate zone in abundance, and of the finest quality, particularly the cereals which flourish best in Egypt. Grass is so thick and luxuriant, that it fattens cattle rapidly, and grows up to the horse's shoulder. In the numerous clefts of the mountain streams and gullies fine timber is to be had. It produces cotton of the best quality, and its cultivation is accompanied with unrivalled success. In short, it seems to combine every advantage of New Zealand and Australasia, with much greater proximity to England. The government surveyor-general becomes perfectly eloquent in describing its character and excellencies. The successive governors of the Cape are equally emphatic in their praises; public companies both in England and Germany, endorse these favourable opinions; and, to sum up all, merchants have largely ventured their money in establishing settlers in its most eligible localities, and promoting its culture of cotton."

In *Chambers's Journal* of October 20, 1849, after quoting the above, the editor proceeds:

"In this paradise a fat ox costs £2:10s.; working bullocks and milch cows from £2 to £4; horses, £10; sheep 6s.; and provisions are at all times remarkably abundant and cheap. It is only ten days' sail from Mauritius, which could readily absorb its agricultural produce; and the neighbouring sea-banks afford an extensive and promising field for cod-fishing. Thus the country is adapted in a very remarkable degree both for land and marine enterprise; and, to make all complete, it is supposed that the bowels of the earth teem with that material now indispensable to high civilisation — coal.

"Why, then, is Natal a wilderness, with so much to attract the capital and industry of Europe? So far from being a discovery of the present moment, it has already been settled by the Dutch boers, those warlike farmers of the Cape, who, retreating in wrath and indignation before the irresistible power of the English, carried their families and flocks, and herds across the frontiers. Here they found themselves in a far superior location both as regards climate and production, and their agricultural tastes and knowledge would have led them to adopt it as their permanent home, but that the hated supremacy of the English reached them even there. It was vain to struggle. Robust and herculean of frame, ignorant, proud, daring, and high-fed as they were, still they could not withstand the tactics of Europe: they were beaten from point to point; and when the conflict became hopeless, they once more began their march of emigration, and once more retreated across the frontiers. Such are the neighbours, then, of Natal; they hang upon its boundaries, like a thundercloud charged with the elements of destruction.

"But the English were not the only enemies of the gallant Dutch in Natal. This rich territory is surrounded by the tribes of the African wilderness, against whom, just as against the wild beasts of the country, they wage a constant and deadly war, and who carried off their property, and burned their dwellings, as often as opportunity occurred. When the Dutch at length abandoned the unequal contest, the ground was taken possession of by a new class of emigrants. The savages of the interior, flying from the tyranny of their native chiefs, took refuge within the deserted circle; and these Zoolah and Kaffir refugees are now supposed to amount to 200,000. So much the better, it will be said, for here we have the rudiments of a labouring population; and this would be true in the case of the strong colony, with ample means of military defence against both external and internal force. But if the mistake should be committed of throwing a handful of Europeans into the arena, to grapple at once with Dutch, savages, and wild beasts, what will be the result? The Colonial Commissioners report that 'the universal character of the natives is at once superstitious and warlike; their estimate of the value of human life is very low; war and bloodshed are engagements with which their circumstances have rendered them familiar from their childhood, and from which they can be restrained only by the strong arm of power; their

passions are easily inflamed, while, from their servile obedience to despotic rulers, they show ready obedience to constituted authority.' Sir Peregrine Maitland, indeed, states that 'they are generally of a docile character,' but the significant fact, that Sir Harry Smith has ordered the removal of the coloured population from intermixture with the white occupants of the land, 'so that a distinct line may be established between the different races of her Majesty's subjects,' is a pretty clear indication of his sense of the danger of employing savage labour, and of permitting the proximity of the natives to the settlers."

[*First Impressions of Natal*]

Emigrant's Shed,³ D'Urban, March 25, 1850.

The houses are mostly built with wood and plaster, a few being of brick. Stone for building is scarce, but some public edifices, &c., are of good freestone, brought from the Bluff, a hill on the other side of the bay, opposite D'Urban. The houses are generally thatched with reeds or rushes, which look well; the garden fences and Caffre huts are made with fine large canes, brought from the banks of the Umgeni, three or four miles distant. This river, which has to be crossed on the way to the new settlement, is from 100 to 300 yards broad *now*, but is nearly dry in summer occasionally. It is rather rapid, and after heavy rains, is unfordable for several weeks. Its banks are wild and beautiful, but in many parts overgrown with reeds or canes. Game is not abundant near the town, but several kinds of buck, and even elephants, are not rare away in the bush. I have been out a number of miles into the country with my gun, but have seen little except birds. Those acquainted with their haunts, sometimes get a good buck to eat. In the cultivation of land, the colony is as yet in its infant state. Vegetables are scarce and dear, the gardens being too sandy, or the cottagers too lazy to cultivate them. Pumpkins are plenty, and easily raised. They vary in size from that of a man's head to a foot in diameter, with a space to the heart containing the seeds. They look and taste like carrot, and, with beef and rice, make an excellent and cheap soup. A seasonable rain has lately taken place, but this has been a drier season than has been known for many years. This is one cause of the high prices of provisions here at present. Indian corn, or mealies, as they are called, grow well, but they have been as yet little cultivated, comparatively speaking.

Father and the rest have returned from seeing the late Cotton Company's land, and their report of the quality of the soil is favourable, but the access by roads is difficult. It is distant about twenty-five miles, and is within half a dozen miles of the mouth of the river Umhloti. This river is always pronounced, and generally spelled, *Umsloti*, instead of *Umhloti*, as on the maps. *Um*⁴ in the native means *river*, which accounts for the names so often beginning thus. Some of them had to sleep in the bush once or twice, as there are few houses, and little accommodation. Some of the *King William* emigrants are settling, or preparing to settle there, and the surveyors are busy mapping out the land. There will yet be some delay ere we can be located,

and we must begin with small things. Set down in what may be called a fertile wilderness, with neither roads nor markets, with everything to buy, and scarce £20 in our pocket, we need not expect wonders for some time. However, we do not despair at all; time will do much in such a country as this, though the 'joys of emigration' may not yet be very many. The climate, so far as I have seen, though warm, is very fine, resembling summer weather at home, but more equable.

There are about 600 soldiers at Pietermaritzburg, and 100 here. I learn they have enjoyed excellent health, even better than in Cape Colony.

As soon as we landed, several of the emigrants got engagements. One of the single women was hired to the English Minister,^s by the month, at £20 a-year; another, who was inexperienced, at £15. A carpenter is employed at £1 a-week and victuals, and another at 5s. a-day, and find himself. Carpenters and blacksmiths are most in request, and may even get higher wages than those mentioned.

There is an Episcopal Church here, and a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. I attended the Methodist meeting yesterday. Both the clergyman have been in our barracks giving us their advice, and seem to take an interest in the land question.

As this is my last sheet, I draw to a close. I pay eightpence for my letter, and I suppose you may have to pay a like sum on receiving it. Twopence is charged on newspapers; you will tell me if you receive them and what you pay. I suppose I will be employed for a time to assist in surveying some blocks of land, but it is not yet settled.

The inducements to assist the surveyors turned out to be so meagre, that I have continued to employ myself on the land along with my father. Our luggage is not all ashore yet. The *Sovereign*, from London, has arrived yesterday with more emigrants, after a protracted passage of 117 days. The natives are friendly and trustworthy, and I believe, from all I can learn, there is nothing at all to fear from them. I am beginning to learn their language from a resident. I thought the natives at first very repulsive beings, but I am now more reconciled to them, and like them for the tractable and friendly dispositions they display. They seem very willing to learn anything, but dislike hard work. Those settlers who have known them some time say they would do nothing at all, were it not for the pressure of hunger, or the desire of buying a wife to work for them. The young men carefully hoard up all the shillings they earn, till they gather the value of about ten cows, which will purchase a wife. When married, they act the gentleman, the idler, or the tyrant, by making their partner do all the drudgery, and support them. The women make for sale good mats or carpets of tough rushes, and bring in from their kraals every morning the milk of their cows, which brings a high price. In person, they seem agile, tall, and well made, without the daring look and muscular frame of the real Caffre. I find they are all called by the general term Caffre (Arabic for *infidel*), though the most of them are Zulu refugees. The Hottentots are a small race, and generally wear clothing. The others, though nearly so, are not quite naked. Beads, brass rings, &c., plentifully adorn those who can obtain them. They are employed by every white settler, to go errands and do their work. Even in our barracks here numbers of them are engaged to wash, cook, and attend some of the emigrants. I, however, prefer doing these things for ourselves.

Emigrant's Shed, D'Urban, March 27, 1850.

From what I have seen during the passage, and since I landed, light clothing is indispensable. Father and I got some clothes made during the voyage of twilled linen, yet we regret having so few of them. Dresses made of cotton, linen, duck, light canvass, or pack-sheet, are most comfortable for wear, and, what is of much importance, can be easily washed. It is now the beginning of winter in this country, and though it does not stop vegetation, yet the gardens and plots are said to be less prolific at this season of the year. Mealies, bananas, pumpkins, water melons, French beans, and some potatoes, are grown, but not to a great extent.

I was out yesterday, seeing a Perthshire settler, who lives five or six miles south of D'Urban. From the hill tops, I could only see a patch here and there under cultivation, like solitary sails seen on the boundless waste of waters. The country was beautiful — at least, as far as hill and hollow, green trees and grass, could make it. The soil did not seem very good, being red or very sandy; but was, nevertheless, covered with the most luxuriant vegetation I have ever seen. There are no extensive flats, as far as I have been, but landscape covered with small hills, as steep as the old braes of S[cotland]. In the bush, grew plenty of martingoolas, which, though scarcely in season, ate very well. This fruit somewhat resembles cherries, but is much larger. It is of a sweet milky nature, and tastes like our youthful favourite, the Scotch blaeberry.

The town of D'Urban is built in a very straggled manner, and may contain perhaps 1000 inhabitants. The roads, or streets, are very difficult to walk on, being of soft sand, which drifts occasionally. The houses look indifferently at first, being mostly thatched, and of one storey. The walls, however, are nicely whitewashed, and have a verandah supported by wooden posts all round, partly to shade off the sun, but principally, I believe, to keep the rain from the mud walls, of which they are generally constructed.

Most of the residents are English, and, I am told, the town has doubled its population within the last four months. Emigrants, instead of betaking themselves to the bush to raise something for consumption, prefer making their nest in the sand here, and living upon their brother emigrants, whom they manage to fleece very cleverly on their arrival.

The grocers and general dealers know how to turn the penny, and charge very extravagant profits, I understand. Ironmongery and hardware goods are very high priced, as also flour, potatoes, onions, candles, &c., which the colony ought to produce in abundance within itself. Glass, summer hats, baskets, &c., are about as cheap as at home. Sweet milk is scarce; and I am inclined to think a properly managed dairy, with such unlimited pasturage, would pay very well. The rearing of calves is the only thing attended to by the natives or old settlers, the demand for milk being, I suppose, of recent date.

Partly owing, in all likelihood, to the coarseness of grass, the cows give much less milk than at home, and, generally, what little they do give can only be obtained while the calves are sucking. By training young cows, a better system might soon be introduced. The large African oxen differ little from the Zulu cattle, except that the latter are smaller and hardier. They take less time to graze, and can better subsist on the rough, sandy pasture

about the coast. They have all immensely large horns, but, in disposition, they are generally quiet and harmless.

It strikes me, that a ship to England, if freighted, at least in part, with these large horns, might prove a profitable speculation. They would cost little more here than the trouble of collecting, as many of them are to be seen lying unheeded on the sands of D'Urban. I heard a sagacious Highlander of our party remark lately, that if he had moulds here, he could make a snuff-mull and at least five spoons out of one horn.

The settlers concur in saying, that the natives are a friendly, peaceable race — that they like the white man, and have no inclination to injure him. Their only failings are laziness, and a certain want of 'can', or handiness, in doing particular work. Being universally employed by the settlers, they have property at all times in their power, yet they are seldom known to steal, dishonesty being considered by them as the deepest disgrace. Their employer usually gives them a Caffre hut near his dwelling in which they live, but sometimes they go home at night to their own kraals, perhaps situated on the heights near the Umgeni River. Only the men hire themselves to work, the women being employed in cultivating their small patches, and attending to the household duties. Their wages are not great — from 4s. to 6s. a month, with victuals, or from 6s. to 12s. and meat themselves. Their victuals, or *scoff*, as it is always called here, do not cost much, as they seldom seek more than an allowance of mealies and pumpkins. Waggon-drivers, and those who occupy situations of some responsibility, of course, get higher wages than those specified.

The mealies, or Indian corn, which is the principal food of the natives, is almost the only crop I have seen cultivated in Natal. The pickles are about the size of white peas, and grow on the ear, which is of a conical form, very much like the pears of the spruce fir, which we used to gather in our schoolboy days. The white American mealies are thinner skinned, and much better than the Caffre mealie, which is generally raised here. They grow on large stalks resembling rhubarb, with occasionally two or three ears, each having some hundreds of pickles from one seed. The mealies are ground into a coarse meal, not a little resembling oatmeal, which, though rather too free for making bread, makes good porridge, and is generally used by the settlers for that purpose. The natives boil the grain, and eat it like rice, in which form it tastes very well, if taken with milk or sugar.

Emigrant's Shed, D'Urban, April 1, 1850.

You will observe, my dear friends, that I am noting down now and then, for your perusal, some sketches of the country, people, productions, &c., gathered partly from my own observations, and partly from the testimony of others. If, at some future time, more experience shows my first impressions to have been incorrect, of course the mistakes will be rectified. It is likely you will have obtained, by this time, much more information concerning Natal than was known when we left Scotland. The emigrants, by the six or seven vessels which preceded us, will have reported much to the mother country, of which we learned nothing during our long ocean passage. The reception which

former emigrants met with on their arrival here, was not so good as ours, no house being erected for their accommodation, and lodgings being scarce and dear at D'Urban. In some cases, they could not obtain immediate possession of their land; in others, as the *King William* people (the ship before us), the land was rejected as unsuitable.

The land surveyed and offered to these emigrants, is about eight or nine miles from Maritzburg, and, excepting the scarcity of wood and water, the soil is all that could be wished. Those who have seen it inform me that the land is of a deep black loam, occasionally mixed with clay. It is such as would be considered a first-rate soil at home, but is apt to become much hardened by drought. The great drawback is the absence of wood and water, streams or bush being only found at a great distance. For this reason, it is unsuitable for being cut up into twenty acre lots, though perhaps well enough adapted for extensive grazing ground. I understand Byrne & Co. paid Government 7s.6d. an acre for this land, and it is a vexing thing to them now to have it refused by the emigrants, as not worth the survey fees, or 2s. an acre. In this emergency, Mr. Moreland, as agent for Byrne & Co., obtained from Government, not long before our arrival, a tract of land on the Umhloti, of the extent of nearly 23,000 acres. This land, which is not deficient in wood and water, belonged to an English cotton company⁶, who have been unable to fulfil their engagements. The site for a town, suburban land, and country lots, are [sic] being surveyed, but it is thought some weeks may elapse ere the land is ready for our choice; but, instead of twenty, we expect to get forty-five acres each.

I have been overhauling and examining our trunks lately, and find their contents little injured by the voyage. Shirts, if well dried before packing, may be starched and ironed without being the worse. Edge-tools should be greased before packing, to prevent rust. Our shoes were a little mouldy, but uninjured. It may not be useless to mention, that boots or shoes, for wear on the voyage, are best to be light, and without sprigs or tacks, which very readily cause slipping and falls. Shoes, though large enough at home, are apt to be too small when taken to a distant country. I'm glad to say, however, this is not the case with ours. Luggage trunks require to be strong, as they have to endure much rough usage.

Since we came ashore, an application was made to Mr. Field, the magistrate at D'Urban, for compensation for the want of luxuries during the voyage, but, from various causes, no redress was obtained. There are two churches in D'Urban, an English and a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. The Wesleyans have a large and handsome new church, almost finished, and seem to be a zealous, thriving body. I attended their meeting yesterday, and heard an excellent discourse from the Rev. J. Freeman,⁷ missionary, who is visiting the churches and stations of Southern Africa. The proficiency with which the singing department of the services was carried on, surprised and pleased me a good deal. There was no precentor's desk, but in one of the seats, near the pulpit, was the leader, a tenor singer, and a bass. Beside them, with his back to the congregation, sat a flute-player, who accompanied the leader, and produced the most mellow and pleasant tones. The readiness and skill with which the congregation joined in singing such tunes as *Mount Nebo*, *Walmer*, *Lonsdale*, &c., was what I had never witnessed anywhere in Scotland. Yesterday, we also attended a funeral procession to the New Burial

Ground, at the west side of the town. It is a lonely, sequestered spot, washed on one side by the bay, and dotted over with patches of bush, and grass, and sand, as the hand of nature made it. A considerable portion of ground here is about to be enclosed and set apart to this purpose, for which it seems very well adapted. The shadows of night were fast falling, ere the English clergyman had concluded the burial-service; and, as father and I turned and walked home, I could not help wondering to myself who would be the tenants, ere another generation has passed away, of that solitary graveyard, of which the busy, little town was now laying the foundation.

From all the accounts I can learn, the climate of Natal is peculiarly healthy, and liable to no particular disease. Most emigrants are liable, at first, to a sort of inflammation of the skin, or outbreak of pimples, partly caused, perhaps, by the change of provisions; but this results in nothing serious.⁸

Emigrant House, Port Natal, April 6, 1850.

The *Hannah*, brigantine, which has been lying in the bay since we arrived, has sailed this week for the Cape, carrying homeward, at length, our letters and papers. I have been employed most of this week down at the beach, assisting to land cargo, and pass it through the custom-house. My wages are 3s.6d and 4s. a-day, and I sometimes have pretty hard work. However, as we are waiting for the landing of our plough and cart wheels from the *Ina* (the last of which came ashore to-day), I am glad of the job, though I suppose it will not last long.

On Monday, four ships came in over the bar, and they are now in the bay, discharging their cargoes of sugar, rice, flour, spirits, &c. Some of them are of considerable size, but none draw so many feet of water as the barques *Ina* and *Sovereign*, which are obliged to lie outside. There is more water on the bar this week than there has been since we arrived: occasionally showing as much as 10 or 12 feet at high water. For this change to the better, we have ourselves partly to thank, as we lent a hand to the opening of the bar about a week ago. Mr. M[ilne],⁹ a Scotchman, who has the charge of some break-water operations, got about a dozen of us, assisted by twice as many Caffres, to go and cut a trench across the bar, for payment. I was the first who volunteered my services, and had the honour to be the first who thrust in the shovel for the opening of the bar. We were conveyed in a boat to the middle of the bar, an hour or two before low water, and, being about the time of neap-tide, the sand was almost bare. Though sometimes up to the knees in water, we worked for three hours most heroically; deeming our attempt, to let in the ships which were lying laden outside, an act of charity as well as one of self-interest. Our operations were so planned, that the force of the tidal current, entering and receding, might deepen and enlarge the trench which had begun. And luckily it had the desired effect.

Thus a small amount of labour, well directed, did much good. It saved the masters of the ships, which got into the bay, a good deal of money, as the shore boatmen charge £1 per ton more, for bringing cargo outside the bar, than for landing it from ships in the bay. This heavy charge, which small-boat competition might considerably lessen, adds seriously to the cost of imported articles, and the doubt of getting their vessel over the bar dis-

courages shipowners from making shipments to Port Natal. Such an improvement of the bar, as would enable all trading vessels to sail at once into the bay, is most desirable.

An engineer¹⁰ from London has been examining it lately and has gone to the Cape, or 'the Old Colony', as it is here called, to draw up his plans to be laid before Government. I have heard that he gives it as his opinion that £25,000 or £30,000 would make it one of the best harbours in the world. As soon as Mr. P[ine], the new governor, arrives, the attention of the Government is to be called that way, to see what can be done for it. At present, a sort of breakwater is constructing, and fences of wattle, stones, &c., for collecting the sand, are being carried out at the point, to narrow the mouth of the bay, so that the current out and in may keep a clear, deep channel.

The bay seems to be about thirty or forty miles in circumference; and, though the upper part is a little shallow at low water, it is a lovely and well-sheltered basin. Fishes of good quality abound in it, and are caught occasionally with the hook, of considerable size. Any one who chooses may fish; but, as no nets are used, few are caught. If a person had a net of the construction used in the Scottish salmon-fishings, I am inclined to think great quantities might be taken. The D'Urban market might, at least, be supplied at a handsome profit.

There is plenty of bush about D'Urban, which makes wattles for building houses and firewood easily produced. Fuel, however, is only required in this country for cooking. There are also plenty of large trees, for other purposes, in the neighbourhood; but the wood seems to be too hard and twisted, to be easily worked. But I have not been long enough here to be a judge in this matter. Some of our party have just returned from a visit to the German settlement,¹¹ which is about a dozen miles up the country, on the Maritzburg road. They say there are about fifty or sixty families, who seem to be living very comfortably on their small farms. Besides cultivating cotton, they are now growing almost all kinds of farm produce on a small scale. They were very hospitable to our Scotchmen, and seemed to lack none of the substantial comforts of life, though, of course, they were without some of its luxuries and conveniences.

In my excursions into the country, and especially on the banks of the Umgeni (the *g* is pronounced like the *g* in *girl*), I have seen the cotton plant growing well. The bushes seem to thrive; but little care is bestowed on their cultivation. The want of capital, machinery, and a regular means of export, seem to have denied it, as yet, a fair trial. Caffre labour is not to be depended on, as they may take a thought, and go away from the planter at the month's end, just at the time the cotton is ready for picking; and, in present circumstances, they say it will not pay white labour. When enterprise and money are brought to bear on its cultivation, it is very likely it may become the staple of the colony. But the great desideratum at present seems to me to be the cultivation of the land. I am absolutely angry at such a country lying waste, and us importing at a high price the staff of life.

Horses are plenty about D'Urban, but they are generally of a small sort, and only used for riding. I have only seen one or two instances of horses employed in drawing the cart, and everybody was staring at them as curiosities. With such steep roads and soft sand, I see one horse could draw a

very small load; but, if more than one were attached, and heavy beasts used, such as Clydesdale horses, I am sure they would be much more tractable, and little inferior in strength, to the long unmanageable yokes of oxen. But horses would require feeding, and the people about the town have little, except what the animals could pick up, to give them. I have heard it said, that horses do not thrive well among the settlers near the coast, and, from the appearance of some of the beasts I have seen, I believe there is some truth in it. But when I saw the grass on which they were turned out to pasture, I did not much wonder at it. Rank weeds, and dry grass of the coarsest sort, pretty well powdered with sand, is not the walk in which we would expect to find sleek and healthy cattle. Were the land brought under cultivation, and laid down again in artificial grasses, as at home, I think the complaint of unhealthiness would cease to be heard. Horses kept for hire in the town, and which get oat-hay and Caffre-corn, look as well as their like in Scotland, and are always used by those who pay for them, even when going the shortest distance.

In dealing with the natives, much difficulty is experienced from ignorance of their language. The greater part of them know scarcely any English, and, in order to communicate with them, I think it much better to learn their language than to endeavour to teach them ours. If a grammar and dictionary had been procurable, the task would not have been so difficult; but, though I made every inquiry, no such helps were to be found in D'Urban. A book, called *The Zulu Companion*, by Mr. P[osselt],¹² intended to answer this desirable end, is in course of being published at Maritzburg, but where it was likely to be had no one could tell. Those who have been a few years in the colony have acquired considerable knowledge of the native language, and to these I must apply for lessons. A son of Mr. M[oreland], the Im[migration] Agent, has already given me a pretty long list of those words and sentences most commonly used, which I will soon make my own. I have now left off studying French, and turned my attention *seriatim* to the acquirement of Caffre, as the language spoken by the natives (consisting of Zulus, Hottentots, Fakus, Caffres, &c.) is always called.

I am told that the language used in Natal is the same as that spoken by the natives in Cape Colony, only differing in dialect, as one district of Britain differs from another. It is said to be simple in construction, and is not harsh in pronunciation.

Tuesday, April 9, 1850.

We have at length got all our luggage in the Emigrant House beside us, including the cart wheels, which have cost us for conveyance more than perhaps they are worth. I believe I have before mentioned that we were charged £2 for them at Glasgow, as extra luggage, and we had to pay other 25s. for landing them, and passing them through the custom-house. Mr. M[oreland] paid the boats for the landing of our personal luggage from the *Ina*, but he was either unable or unwilling to do the same with our extra-freight. Mr. C[ato],¹³ who owns the barge, and who is one of the most influential citizens of D'Urban, claimed on all extra luggage, for bringing over the bar, £1 per ton, or per forty cubic feet; and for landing them from the bay, 3s.6d. per

ditto additional. All goods intended for traffic, and articles not required for personal or agricultural purposes, are liable to a duty of 5 per cent. on their value at the custom-house on landing. Our trunks and baggage were not inspected.

It is three weeks to-day since we first came ashore. I have just been calculating our items of expenditure, and find that the average outlay during this time for provisions was 4s. each, or 8s. a-week. This was exclusively for victuals, and does not include other necessary expenses. Ale and porter, with wines and spirits, are all high priced here, yet numbers of our party of emigrants are so foolish as to go to the inns, night after night, for their tumbler of ale, and occasionally they stayed so late as to be paying 5s. a bottle for brandy. Of course, the publicans have got none of our money, and I am sure our health is none the worse on that account. Living would be cheap here, were it not for the high price of bread. It is commonly baked into six-penny loaves, but, looking at weight and quality, I believe it is more than double the price it was in Scotland when we left. Butcher meat, at least beef, is very cheap — boiling beef 2d., roasting do. 2½d., and the best steaks 3d. a pound. We have a steak at least once a day to our coffee, and rice and pumpkin being reasonable, we have a good soup to dinner, when convenient to make it. Tea costs from 3s. to 4s. a pound; but we generally prefer coffee, which is to be had, of excellent quality, at 1s. a pound. The sugar is coarse, and costs at present from 4d. to 5d. per pound, or about its price at home; but several ships, laden with that commodity, being daily expected from the Mauritius, it is likely soon to be lowered in price. Potatoes are, strange to say, very scarce, and bring about 65s. a boll, or 1d. and 1½d. per pound. Mealies, or Indian corn, beans, oats, potatoes, etc. are sold here by the *muid*, which is about 3 bushels, or from 160 to 180 pounds. There are a great number of general stores, as they are called, in the town; but few, if any, make a trade in one particular line. There is no stationer or bookseller, though I think there might be demand enough in that business.

April 10, 1850.

Some of our party have returned from Pietermaritzburg, after a short sojourn about the capital. They describe the country as hilly or undulating all the way, and the waggon-road rather steep and circuitous. Maritzburg is beautifully situated on each side of a branch of the Umgeni, and connected by two bridges. The streets are regular, and much better built than at D'Urban and, the town being surrounded with hills at no great distance, it has a handsome appearance. There is not much stir about it; the people seeming to be idling and living on their money, rather than earning it. The land is of excellent quality around; but the want of wood near the town, both for building and fuel, is felt as a serious inconvenience. Agriculture there, as here, is yet in its infant state, little land being under cultivation. They went and saw the land which we left Scotland with the intention of occupying, but which former emigrants refused to accept. They liked the appearance of the land very much, but those who could judge declared it to be generally unsuitable for the intended purposes, owing to the scarcity of wood and water. Some of them saw Mr. J. E[llis],¹⁴ who left L. last year, and who is

following his trade in the neighbourhood of Maritzburg. One of his sisters is keeping house to General Boys,¹⁵ the interim Governor of Natal. Mr. E. has bought a farm, or rather an estate, of nearly 3000 acres, about 30 miles beyond Maritzburg, price £150, and which he intends shortly to occupy. I could not learn anything of the D.s from —, but the letter I carried was sent to them. So much for ‘news from Maritzburg’.

We have had several meetings of the emigrants, and some correspondence with Mr. Moodie, the Secretary of Government, Mr. Moreland, &c., and we expect the land question to be settled shortly.

My job at the shore was finished yesterday; and, as it is now useless and expensive living here, we intend to hire a waggon some day this week, and go on the land, where we can squat, and put in our potatoes and seeds. We had a letter from Mr. Roberts,¹⁶ London, to Mr. Moreland, and he advises us to go, offering to give us the land which the Cotton Company had ploughed before, in which we can plant our seeds, and get a crop, and one of the huts beside it to live in, if there is an empty one. By taking a quantity of staple provisions with us, it is said we can live cheaper there than here; and it will be an adventure to be near the land, and acquainted with it, when it is ready for our selection.

Thursday morning, April 11.

We have engaged a waggon at 30s. which will convey us and the most of our luggage, we expect, to the Cotton lands: it is to start about mid-day. I intended at first to post this before going up the country, but, as I understand there will be no mail or ship to the Cape with letters for some weeks to come, I think it better to take it with me, and bring it to the Post-office the first time father or I come down to D’Urban. I can then tell you a little of the land in the interior.

Mr. B[yrne] has sent out by the *Edward*, just arrived, an excellent surf boat of 40 tons for the landing of emigrants and luggage.

The entrance to the bay continues to improve, and ships are coming in and out every week with freedom.

*Hut on the Cotton Company’s Land, Banks of the Umhloti,
Saturday, April 13, 1850.*

My Dear Friends,—We arrived here safely last evening, and have established ourselves in one of the best huts, almost close to the river. Our journey was rather adventurous and difficult—for we had our ‘perils by the way’ as well as Paul — but, thank Providence, we escaped all injury.

We left D’Urban about noon on Thursday, mounted on the top of our luggage, in an open waggon. The distance from the town to the Umgeni — which, in the Caffre, signifies ‘river of alligators’ — cannot be more than 2½ miles. The lower drift, or ford, is close to the sea, where the river mouth is of considerable breadth, and is therefore easier crossed, except when the tide is in. As no rain had fallen for some days, our waggon-driver judged the river to be passable at the middle drift, and, as we proceeded thither, I saw

blocks of freestone, of hard quality, but not unsuitable for bridge or house building, jutting out of the hill by the roadside. Entering the river by a very steep bank, we found it deeper and heavier than we had imagined. We had only got a short distance, with the water up to the bottom of the waggon, when the oxen stopped, and seemed unable to get on farther. All the efforts of the leader and the driver, both of whom were Caffres, to get the oxen forward, were unavailing, as, unfortunately, they had to pull against the stream, which, though seemingly smooth and dead, was strong and impetuous. Seeing no better resource left, we stripped; and, descending from the waggon, urged on the oxen, till they fortunately gained the opposite side. I have heard of instances of waggoners making their oxen swim across when the river was high, and they getting impatient for its fall: injuring, of course, whatever was in the waggon, and sometimes getting their goods floated away altogether. As there is now no small traffic across, a bridge would be very desirable: but, as the river rises occasionally high, and the banks are rather flat, it would not be very easy of construction. Judging from its appearance and channel, it seems to have ordinarily more water than the Almond, but less than the Tay at Dunkeld. For a considerable distance inland, it has a soft, sandy bottom, which is constantly shifting. The water is always of excellent quality, and is used by the military and others at D'Urban. From the river to the town, on the north side, there is a hollow, through which, I believe, it would not be very difficult to lead the Umgeni, or part of it, into the bay, where it might be of much service. For the first few miles, after crossing the river, our road was over grassy knolls and through thick bush, but afterwards the prospects grew more open and beautiful. At the side of the track, in a bushy part, the driver pointed out the recent footprints of an elephant: they were of large size, and deeply indented in the ground. There are said to be many of them in the bushy district of Natal; but they generally manage, somehow, to keep out of the sight and reach of the 'lords of the creation'.

Hut on the Northern Bank of the Umhloti, April 21.

My Dear Friends, — I long to ask for the welfare of you all, and to tell you of ours. Distance forbids our hearing from you, and time may long roll on without bearing tidings to one another. I enclose you half-a-dozen small sheets, made up of occasional notes, in which I have purposely avoided speaking of home thoughts and personalities. I miss much the friendly correspondence which used to be a source of such pleasure to me in Scotland. It is my intention to continue to write, as I find occasion, this sort of fireside chat about ourselves, *our country*, etc., and send it to friends in Scotland, who I know, will listen with pleasure to a 'voice from Africa'. My next will contain all particulars of the choice of our land, and the progress of our seeds. I may only say, that the more I have seen of the climate, soil, and capabilities of this country, my opinion of it is the more favorable, though it is farther behind in improvement than I expected. The coloured people are an inoffensive race, and no one seems to have any fear of them.

May 2, 1850.

During the last two or three weeks, we have been busy putting in our seeds, &c. One of the huts beside us is occupied by Mr. G., who turns out to be a cousin's son of the poet-preacher. He shares with us a bag of Cape oats and a bag of beans, which we are putting in here to get one crop before we get on our own land. He bought a span of six oxen, and we work together. We are more comfortable here than, in the circumstances, you would imagine, and live, though simply, better than we usually did in Scotland. Except the occupants of three or four huts beside us, we rarely see a white face, yet I do not weary much; and when, at the mid-day rest or with the evening lamp, I can get an hour or two to the *Book of Scottish Song*, *Chambers's Information for the People*, or my letters to my dear friends in Scotland, I am as happy as my wont.

I believe a lodging-house at D'Urban would be a paying concern, even though rents are high. If a person had the means to purchase an erven [sic], or town lot, and build a house on it for that purpose, it would be a profitable investment.

As to the inducements to others to come out, circumstances change so rapidly here that little definite can be said. To farm to advantage in this country, as at home, requires some capital. If a person had £100, or even £50, with which to stock and set agoing, he might get plenty of suitable land, and a good return. Farms of any extent and quality may be rented on a short lease, from 3d. to 1s. an acre, or bought from 6d. to 5s., and that in any district of Natal. Such men as ——, who would not grudge to 'put their shoulders to the wheel', and work themselves as an example and encouragement to the Caffres, would certainly have a good chance of success. Wheat and other grains are likely to grow well, but in most of the districts they have scarcely been tried, and seed can hardly be procured.

Servants' wages are certainly high about the bay, and there was a brisk demand for them when our ship came in; but, so far as I can learn, the demand is not so general but that it might be more than met by a few arrivals of emigrant ships. As great numbers are now settling on the land, and the population of town and village rapidly increasing, servants will by and by be in more extensive request. So soon as a Briton has got settled down with anything like comfort, he will seek such assistance and attendance as he has been accustomed to employ at home, in preference to the cheap but unskilful service of the natives.

The demand for ploughmen and farm-labourers is as yet limited, and may be said to be just beginning. Tradesmen will do well here, and when districts are more thickly peopled, they will do better.

May 10, 1850.

We have at length, my dear friends, got an opportunity of choosing our land, but which will not be surveyed into lots, and ready for our occupation, for some time. We have got our 90 acres on the banks of the Umhloti, eight or nine miles from the sea, and six miles further up than our present location. A stream runs by or through the land to the Umhloti.

[Here the series ends.]

Edinburgh: Printed by J. Hogg.

Notes

1. The *Ina* was the first ship of the Byrne emigration scheme to sail from Glasgow. She carried 120 people made up of 76 adults and 40 children. Her date of sailing from the port of Greenock was 30 November 1849 and she arrived on 8 March 1850. Later, a second shipload of Scots emigrants arrived by the *Conquering Hero* on 28 June 1850. She also sailed from the Clyde.
2. Sidney Smith was the author of *Whether to Go, and Whither? or, the Cape and the Great South Land*. According to a footnote in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, vol. 2, 1849, the book was 'a useful and extremely well-written shilling pamphlet'.
3. John Moreland, the Byrne settler agent, built various wooden and thatched huts as temporary accommodation for the emigrants. Thomas Duff and his father lived in the 'barracks' for single men from March 25 until April 11 1850 when they moved to their plots on the late Cotton Company's land.
4. The prefix *um* indicates that the word belongs to the first of six noun classes. It has no meaning on its own.
5. Rev. W. H. C. Lloyd.
6. The Natal Cotton Company was established in April 1847 by the Cape Town businessman Edward Chiappini and others. The company was wound up in 1850 and the land, 22 750 acres on the Umhloti and Tongaat rivers, was repossessed by the Colonial government and later sold to Byrne & Co. The agent Moreland settled many emigrants at Verulam, Mount Moreland, and New Glasgow, the villages which he laid out on this land.
7. The Rev. J. J. Freeman of the London Missionary Society, author of *A tour in South Africa, with notices of Natal, Mauritius, Madagascar, Ceylon, Egypt, and Palestine*, (1851).
8. Here Duff refers to Natal sores, a complaint more serious than he realised.
9. John Milne, an emigrant by the *Dreadnought*, was the first harbour engineer to attempt to remove the notorious sand bar across the entrance of Port Natal.
10. Hardy Wells, Esq., who visited Natal between November 1849 and February 1850. A later attempt to engage a professional consultant resulted in Captain James Vetch, Admiralty hydrographer, constructing a badly designed pier in 1859 on the South Beach, Durban. Two or three gales destroyed it. Its foundation is still visible at low water.
11. Jonas Bergtheil set up a successful settlement at New Germany, 12 km west of Durban, in 1848. He brought out 189 emigrants to grow cotton. The scheme failed but the settlers were successful with other crops. In his old age the settlers sent messages of gratitude to Bergtheil for establishing the community in Natal.
12. The Rev. C. W. Posselt, minister at New Germany, published *The Zulu Companion, offered to the Natal colonist, to facilitate his intercourse with the natives*. Pietermaritzburg, D. D. Buchanan, 1850.
13. George C. Cato, known as 'King' Cato (1814-93), came to Natal in 1839 and was regarded by the settlers as the most knowledgeable person in Port Natal. It was his surf boats that brought the Byrne settlers and their baggage from the outer anchorage. His charges were somewhat high.
14. James Ellis (1806-87), a carpenter who emigrated by the *Henry Tanner* in October 1849. He was accompanied by his sisters Elizabeth and Helen. The former became housekeeper to Col. Boys.
15. Between the time of Lieut.-Governor Martin West's death and the arrival of his replacement, Benjamin C. C. Pine in 1850, Colonel E. F. Boys, officer commanding the 45th Regiment, was acting-governor of Natal.
16. Thomas Roberts, chief clerk to Joseph C. Byrne & Co., handled the business of the London office during the absence of his employer.