

NATAL: 1846 - 1851

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MORE THAN forty-four years have passed away since, in December, 1846, I landed in Natal. Notwithstanding the long lapse of time it is not difficult to remember, it would be almost impossible to forget, many of my first experiences and impressions. The inhabitants were at that time so few, their circumstances so little favoured by fortune, the local events of the period have left so little trace on the position of the Colony at this day, and intercourse with the world beyond its borders was so restricted, that any account of things as I found them can only have the interest that may attach to what was very novel and unusual, and to a comparison of the deficiencies in the past with the measure of success attained at the present day.

The new country was almost a desert; and it may be well to advert at the outset to the first thing noticed by a new comer—the paucity or absence of population in a land the beautiful aspect of which bespoke its being rich in natural advantages.

There were few English residents then or for some years later, and these were nearly all at D'Urban, a remnant of the adventurous men who had come during the preceding twenty years as explorers, or for the sake of sport or profit in the destruction of elephants, then numerous, now never seen, in the woods near the coast; or to deal with the Zulus in furs or ivory. Three or four mercantile men were watching events that might favour commercial enterprise. D'Urban had not then more than two hundred inhabitants, in cottages far apart from each other on the site of the now well-built seaport town.

The African-Dutch inhabitants, always spoken of as “Afrikanders” or “boers”, were more numerous, but none lived at D'Urban. Their only possessions were their flocks and herds, and they believed the coast to be less favourable to the health of stock than the higher country inland. They were with few exceptions the descendants of a pastoral and nomadic people who for nearly a hundred and fifty years had occupied first the central, then the northern, portion of South African territory, subject until 1806 to Holland, and since then to England. A large proportion of these boers, seeking new pastures, crossed the borders of the Cape Colony in 1835 and 1836, and wandered far and wide north of the Orange River. In 1838 very many of these came over the mountain range of the Drakensberg. After deducting the number treacherously slain by Dingaan, there were probably not fewer than 3,500 who occupied Natal. Their position here being regarded by the British Government as likely to lead to disturbance with tribes in the neighbourhood of the Kaffrarian frontier, it was thought expedient to insist on their submission to our authority. They submitted in August, 1842; but within two or three years nearly half of the boers, dissatisfied with their condition and averse to our rule, withdrew into the tracts now known as the Free State and Transvaal, where many of their countrymen already were. The rest, with the exception of about 300 who remained at Pietermaritzburg were dispersed over

the face of the district. In some few instances, two or three families, influenced by a feeling of insecurity in absolute solitude, built their cottages near the homestead of a friend or relative. This, however, gave the neighbourhood an even more deserted appearance than it would otherwise have had. The grants of land that had been allotted by the Volksraad, in 1839-1840, not only to every boer, but to each of his sons who had attained the age of manhood, even though he might still continue to share his father's abode, were each of an area of 8,000 acres; and, when the owners settled themselves on property not their own, these large extents remained wholly unoccupied.'

Then there were the Kafirs. The country had for very many generations been occupied by tribes that kept themselves separate, but between whom there had rarely been any keen feeling of hostility. Tshaka, early in the century, having repeatedly invaded Natal and killed countless thousands of natives, at length expelled all the survivors, and kept the territory vacant. After his death, Dingaan had allowed a number, about 3,000, to attach themselves to the English at D'Urban, to whom they were in many ways useful, and who protected them. These lived in the neighbourhood, within a radius of a few miles from the port. When Dingaan had been defeated by the boers and then assassinated by a treacherous follower, about 100,000 kafirs came back to Natal, not all at once, but as occasion from time to time favoured the return of several fragments of tribes; and, perhaps because the boers claimed all the open country, more probably because the sufferings they had undergone made them prefer to hold themselves aloof, and remain as much as possible unseen and unnoticed, they chose the very broken tracts, almost fastnesses, that still form the greater part of the kafir locations. A stranger might not even hear of these: I did not, for some time after my arrival.

In 1842, Natal had become virtually subject to British power, but three years passed before initial steps were taken to establish a regular government. It was not then a colony even in name, but a district of the Cape; and the inhabitants being so few, though the necessity for supervision and for an occasional exercise of authority had for some time been felt, there could be but little public business, and the arrangements for its transaction were very simple. Commerce had scarcely begun to exist, there was little of export, little that could be subject to taxation. There was no revenue, and in every thing Natal was dependent on the parent colony. The Cape itself had little superfluous wealth, and when it was considered indispensable to appoint a few officials here, their numbers were limited as much as possible, and no more of emolument fell to their lot than sufficed for the most modest maintenance. A port-captain and collector of customs had from the first been stationed at D'Urban. Lieutenant-Governor Martin West arrived in December, 1845. The recorder, the colonial secretary, the diplomatic agent (in charge of native affairs), the surveyor-general, and the crown-prosecutor, came either with Mr. West or nearly at the same time.

Pietermaritzburg had been the seat of government under the Volksraad, and remained so under the English. The site had been well chosen. It was not quite the centre of the district, but had such an extent of level ground or gentle slope as would not easily be found elsewhere in a very hilly country; and quite spacious enough for a city that might in days to come contain hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. It had been well laid out in 1839. The streets were to be broad, and all at right angles to each other. In 1846, there were not more than seventy or eighty cottages. There had been no construction of any roadway in the streets,



A view of Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, in the 1880s from the corner of Timber Street looking towards the Presbyterian Church and Market Square. This is the main street as John Bird knew it. The central building in the picture contained the early municipal offices. The unpaved street is rutted by wagon-wheels. On the pavement can be seen two hitching-rails.

(Photo by courtesy, Director, Natal Museum)



John Bird, b. April 18, 1815. d. May 28, 1896

(Photo by courtesy of his grandson, Mr A. C. Mitchell)



The old Colonial Office building in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, where John Bird worked in various capacities during his career. The building was demolished in 1897 to make way for the existing Colonial Buildings on the same site.

(Photo by courtesy, Director, Natal Museum)



An interior view of a room in the old Colonial Office showing John Bird's son Christopher, principal under-secretary, at his desk. He appears to be writing with a form of quill-pen. By the side of his bentwood chair is a brass spittoon. This picture was taken in 1897.

(Photo by courtesy, Director, Natal Museum)

which were not mac-adamized or otherwise hardened, and were overgrown by rank grass, except where it had been cleared away to a breadth of ten or twelve feet by the frequent passage of heavy wagons. Here and there two or three little dwellings were near enough to each other to give some indication of the direction of the streets, which, however, was made more noticeable by rows of seringa-trees planted at their edges, and which had grown rapidly. But for these trees, every town in its first stage would have a similar appearance to that of our city in 1846. A traveller in America might almost at any time during the last fifty years, have seen a few houses dotted, just as they were here, over the space destined to be occupied by buildings and a dense population. But there would be this great difference in the cases. Time could not be given there for a growth of trees; our cousins beyond the Atlantic would not even have allowed the grass to grow. Here things had remained in outline for nearly seven years, and were destined so to continue for some years more.

As before noticed there were between two and three hundred "Afrikander" inhabitants in the town, whom difference of language and less cultivated habits separated from the English: but there was no aversion between them. The boers disliked the government, but bore no grudge to individuals merely because they were not of their own race; and were quite ready to oblige and be useful to them.

The position of the English in Pietermaritzburg was indeed singular and unusual. With exceptions so few that they need scarcely be adverted to, their number consisted wholly of the civil servants and their families. In the strange land and in very new surroundings they necessarily became intimate, meeting daily in friendly intercourse. Some years passed before the circle of acquaintance became widened by the influx of immigrants from England, and intimacies grew more restricted. The garrison—an infantry regiment—was quartered on a hill at a short distance from the town. Beyond the precincts of Fort Napier, the officers could have no association except with the civilians, and they soon took their part in social amenities. But even with this addition from the garrison there were not more than fifty or sixty English residents.

Amusements were few—no theatre—no opera. A carriage, a gig, a spring-cart, were unknown luxuries. But, thrown on their own resources, they made the most of the little at their command. The regimental band often placed its melody at their disposal. In more than one home there was no lack of musical ability; and at least in one there was an excellent library. But the chief pastime was riding. Every one rode. Horses cost little. Their provender was procurable from natives at an almost nominal price. To the men, sport in quest of the antelope was within easy reach on horseback. The most frequent and enjoyable diversion was the afternoon ride, and in this the fair sex took quite an equal share. But a journey to any distance was attended with some difficulty to a lady. If for instance any thing made it indispensably necessary for her to travel to D'Urban, a distance of fifty-four miles, the ox-wagon was the only mode of conveyance:—the strong wagon without springs, jolting heavily, which has been fitly called the "pioneer of civilization": for it had carried the boers for some generations in their wanderings in every direction, before roads existed; and every site in the interior of southern Africa that has attracted commerce and social institutions owes its discovery to them. Long practice had taught the wanderers to construct the wagon firmly and symmetrically. Exposed in the wilds to inclement weather, great heat, mud and dust, it had a rude appearance: but the boer in the town kept his wagon clean, neatly painted, covered with a white well-shaped tilt, impervious to rain or

sunshine; and he allowed it to be used at a moderate charge by any one who needed it. It was drawn by twelve handsome oxen, but was slow in its progress. The distance to D'Urban is now traversed by the train in five hours; but the wagon could not reach its destination in less than three days and a half. There was but one roadside cottage in all the length of the fifty-four miles. For the fair traveller, therefore, her meals had to be prepared and taken in the open air, when at intervals the journey was interrupted to give rest to the oxen and set them free to roam for an hour in the abundant pasture everywhere adjoining the road. Usually a sister or lady friend travelled with her, and for their rest at night a feather-bed was spread in the wagon. A protector, her father, husband, or brother, always accompanied her, and a tent was pitched for his use at the evening "outspan". The driver and leader screened themselves, as best they might, under the wagon. There was something rude, and much of discomfort in such a journey; but necessity, the hard task-master, would make no distinction between the mode of travelling of the nomadic boer and that of the gentlewoman. It was of course much more often necessary for men to go to and fro between the town and port. They always did so on horseback, and a kafir porter was sent in advance to carry the indispensable carpet bag, and await the traveller's arrival.

Novelty and an absence of many of the restraints imposed by crowded civilization may have compensated the residents for some disadvantages; but a sense of isolation was kept alive by the difficulty of communication with the outer world. Used as we now are to receiving letters brought in less than a month by weekly mail steamers, and to less regular intelligence that may arrive by numerous other ships; knowing daily, often hourly, by the instantaneous telegram, the principal events of each day in other lands; and also, in any special emergency, occurrences of a private nature that may affect the friends from whom we are separated, it may easily be imagined how sensibly the pain of remoteness was felt, when only once in a month or six weeks¹ a letter would be delivered here, which, however important it might be that news should come soon, had not been less than three or four months on its transit by sea.

But, whatever may have been the attractions or discomforts of life in the little town, it was not my privilege at first to share them for more than a few days. I had been sent by the Cape Government to be employed on the survey of the country, and very soon received the surveyor-general's instructions to commence my work at the Bushman's River, sixty miles further inland, in a part of the district of which Estcourt has since become the centre.

The preparations for my journey were soon made. I had to adopt the mode of travelling before described. The wagon carried my baggage. I rode beside, or a little in advance of it. The simple bell-tent was my habitation at night. There was no risk of missing the way, the only track being that by which the boers had originally come from the Drakensberg near the source of the Tugela. No dwellings were in sight from the road; I met no one, spoke to no one, till I halted, at the end of the fourth day at the Bushman's River, where two boer families had taken up their abode.

The loneliness of the journey is not the only thing that the traveller would not now notice. The rivers have all been bridged. It is no longer necessary on arriving at the banks of a stream to know whether or not it had more than its ordinary volume of water, to ascertain its depth, to find where its bed is shallow and free from rocky unevenness. The scenery is still attractive, often beautiful. From the summit of a hill or rising ground, the sight of the great chain of western moun-

tains must always be imposing. But, whether because the country has now been long the pasture-land of numerous flocks and herds, or from a decrease in the annual rainfall, as is the belief of all still living who were here in 1845-1846,² it is certain that the growth of grass is no longer so luxuriant nor so brightly green as it was then. The view, however, would now only beguile the time and be interesting to one who had not often to travel in that direction. Whether by train or carriage the object is only to traverse a certain distance and reach a special locality. In the early days, it being quite certain that the wagon would not move on at a rate a little more rapid than two miles an hour, an agreeable distraction was far more necessary; and it was at once afforded. Natal having been long uninhabited, game of every kind had multiplied without let or hindrance. It was so abundant that the love of sport was roused in almost every one not too old for active enjoyment. Man must originally have been a hunter; and the instinct remains. It is seldom quite dormant, and is usually stirred with no little keenness in the young and strong, when opportunity prompts and favours the excitement. Often, before the European population had increased, and the first settlers had found it a wise economy not to lessen the increase of their flocks by slaughtering them, but rather to supply household needs by the use of their guns; often, in riding from Pietermaritzburg to the Umgeni, a distance of fourteen miles, have I seen as many as twenty or thirty "orobis" (the antelopes most prized by the sportsman), that started up here and there singly or in pairs, alarmed by the pattering of the horses' hoofs on the hard road. How many more must have lain hid in the rank grass all over the face of the country. Absolutely countless numbers! At the present day one may traverse the fields in every direction, yet, even with the help of hound, pointer, or other finder, perhaps not a single antelope will be seen.

My arrival at Bushman's River was of direct utility to the boers, and was soon generally known. Living at distances of five or ten miles apart, they yet visited each other frequently. Whether to prevent their herds from straying too far, or in pursuit of game, or to while away unoccupied time, their lives may be said to have been spent on horseback. This very much promoted companionship with friends and acquaintances whose abodes were far beyond the range of a pleasant walk. By men in the saddle any "bit of news" was at once and quickly divulged. The commencement of the survey was an important item of intelligence. Soon all knew that at last maps and diagrams would be available, on which the issue of their title-deeds depended. To those who had no wish to leave the country, again to wander in the wilds, these deeds would give a sense of secure possession which they had long wished for; to others, and they were the more numerous, who disliked the fetter of government and contact with civilization, the title in due form would make it more easy to dispose of their claims to land; for from the first there were a few speculators who would give a moderate, very moderate, price for property of which the value might, or might not, at a future time become considerable.

A sketch may very properly be given here of the circumstances that had influenced the character and habits of the boers in a generation that has now passed away. Information on this subject may of course be very copiously found in any history of the Cape colony, but the reference would be an interruption, and the narrative I am now giving would be less clear without a brief mention of antecedent occurrences.

The African colonists, from the date of their earliest settlement at the Cape, in

1652, had been ill-used by the Dutch government. The ruling power in Holland had induced them to leave their mother-country, not with any view to their own benefit, but to make them useful in providing supplies for the shipping engaged in the important commerce with eastern regions. The settlers toiled hard, but could earn little by their labour. They were not allowed to make any remunerative charge for their produce; it could only be sold at the very low price fixed by the government. This could not but be felt as oppressive. It was endured for a while, and then they began to withdraw from the neighbourhood of Cape Town, and to restrict themselves to providing only for their own sustenance. They became almost at once a pastoral people. A few were agriculturists, and from these the corn for daily bread was sent for, often from long distances, by their unsettled countrymen. Passing over the range of mountains stretching from beyond Stellenbosch to Cape Hanglip, they withdrew gradually—and almost exactly in proportion to the efforts made by the government to overtake and keep them subject to control—into remote inland tracts. The migration began a little before the year 1700. They came of course in contact with natives who resented their intrusion, and sought to check it by robbery, sometimes by sudden and murderous attacks. But fire-arms made it easy for the boers to subdue or destroy a people armed only with the spear or bow, of whom the survivors, if Hottentots, became servants, virtually in a condition of slavery; if Bushmen, withdrew into the fastnesses and caves of the mountains. There were always among the “Afrikanders”, a few, who, disinclined to constant wandering, and finding here and there a spot of inviting fertility, gave up an unsettled mode of life, tilled the soil, and lived in houses, or cottages. The rest had huts of the simplest construction, the sides and roof being of reeds or rushes with wooden supports or poles. Such an abode often sheltered them for many years, but might be quitted without loss when the owners felt the impulse of a love of change and of seeking more distant solitude.³ Then for a while the wagon and the tent became their domicile, the tent being usually a canvas awning thrown over the tilt of the wagon and stretched on upright props at either side. As the agricultural boers by degrees became more numerous, villages of very insignificant proportions sprang up here and there; and in these a magistrate, known as the “Landdrost”, was appointed by the authorities at the Cape. Little power as the magistrate might have, his appointment was the signal to the greater number of the shepherd-boers to stray farther away, and to shun all intercourse with the villages, except such as was indispensable for obtaining clothing and other necessaries; and once or twice in a year they would repair to the shop or store, spending perhaps a month in their slow journey, going and returning. Ultimately, when the country had become a British possession, and when the “voor-trekker”—a name literally rendered “the foremost in the march”—by which those were spoken of who led the way into remoteness, had reached the Orange River and the limit of the eastern frontier, they came in contact with the Kafirs, who were both more numerous and more warlike than the aboriginal tribes they had before met, who resented intrusion more resolutely, who stole more numerous from their flocks, and on whom the English government would not permit them to make the same exterminating retaliation as they had found expedient in dealing with the Hottentots and Bushmen. Their aversion to any authority other than that of leaders chosen by themselves then reached its highest point, for the two-fold reason that they believed themselves to be wronged, and that they were thus wronged by those who had no national sympathies with them. A general exodus was resolved upon. Of their

venturous advance not unattended with some loss into Moselikatzé's (Umsiligazi's) country, of their first entry into Natal and their honest endeavour to acquire the country by a cession willingly agreed to by Dingaan, of the terrible and calamitous loss of numbers inflicted on them by his perfidious midnight assault, of their ultimate triumph over the Zulus, their submission to England, and their subsequent withdrawal in large numbers into the interior, nearly every history of events in South Africa, and quite recently the graphic and agreeable volume, "The Land and its Story", have given an account. All tell the varied tale of hazard, suffering, and success. It is obvious that experiences such as these, prolonged through four or five generations, could not fail to affect, and even to mould, the character of the African boers. An independent spirit, a power of endurance gained from being used to privations and hardships, courage stimulated by danger, self-reliance by frequent triumph over difficulties, became inherent and general among them. Their love of liberty, bordering on licence, might suggest that there would be a tendency in them to somewhat general lawlessness, but the inference would not be well founded. They felt that those whom they had chosen to be their leaders had been selected for the purpose of giving time and thought to general interests which individual action without guidance might have obstructed; and the patriarchal men so chosen were always treated with deference, and their injunctions were very generally respected.

The loss of life and property inflicted on them by the aborigines at every stage of their advance into the wilds, had induced them to consider these as having little, if any, claim to sympathy. No inward consciousness seems ever to have whispered that they, the boers, having from the very first—except in the single instance of their strictly equitable dealings with Dingaan—been intruders into the country, had also virtually been the primary cause of the misfortunes that had befallen them. Dangers often shared, brave efforts often made to assist or defend others, had inspired in each a true regard for his fellows, a conviction that no other human beings were their equals, and, in not a few, an actual belief that they were in the scriptural sense "a chosen people". Seclusion from civilization had stood in the way of any comparison of their own merits or demerits with those of other nations. It had also deprived them of any but the most rudimental instruction. Their attainments did not reach beyond the first four rules of arithmetic. But the parental care which had enabled them all to read, and, with very rare exceptions, to write, must have been general, and, in their desolate position, very praiseworthy. Books, even if they had known their nature or cared to have them, could only have been procured with so much difficulty as placed them practically out of reach. Bibles, however,—and this was due to the solicitude of Dutch-reformed ministers, who occasionally undertook long and difficult journeys to visit them—were to be found in every household, and were assiduously read with reverence and earnestness by old and young.

Since 1850, I have seldom conversed, and have had little intercourse, with any of the boers, and have not been in a position to judge personally what mental change or wider range of knowledge or ideas a succeeding generation may have gained from the frequent presence among them of many of better education, their countrymen from the Cape and its vicinity, as well as men of other nationalities, who have visited or settled in the Free State and Transvaal, where nearly all the descendants of the original emigrants now form the "Afrikander" population. Probably almost certainly their general characteristics are unchanged.

But they are not in the same simple and poverty-stricken condition in which I found the boers in the beginning of 1847. Their abodes were then of rude construction. Necessity had taught them to have few wants, and these were supplied by the cultivation of vegetables, and of a little wheat, and the annual increase of their cattle and horses; but the increase though not inconsiderable afforded very scanty means of procuring even ordinary comfort. There was as yet no market: the demand for their produce or stock was limited to the requirements for the maintenance at the seat of government of a single regiment of infantry and a troop of cavalry. The sum so expended, divided among the rural population, could hardly more than suffice for the purchase of a few indispensable commodities. This notwithstanding, there was an attention to neatness that could not but be noticed by a stranger; and their hospitality, though simple and inexpensive, was offered in a very frank spirit to those who sought or needed it.

Any one who had seen much of their countrymen in the Cape colony could not but observe a difference in the appearance and bearing of those who had emigrated. Though resolute and self-reliant, they had something of dejection in their aspect, which may have been wholly due to the want of prosperity and the absence, as yet, of any bright promise in the future. But it was probably also caused by their experience of reverses, and very specially by the memory of the still somewhat recent disaster of 11th February, 1838, when a contingent of Dingaan's army came stealthily upon them in the dead of the night, and killed very many men, women and children. The number has been variously estimated at from five hundred to seven hundred: either number constituted a large proportion of all who had crossed the Drakensberg. Nearly all who escaped, or who had been at a distance from the encampment that was attacked, had to deplore the death, under circumstances of singular cruelty, of friends or relatives, murdered as they lay in their beds, or stabbed, as, starting from their sleep, they struggled to rush away. Remembrance of the calamity was kept alive in many ways. It often formed a subject for discourse when a traveller came among them. The names given to several localities were so many echoes that recalled the event. It had occurred in the immediate neighbourhood of the part of the district in which I first met the boers. At a distance of five miles there was the "Moordspruit"—the "rivulet of murder". In another direction, a little farther away, the site of a village, showing as yet little sign of occupation, had been marked out; and to this the name of "Weenen", *i.e.*, "lamentation", had been given; and many a spot in the direction of the Little Tugela was connected with some specially afflicting incident. In the "Annals of Natal", there are several graphic narratives of the events of the night of 11th February. These are written in artless and almost rude language, a defect much less observed in a translation, but which in itself lends impressiveness to the original. One from the pen of Charl Celliers, another written by Daniel Bezuidenhout, are full of stirring interest. A third, a letter written to her relatives by Elizabeth Steenkamp is womanly and much the most affecting.

It was only during the preparations for the survey, and whilst the work at the outset was in the neighbourhood of the two homesteads at Bushman's River, that I saw a few of the Afrikanders collectively and often. As the triangulation extended and receded into distance, only one or two would come once a week to set up the beacon points of land to which they had a claim. Once a month the "Fieldcornet", who had been some years previously appointed under the Volks-

raad to apportion the extents originally allotted to the claimants, came to me with a few attendants to point out the landmarks.

My mode of life "under canvas" was in nearly every respect that of any traveller or sportsman who had to spend some time in the wilds. The chief difference would be in the length of the time. His excursion was seldom for a longer period than a few weeks; but my sojourn in tents lasted for four years. No one now visiting the same tracks would find game in the same profusion: he might see none. Nor could he now be in the same lonely seclusion: some dwelling, some fellow-mortal would be near. He would not have to be upon his guard against danger, which, if not actually threatening, could not be regarded as remote or unlikely to occur. Every year, when the winter set in—it is more severe in the higher region beyond the borders than within the district—great numbers of quaggas and of various kinds of antelopes that may properly be classed as deer, came over the mountain range into the lower and warmer country and were followed by lions that more than satisfied the craving of hunger by devouring the weaker creatures. Springbuck and elands are now seldom seen, and the quaggas have wholly disappeared. This, however, has been much less due to their destruction by the fiercer animals than to the guns of the Afrikanders in the Free State and Transvaal. The skin of the gnu is easily converted into leather, not of excellent quality, but by no means valueless. It became an article of commerce, and hundreds of thousands of skins were for some years annually exported. This of course would come to an end. The abundance of prey made the lion of South Africa far less formidable to man than its fellow in Numidia, which being a starveling never spares a human being in the desert; whereas here it was commonly noted that the lion seldom molested men unless it were in some way irritated. The king of beasts would watch and rush upon the wild herd at night, but during the day kept out of sight in his lair on the skirt of a wood, or in long sedge or rushes at the edge of a brook. The owners of cattle seldom lost any by his depredations, if they kept their stock at night near their homesteads, where the wakeful dogs would give warning of his approach. Nevertheless it was obviously wise to guard against risk. The sportsman at his out-span would have his oxen driven up before daylight disappeared, and secured by being tied to the drag-chain of the wagon, and his faithful guards, the hounds or pointers, would give any necessary warning during the night. It was usual, whenever there was reason to suppose that a leopard, or hyena,⁴ or lion, was near, to have lights in every tent, in the belief, probably not without good reason, that the brightness in the dark hour had the effect of keeping fierce creatures away.⁵

From the Free State and Transvaal, chiefly from the latter, small numbers of the Afrikanders have at intervals continued to yield to the roaming propensity of going into tracts more remote not occupied by the white man. Recent rumours make it possible that a considerable exodus is now contemplated, and that perhaps a thousand will soon emigrate northwards. But far the larger proportion of the residents of European descent have acquired landed property, and have so long had the advantage of a permanent abode that the wandering spirit would naturally become less active. The same effect must also in no little measure have been produced by the disappearance of game, which, year by year, made it less easy for a wanderer, always accompanied by his family, to provide for their sustenance in the wilds, or to make sport a daily occupation, to the exclusion of any steady industry.

I had not been more than a few months employed on the survey when events

gave me two unusual opportunities of personally observing and knowing the effect of "a will to wander" on minds ready to obey it. There were many boers in the country around me—two or three hundred were then reckoned to be "not a few"—who were averse to British control, yet wished to remain in the district. The two objects were not attainable without a risk of overt disloyalty; and this, they thought, would be more safe in proportion as they went farther away from the seat of government. They withdrew beyond the Tugela, and occupied the country within our boundary, north of the river. Several of their number had claims there for land allotted to them by the Volksraad. A rumour reached Pietermaritzburg that they were in concert with the Zulus to overrun the colony and drive out the English. How far this may have been true will never be known with certainty. The Zulu King denied it. Governor West informed one of the leaders of the disaffected that the design was known, and that measures would be taken for its frustration. The reply to this was that the rumour was quite unfounded, but that Panda claimed as his own the tract north of the Tugela. In order to leave no room for doubt that the claim did not exist and could not be recognized, I was instructed to make it known that the survey would be proceeded with beyond the Tugela at an early date. In a few weeks (August, 1847), I crossed the Tugela, and in more than one locality met influential boers who were authorized to speak on behalf of their fellows. They left no room for doubt as to their intention of frustrating the purpose contemplated by the government. All were in concert not to accept land-grants that would imply a recognition of territorial authority, and refused unhesitatingly and repeatedly to point out any beacons of the extents allotted by the Volksraad; and without a knowledge of these a survey would be useless. Advice and warning were of no avail; and as a plea that must fully justify them, they insisted on the real or pretended difficulty in which they were placed by Panda's assertion of right to the part of the district since known as the Division of Klip River. I could not do otherwise than report officially that my errand had been a failure. To all appearance disturbances were impending; but the risk passed away. The Lieutenant-Governor issued a proclamation, announcing that no title to land in the Klip River Division would be issued except to claimants who had taken, or would consent to take, the oath of allegiance. To this the disaffected were averse, and towards the close of January, 1848, they quitted Natal, with the intention of settling in vacant tracts beyond the Drakensberg.

On their way, however, they were met by Sir Harry Smith, the Governor of the Cape, who had come overland for the purpose of gaining local information, and forming his own opinion on local matters here. Meeting the boers in rainy weather, and the rain falling in tropical abundance, Sir Harry Smith saw them in a deplorable condition of discomfort, and felt and expressed much commiseration for them, did all he could to soothe them, and promised that if they would return to the district, grants of land should be made to them without any strict or disadvantageous conditions. The greater number returned, but within the next two or three years, many still preferred to be free from control of any kind, and again withdrew beyond the mountains.

My connection with the executive government being limited to a position under the surveyor-general, I had not in remote loneliness, any knowledge of the incidents just mentioned until some time after their occurrence, excepting those with which I had been personally concerned in August, 1847. Early in January, 1848, a boer came from some distance to tell me that reliable information had been re-

ceived that Panda was about to send an army into the district, that it was on its way and at no great distance from the borders; and that the boers were in great alarm, and had resolved to collect their numbers at Doornkop, a little on this side of the Tugela, to form an encampment there, and wait the turn of events; since the government would probably take measures to drive out the savage horde, and the boers would then be able to return to their homesteads in safety; and he insisted urgently that it would be very imprudent to remain alone and defenceless, and that I could not do better than repair to Doornkop. He was evidently in a state of great anxiety, and rode off at speed. I went to the camp at Doornkop. There the usual "laager" had been formed. The wagons were drawn up in square, the poles had been removed so as to admit of the wagons being brought into close contact; an arrangement which made it impossible for men armed only with spears to attack them without heavy loss: the assailants could not prevail against those, though but few, who were in possession of fire-arms, who could scarcely be seen ensconced in their barricade, and by whom they would be shot down almost at discretion. To the "laager" reports were brought from time to time by men, who had been sent, well mounted, to explore the country round. The number of fighting men in the camp was probably about a hundred. During the day, they loitered in or near the enclosure. At night, each wagon gave shelter to a family. Their dwellings in the country round had been left unprotected. Their herds had been driven first to Doornkop, and then into pasture near the mountains, as far as possible from the Zulu boundary. Several days were spent, at first in anxiety, naturally most noticed in the women. This wore away by degrees, as reports did not confirm the approach of danger. Uneasiness gave place to the dreariness of inaction; and then many, about half of the boers returned to their homes; but the remainder chose the road to the mountain-pass, probably knowing that the discontented men in Klip River were at that very time leaving the district. They joined these on their way, and formed part of the multitude met by Sir Harry Smith, and whom he induced to return.

During the twelve months that followed, nothing disquieting took place. Then, however, an aboriginal tribe that many years before had submitted to Tshaka, and had been spared on condition that they should acknowledge him as their monarch and form part of the Zulu people, returned to Natal. They certainly had no hostile intention, but settled themselves on vacant ground where their forefathers had lived, perhaps for ages, before Tshaka's invasion. But though the space they came to was unoccupied, and no indication had warned them that they were trespassing on private rights, it included several grants of land since allotted to the Afrikander population. These reported and complained of the intrusion. But the natives, having lost no time in erecting their huts—simple structures of laths and bulrushes—were disinclined to remove, and remained on the disputed ground. It became necessary for the government to intervene, and the diplomatic agent (Mr.—now Sir Theophilus Shepstone) was sent with a detachment of native police to insist on their removal. In order to obviate any risk of resistance, he called upon some of the native chiefs living in locations near the border to send armed contingents that should act under his directions. I heard of his coming and of its purpose, and met him near the Klip River. It was then that I first knew that at no great distance from several of the extents I had surveyed there were very many thousands of natives, who held themselves aloof, and rarely—never in any number—came near the abodes of the "white men". The chiefs obeyed the requisition without delay. Three of their regiments, in all about

a thousand men were sent to act with the native police. It was evident that though there might be little comparison between the regularity of their movements and the superior action of drilled troops, yet there was much of military order and discipline among them. Each regiment had its distinctive shield, covered with the skin of ox or deer, and the diversity of colour in the shield, wholly black, or mottled, or white, denoted the troop to which it belonged. The head-gear, a tuft of long feathers, the soft plumage of beautiful birds, was also distinctive. The weather was warm, and except the strips of fur, numerous attached to a waist-belt, and descending to the knee, the men wore no raiment, having laid aside the "kaross", the mantle of skin or fur required for protection against cold by day, or for covering at night. The array was handsome, and, seen for the first time, very striking. As they came near, they were drawn up, each regiment in triple line ("three deep"), and, at a signal from someone in command, gave the royal salute ("Bayete") to the diplomatic agent. They had arrived in the afternoon, and till night the war dance, and songs evidently inspiring in which all took part, kept them in animated occupation. Very early on the following morning, the force set out on their march. I accompanied them. We were not long in finding the huts of the transgressing tribe, but they had been deserted. It was known that they had been occupied, until evening on the preceding day; and as the tribe, in removing, included numbers of women and children, it was not unreasonable to suppose that we should overtake them without a very long pursuit. Evidently, too, they had gone off without their cattle; for many herds that could have had no other owners, were seen in the open field in every direction. We had not gone far when either intelligence was received, or the traces of a multitude traversing the long grass made it plain, that they had gone for safety to the summit of a high hill, that might well be ranked as a small mountain,—the "Imbulane", not far from the banks of the Klip River, where Ladysmith has since been built. The hill rises several hundred feet above the plain, is steep in ascent, and flat on the summit, all round which on every side there is a crest of precipitous crag. We had expected that, on gaining the top of the hill, the tribe would be in sight; but again the expectation was vain. Had they descended on the other side? A halt ensued, a pause for consultation. But it was not of long duration; for voices were heard from underground; and soon an Induna,⁶ deputed by Mr. Shepstone, was in conversation with leading men of the fugitive tribe. They were in a crevice, the opening of a cave of great dimensions; in fact, according to the description given by the natives the crest of rock is hollow in nearly the whole of its circuit. I had before been several times on the summit of the hill, and never suspected that so capacious a den was immediately beneath me; but the people of Putili (the hereditary chief of the tribe) having lived quite near had long known that it was there. From the height they had watched the approach of the police and their auxiliaries, and must have felt that resistance would be unavailing. The parley therefore was not protracted. The chief men did not hesitate to submit, and to ask to be forgiven; and their offence was pardoned on the condition that they were to be obedient to British authority, that they were to be located near the Drakensberg, and should avoid all encroachment on the property of the Europeans. The terms were accepted without demur; and then the tribe swarmed out from the dark recess into sunlight and open air. There cannot have been fewer than twelve hundred of all ages.⁷ It took no little time for them to come singly or in pairs through the narrow entrance of the cave. We stayed on the height, till they had all begun to descend. They were placed in charge of a res-

possible Induna, and in a few days were settled in their kraals at the base of the mountain range.

Few of the changes wrought by time in our colony are more noticeable than those in the mental condition and propensities of the natives.

Undoubtedly in their first intercourse with the "white man" they at once recognized a superior, one of greater intellectual power and attainment,—not of course as regards culture, of which they had not even an idea and were wholly incompetent to judge—but in the inventive faculty, the skill with which he achieved any purpose, great or small, tending to safety, advantage, or comfort. The use of gunpowder, the construction of cannon or muskets, would naturally impress them deeply, since besides the evidence of clever workmanship there was a warning of the hopelessness of coping with the European in war on any even terms: but the impression was coupled with the thought of physical force, and was not so suggestive of superiority of mind, as many an ordinary and even trifling appliance of skill to very minor uses. A traveller might halt for a while at a kraal where a lucifer match had never been seen or heard of; and the result of its friction against sand-paper was watched with wonder. To set fire to spirits of wine, which they supposed to be water or a watery liquid, seemed to them to be little short of sorcery. In either case there would be an ejaculation of admiration or bewilderment. Gradually, as they found themselves more habitually among a civilized population, things strange were so constantly witnessed or spoken of that novelty and artful contrivance lost much of their fascination. Rarely now do they express or show astonishment at any marvel of art.

In the wars that ended in the overthrow of Dingaan, the boers had shot down and overcome the Zulus but soon after the same boers submitted to our troops. Hence the deference felt by the natives for the power of Great Britain was genuine and deep. To those placed over them by that power they were respectful and obedient, and they are so still. This respect, however, was influenced by something more than the conviction that the European was a superior being, or that our military force was pre-eminent.

Many years, perhaps hundreds of years, before Tshaka's invasion the natives had lived in a state of tribal separation, and, though there was no frequent or rancorous hostility between the tribes, experience had taught them that they were safe from wrong or disadvantage only under their own chief and in fellowship with their own people. In the long period of suffering and danger, when they were either driven out of their own country, or could remain in it only by lurking in woods and caves, this feeling naturally became more acute. In adversity or calamity they were more than ever distrustful of strangers. The suspicion of treachery haunted them, and they attached themselves very exclusively to those whose interests and sympathies were bound up with their own. Loyalty to their chief, and a regard for their fellows, became a second nature to them. When the course of events enabled them to live in, or return to, the country in safety, they knew from the first that the intervention of Britain, in the concerns of the land that had been their own, was full of evidence of a desire to protect and be just to the natives; and instinctive loyalty easily extended itself to officers appointed by the Crown to control them. The respect for "white men", was also somewhat general; but—a change for the worse much to be regretted—it cannot be said to be so now.

It has been almost exclusively in the capacity of servants that the natives have stood in any relation to the colonists. That the Kafirs are bad servants, that they

are lazy and unwilling to work, is a current phrase; and in this there is but a trifling inaccuracy. Idleness, not laziness, is their great defect, the result of their condition in former days. Far from being lazy there is no kind of activity in which they would be found wanting if actuated by any sufficient inducement. In their tribal state, the men were not servants or labourers; they were warriors, sentinels, and hunters; work, even laborious work, fell to the lot of the women. But the men could not be always hunting, or fighting, or on the watch, and in periods of inaction they were idle. They have therefore no inborn inclination to be labourers, partly from the love of idleness, partly from their dislike of the mark of inferiority which labour appears to them to bear. When first it was an object to gain a little money, they looked on a master as in some degree a chief. No one who then employed them can fail to observe that they work less willingly, even less well, now than formerly. But even then they worked only for short periods, not long enough to attain any proficiency; and shook off the yoke, reverting to exemption from occupation. It cannot be doubtful that working, as the greater number have done, in the towns, they have been placed in frequent contact with, and even often have otherwise gained a knowledge of, the failings and vices of men and women of bad character among the Europeans; this has tended to diminish respect. Nor was it long before they became aware that their labour was of more importance to the colonists than wages were to themselves. The imposition of the annual hut-tax made it an object to every head of a kraal and to every parent that their young men should go into service, and earn the amount of the tax. For a while this was a very useful stimulus. But, as time passed on, the great demand for labour at the Diamond fields, and more recently at the gold fields, induced speculative men to offer a very much higher emolument to the labourer than it would be worth while, or in most cases even possible, for an employer here to pay either for agricultural labour or domestic service. The great distance to Kimberley or Johannesburg did not at all deter the Kafirs; they went in thousands. The opportunities of earning large sums there added greatly to the difficulty of procuring servants within the colony.

Apart from unwillingness to work, and diminished respect for his employers, the character of the Kafir has sensibly deteriorated. If they have gained any knowledge, whether from casual observation and experience, or from efforts made by zealous men to instruct them, the proverb that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" receives a direct confirmation. In many of the natives it has very much unsettled their instinctive ideas of right and wrong, before better principles have had time to take root in them. But this is not the fault of the instructor; and it is wholly unreasonable to blame him, as is very usually done, for that which results from a merely natural cause. The more constantly and earnestly their tuition is attended to, the better prospect will there be, that the Kafirs will become less untrustworthy and more diligent.

In the year 1850, the influx of emigrants from Britain, which had begun somewhat earlier on a small scale, set in in earnest. I was called away from the remote wilderness, and the task was assigned to me of locating large numbers of emigrants on the banks of the Illovo, where the villages of Richmond and Byrne have since sprung up. Of the circumstances that attended their arrival and settlement, it is for several reasons scarcely necessary that any detailed account should be given by me. The new comers were of various grades in the social scale; but the larger portion were peasant-farmers, and their habits and character as a class in the mother-country are too well known to need a definition. Being British, they

at once claimed attention and notice in the newspaper-columns; and the local journals gave many particulars of their early experiences and of the difficulties to which they were for some time subjected.

The Dutch-Africans in Natal had no capacity for writing; and, moreover, little cared that their position and views should be known or understood: they never sought—never perhaps thought of seeking—the intervention of the press for the advocacy of their interests. Still less could the ignorant kafir-savage have recourse to any such means of bringing his condition to notice. In relation to both these classes of our population—as regards the “Afrikanders” forty years ago; as to the natives up to a much more recent date—circumstances have given me very special opportunities of becoming intimate with matters not very generally known: and there is almost a direct claim on anyone conversant with these to assist in securing for them a place in our records.

It is otherwise as regards the English emigrants of whom, therefore, I must speak but briefly. They came to a new, strange country; they were set down in a locality then almost uninhabited in mid-winter, in a very cold season. But the national spirit bore them triumphantly over difficulties, privations, and hardships; and they were not slow in discerning anything that might be turned to advantage. A few only, disheartened or dissatisfied, quitted the colony; and bent on seeking their fortunes elsewhere, again migrated, chiefly to Australia. Of those who remained far the larger number have had little reason to be discontented with their lot in the land of their adoption, and have lived in comfort. Many have been very prosperous.

The immigration from Europe speedily changed the aspect of things in the colony. The stride of advance was rapid in commerce, in revenue, and in the importance of business and of public affairs. And when, in 1851, I became an inhabitant of our chief town, I found at once that things in the political and social sphere were no longer in the very primitive, simple, and unusual state, in which I had found them in 1846. To place briefly on record a short narrative of what was unusual or not generally known was the motive for writing these few pages: they are properly brought to a close, when, though the progress then evident may only have been relatively considerable, the stage has been reached of a condition of things habitual and ordinary in any civilized community.

JOHN BIRD

Notes:

1. I have known more than two months to elapse without a mail.
2. No register of the rainfall was kept till many years later; but the belief that it has greatly diminished is quite in accord with the record of floods in which every river overflowed its banks. There was a great flood in March, 1848; the greatest ever known in April, 1856; then at intervals partial and minor floods, until a great and general flood occurred in August, 1868. There have been none since. So that floods were numerous enough to saturate the country, and replenish every source and spring in the first twenty-two years after 1846; there have been none in an equal lapse of years since 1868.
3. In 1843, 1844, I was employed on the survey in the “Great Karroo”, the Roggeveld, and the borders of the Nieuw-veld, in the Cape Colony; and the proportion of dwellings in all that great extent of territory that had the appearance of having been built with a view to permanent occupation was very small indeed.
4. The leopard and hyena used always to be locally called the tiger and the wolf. They still are generally so misnamed.
5. Hunters specially in quest of a lion seldom failed of finding one; but I never had an opportunity of joining them, and never saw a lion in the wilds; yet very probably lions were often

not far from me. Upon one occasion, when a young moon gave a pale light some time after sunset, I had to pass near a bank covered with tall bulrushes; there was a stir among the rushes; my horses trembled in evident alarm, and then rushed away in ungovernable terror. On the next day an old boer told me that on the preceding evening, at an earlier hour, and at the very spot to which I refer, he had narrowly missed a dangerous encounter with lions, having seen three at a short distance from the road.

It was long before lions wholly withdrew from the district. Several years after the period here referred to a lion came in broad daylight into a farmyard—not in the wilds, but in the immediate neighbourhood of Pietermaritzburg—and tried to make his way into the stable. The owner of the property, Mr. Walter Harding, afterwards chief Judge of the Supreme Court, was absent from home, having gone to his office in the town. The terrified servants and family bolted every door and secured every window; and the lion after a leisurely inspection of the cow-shed (fortunately the cows were in a pasture two miles away) went off at a quiet stately pace. As soon as it could be safely done, a messenger was despatched to Mr. Harding to inform him of the alarming occurrence; and he at once organised a party to go in quest of the formidable monster on the following morning. I was one of the number. We found many distinct tracks of this lion, in mud and soft ground, and followed these for fifteen miles—to the neighbourhood of Table Mountain—and turned back without success when we found that it had gone down into the broken country of the Inanda, and was probably too far in advance to afford any reasonable chance of being overtaken before night-fall.

6. The Induna is a man chosen by a chief, and employed upon occasion to act with delegated authority.
7. The submissive demeanour of the men, the dejected aspect of the women, and the terror of the children, presented a scene that could never in such number be shown on any stage, and which even if imitated by the most skilful actors, on a smaller scale, would fall short of any such vivid effect as that of the reality immediately before us.