

WILD KAFFIR LIFE AND WILD KAFFIR INTELLIGENCE.

BY ROBERT JAMES MANN, M.D., F.R.A.S.

Superintendent of Education in Natal.

AT page 188 of the October number of the *INTELLECTUAL OBSERVER* it is stated that the 10,000 "Natal Kaffirs" of 1836 have grown into 200,000 Natal Kaffirs in 1866; and the inference is drawn that the native race in that colony is increasing in numbers rapidly, and not dwindling away, under the presence of British enterprise and rule, and that therefore the question of the capabilities of that race is an important one. It may be necessary to explain that the Natal Kaffirs thus alluded to were Kaffirs who acknowledged English authority, and came within the sphere of civilized observation at even that early period, or very soon afterwards. The Kaffirs spoken of by Mr. Fynn as "Natal Kaffirs" were natives who had gathered round his settlements at the Bay. The rapid increase in numbers was, in all probability, due to the addition of more and more resident clans to the white man's following, as well as to the return of exiles, and the influx of refugees. The Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal has recently ascertained by direct investigation, that there are at the present time forty-three distinct clans, or tribes, within the colony, which were aboriginal tribes of the district, and which have never dwelt elsewhere, excepting for any brief period that they may have been compelled to remove themselves into concealment during the Zulu invasion and occupation. There are also twenty-two other native tribes in Natal, of which nine are composite and made up of a fusion of the fragments of aboriginal tribes, and of which seven are Zulu tribes which have removed themselves from the territory that is still under Zulu rule.

Before the rise of the Zulu power these aboriginals were neither warlike, nor aggressive. Disputes occasionally arose, both between families and between tribes; but such disputes were always speedily settled. There was no attempt at military organization. The several tribes were, for the most part, on friendly terms, and intermarried with each other. They possessed cattle, sheep, and goats; and cultivated the ground, and drew the principal portion of their subsistence from their gardens. They were, indeed, to a considerable extent what the Natal Kaffirs are now seen to be in the colony. The notion of Zulu-Kaffir ferocity, which has become

prevalent in late years, does not properly belong to these people. It has come from an accident in their history; the development of the Zulu military despotism under Chaka, which has been already described.

The chiefs of these aboriginal tribes ruled as patriarchs, and possessed absolute and uncontrolled power over the lives and property of their people. There was no other check to this irresponsible power than that which arose from the necessity, even in this state of affairs, of conciliating public opinion.

At the present time the several chiefs of the sixty-five tribes of Natal Kaffirs retain only the shadow of their old authority. They are allowed to settle disputes between their people, and to punish petty offences, but all criminal cases are now tried by the magistrates and the Supreme Court of the Colony; and even in cases adjudicated by the chiefs, an appeal can be made to the magistrates, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, and to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. All supreme power has been transferred from the petty chief to the proper head of the State; and the chiefs now only consider themselves lieutenants, responsible to the Governor for the management of their tribes. They can no longer assemble their people in arms, unless under the order of the Governor. The attempt has been made, and with a considerable measure of success, in Natal, to turn the natural and inherent sentiment of respect for the patriarchal chiefs into a means of orderly government. By leaving a show of authority, and a harmless jurisdiction in the hands of the chief, his dignity has been saved from the evil effects of rude shock, while, at the same time, he has been made the direct link which connects his people with the institutions of the Government. The tribes themselves are divided into territorial districts, villages or kraals, and families. The chief presides over the tribe with a head-man, or Induna, under his authority. Each territorial division of the tribe has also its own proper head-man, or Induna; and there are also heads of groups of kraals, heads of kraals, and heads of families. Each head is practically responsible to the one immediately above him; and in the ascending series the chief of the tribe is responsible to the resident magistrate of his county; and the magistrate to the Secretary for Native Affairs, who is the head-man, or Induna, of the Governor, *par excellence*, the great chief. This organization is so complete, that any order emanating from the Governor can be at once made known to every native hut in the land, although the communication has necessarily to be made without the intervention of written or printed documents.

The huts of the native Kaffirs are nearly always grouped

together into villages, which are technically named "kraals." The huts are planted upon sloping ground, whence the water can run away easily, and are ranged in circles larger, or smaller, according to the number that has to be accommodated. The head of an ordinary family will have perhaps from six to ten huts in his kraal. The chief Ngoza's kraal near Table Mountain, to which the hut of the Tinted Plate at page 185 belongs, has some eighty or ninety huts in it, and is a pretty long walk across. Old Umpanda has a royal kraal at Nodwengu in Zululand, containing six hundred huts arranged round the circle in triple ranks. The huts are fenced in with stakes and wattle, which thus form an outer wall to the kraal. But there is also within the circles of huts, an inner wall of similar construction, which encloses a kind of court-yard, that is entered by a single opening, and that is employed for herding cattle at night. The huts thus stand in a clear, ring-shaped enclosure of their own. The interior space of the kraal of Ngoza, to which the hut of the Tinted Plate belongs, is so spacious, that upon one occasion, when it contained the wagons and travelling oxen of the writer, and of the Lieutenant-Governor, with the tents of their encampment, in addition to the very large herd of oxen belonging to the chief, it still looked like a large and nearly empty field.

A very good idea of the appearance and size of the Kaffir hut may be gleaned from the plate, where Ngoza and his men are seen at the back of his own immediate dwelling. This structure is not very unlike a squat bee-hive, large enough to hold men, instead of insects. It is unquestionably a rude affair, when compared with the dwellings of an older and higher civilization. But there is another point of view from which it may be contemplated. Taken as a structure made almost out of nothing, by hands that are almost innocent of instruments, it is really a surprisingly ingenious and complete contrivance. In order fairly to understand this, the reader must conceive a man, just in the state in which nature has made him, planted down on a piece of wild pasture, with nothing but a rudely-fashioned lance in his hand, and told that he must fabricate there for himself a structure that shall at once be both clothing and house, and that shall efficiently shelter him through day and night, through storm and sunshine, through summer and winter. If the reader himself could be made the actual hero of the situation, he would be better able to comprehend what the task is that the wild Kaffir has accomplished, when he has made this straw house, than he can be without the experience. In constructing the hut a frame-work of wattle is first bent into a hemispherical shape. A thatching of dried grass is then laid over the

wattle, and bound compactly down upon it by fibres. A low arched door, very much like the bee's door, is left at one point, through which passage is made horizontally, either for ingress or egress. The correct position is something even more abject than that which is familiarly known as on all fours. This doorway is closed at night by a frame of wicker-work. The floor is a smooth, hard, and almost polished pavement, constructed of beaten earth and cow-dung. If the hut is of large dimensions, it has four or six posts inside; but if of small size, these internal supports are not used. There is a saucer-like and rimmed depression in the middle of the floor, to serve as a hearth in cold weather, and the smoke and air permeate the grass with just sufficient freedom to secure ventilation, but not one drop of water enters from the sky. Round the walls, in the interior, the scanty Lares and Penates of the master, consisting principally of beer pots, milk pots, mats, skins, and shields and assegais, are distributed. Upon the floor with rush mats unrolled beneath them, the dusky household squat to gossip by day, and lie outstretched to sleep at night. Each hut affords sleeping-room for several individuals. The chief, or head-man of a kraal has a principal hut for himself, where his visitors come to gossip and feast with him, and also a hut for each of his many wives, whose families dwell therein with them until the children attain a certain age. In most kraals there is also a hut set apart for the use of young men.

The Kaffir is eminently a creature of sunshine. In cold or wet weather he keeps himself close within the shelter of his hut, and gossips and doses away his time. When the sunshine is genial and warm he sits outside squatting upon the ground, surrounded by his dogs and his children, and fashioning some article for household use, for employment as a weapon, or for personal adornment; or with a small shield upon his arm, and a bundle of short light assegais, and a knob-headed stick in his hand, he strides off over the hills bent upon some business of gossiping or feasting. The cattle are principally tended and herded by the young boys, roaming free over the pastures by day, and being driven into the inner enclosure of the kraal for protection at night. In some convenient nook on a hill side, or in a sheltered ravine near to the kraal, a space is rudely fenced in as a garden, and here crops of the Indian corn, the millet, the sweet potato, and occasionally of the pumpkin, a wild sugar-cane (*Imphecè*), and wild hemp, and tobacco for smoking, are grown. The ground of the garden is broken and tilled by the women, working with a curious kind of hoe, now imported largely into Kaffir lands for native use. The Indian corn and millet are produced in large quantities, and ordinarily form the staple of a Kaffir's food. The grain is stored, after

harvesting, in pits dug in the ground, with only a narrow opening left at the top, which is carefully and skilfully closed by placing a flat stone over it, for protection against the rain. The food is prepared by the women, sometimes aided by the children and young lads. The Indian corn is roasted, when green, upon the cob; when ripe the grain is crushed by hand, between stones, and the meal converted into a kind of porridge. The milk from the cows is chiefly consumed in a half sour and clotted state by the children. The millet is ground between stones, and made into a sort of infusion or decoction, which undergoes spontaneous fermentation, and so becomes converted into a liquor that is known as Kaffir beer (Tywala). In its choicest state, as it is found in the cellars of distinguished men, this liquid is limpid and clear, and possessed of considerable inebriating power. It is unquestionably very nourishing. In more common-place households it bears a considerable resemblance to a mixture of bad gruel and table beer. The beer drinking is the most ordinary form of native carouse. When there is a good brewing ripe, the men assemble and drink the liquid in rotation out of capacious gourds or pots, made of closely and thickly-woven grass, or more rarely of hardened clay. The beer is kept during fermentation in these vessels, which stand in the interior of the hut, opposite to the doors, something like the jars of the Forty Thieves, in a long row. The milk is held in similar vessels. The beer pots and milk pots are carried by the women and girls, very skilfully balanced upon their heads. A jovial spark, off on a visit, may be sometimes met, with a string of women or girls, each with a full beer pot balanced on her head, behind him. The water for household use is brought in by the women from the nearest stream, in gourds.

Under ordinary circumstances the gardens furnish a fairly ample supply of food for the daily wants of the household. But occasionally from some accident of season, or from some other cause, the supply runs short, and periods of great privation have to be endured. One of the first benefits which the barbarian reaps from the neighbourhood of civilized men is the alleviation of this unavoidable misery of barbarous life. So soon as he has white neighbours within reach of his kraal, he is pretty sure to have some additional resource to draw upon in seasons of dearth and famine. In olden times, and still in remote districts, the Kaffirs occasionally die of famine in great numbers; and those who survive subsist to a large extent, even for weeks at a time, upon wild roots dug up out of the ground.

Animal food, among the Kaffirs, is entirely a matter of carouse and feasting. If a distinguished visitor comes to a

Kaffir village, or kraal, the principal man makes a present to the visitor of a goat, or of an ox, as the case may be. The animal is graciously received, and turned over to the attendants of the guest for slaughter: some choice part is retained by the guest, and the rest is handed over to the inhabitants of the kraal, to be eaten in honour of the visit. Animals are also killed and eaten upon certain other ceremonial occasions, when set invitations are given, and set feasts made. Upon such occasions, if it is an ox that is to be eaten, it is taken near to the entrance of the kraal, and stabbed behind the shoulder with an assegai, wielded by some expert hand. A fire is kindled near, and almost before the animal is dead it is hewn to pieces, and the selected portions being removed, the rest is divided in what seems to the uninitiated observer to be a sort of scramble; but it is in a scramble that has in itself some underlying order of accepted etiquette and custom. The fragments of meat are just laid for a brief interval upon the embers of a wood fire that has been prepared close at hand, and are then rapidly transferred to the throats and stomachs of the feasters. The eagerness for the unusual, and rare, gorge is far too keen to allow any refinement of culinary art to be either learned or exercised. A couple of hours is pretty well enough, in Kaffir handling, for the conversion of a living ox into a remnant of stripped skin and bare bones.

Well-to-do Kaffirs rejoice in a multiplicity of households. In the kraal of a chief, or of a wealthy patriarch, each hut near to his own, contains a wife, and that wife's offspring, and the more distant huts are appropriated to the other members of the family or clan. Polygamy is an institution among the Kaffirs, that is intimately and inseparably interwoven with the privileges of wealth and the rights of property, and that will therefore be very difficult to eradicate. The Kaffir has strong natural instincts of affection for his wives and his children, as a rule; but the peculiar position which he holds as a polygamist, of necessity introduces some relations and characteristics into his domestic life and social history that are not calculated to awaken interest or respect. In all probability some of the incidents and occurrences that arise out of these relations are but imperfectly understood by European censors and critics. Kaffir men do not acquire wives until they are able to pay a stipulated number of cows to the father of the bride for the privilege. These cows are differently viewed by the different authorities who speak of Kaffir practices and customs. By some they are held to be an actual purchase price paid for the girl. By others they are considered to be a sort of deposit made in her interest to her family. In case of a wife leaving her husband within a limited period, he is allowed to have some

claim against her parents for cow-restitution ; but matters are held to be in some way changed when she has bestowed female offspring upon her husband. In some instances a family of girls confers a measure of freedom and independence upon the mother, because the value of the cows, price or deposit, is thus restored. At any rate the women are looked upon as possessing material and substantial value in a household, because they bring girls, who in due time turn into cows ; and because they perform hard and productive drudgery. The children of any particular wife speak in common of all the other wives of their paternal parent as "mothers ;" and, as a general rule, there is a surprising amount of harmony maintained in the household under the circumstances. According to the old and time-honoured custom of the Kaffirs the father's property in his daughters was so absolute and complete, that his sole will determined all matrimonial arrangements, and he possessed, and not unfrequently exercised, the right of punishing a refractory child who refused to obey his commands with death. Since the subjection of the Kaffir chiefs to British supremacy and rule, all coercion of girls to an unacceptable marriage has been generally forbidden, and in any case where an appeal is made against parental authority upon this ground, the magistrates discountenance, and even punish, its exercise. It is the intention of the colonial government, at the earliest possible opportunity, to introduce some arrangement which shall make a full and clear declaration of a woman's personal consent indispensable to the legality of a native marriage. In the meantime two very important alterations in the old Kaffir practice have already been brought about. Every marriage now consummated is held to be irrevocable and final, so far as the parents of the woman are concerned ; and a widow is now free to marry any one that pleases her without reference to the opinion or will of her natural guardian. These important modifications have been made by the Lieutenant-Governor, acting in his capacity of supreme chief, and have received the general assent of the natives on the ground that they admit them to be just and reasonable. It is obvious that some caution and judgment is required in the introduction of changes that are directly aimed at the root of a practice which is intimately bound up with the customs, habits, ideas, and laws of a race, and which the people believe to have been created with them.

Mr. Crawford considers the negro to be a very unmanageable and unpromising piece of humanity. He remarks of him that he has no literature, and no architecture ; that he cannot tame elephants ; that his religion is nothing but witchcraft, his wars merely the incursions of savages, and his government only a brutalized despotism. Without at present meddling with the

inferences which Mr. Crawford draws, it must be admitted here that these allegations apply as accurately to the Kaffir as they do to the pure negro. It is a very remarkable fact in human history, that the Kaffir, with such inherent capabilities, should have remained utterly savage so long; that even, after seeing with his own eyes the wonders that are worked by his white cousins, in matters that come so immediately home to him, as flocks, herds, and food crops, he should still be willing, if left alone, to lead the indolent, unproductive, and unprogressive life that has been described. Whatever may be the case in regard to the principle that Sir S. W. Baker enunciated so prominently at the last meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, namely, that all negro races would infallibly fall back into barbarism, if left to themselves; there can be no doubt, at any rate, that these races will not advance out of barbarism, if so left. But here there occurs one consideration, that perhaps has not yet received all the attention it deserves, and that really carries with it much important and practical suggestion. Mr. Crawford argues, "The negroes are uncivilizable, or nearly so, for, after years of social existence, they have no literature." May it not be that the negro races have not advanced into civilization *because* they have no literature? A race which is incapable of originating a literature, may, nevertheless, be quite capable of being deeply and permanently influenced by a literature that is brought to them from without. This literature may indeed ultimately prove to be the very panacea and influence that makes progress possible and advance permanent. It is by no means an unheard of thing in human history, that races have received and benefited by a written and recorded language, although they had failed to contrive the instrument for themselves.

It is a very curious, and certainly a most noteworthy fact, bearing indirectly but instructively upon this view, that the wild Kaffir, even when quite removed from the influence of white men, and from civilized appliances and practices, has, nevertheless, *an education* of his own. This becomes strikingly apparent to even the most careless and most casual observer, when the young men and the old men of the race are compared. The young men are all wild, impulsive, restless, and full of savage fire, which generally burns itself out in howling, dancing, boasting, and laughing, but which is quite capable, as proved in Chaka's experience, of being turned to less desirable account. The old men are all quiet, astute, thoughtful, and full of "wise saws and instances." The countenances of the young men are commonly savage and furtive, even when good humoured. The countenances of the old men are constantly dignified, grave, and intelligent. In Zululand, at this

present hour, the young men are nearly all turbulent, quarrelsome, boastful, and aggressive; the old men are nearly all quiet, peaceful, and full of admiration and friendship for their Dutch and English neighbours. There is a very simple and obvious reason for this difference. The young men are all of the raw material of barbarism; the old men are all *educated!* The education of the Kaffir race is talk. The remark of Sir S. W. Baker and others, that the negroes acquire their full intellectual development at a very early period, and are incapable of subsequent advance, certainly is not true in regard to the Natal Kaffirs.* The wild Kaffir leads a life of indolence, and puts the amount of drudgery that is requisite to provide for the absolute essentials of this indolent life upon his women. But he also leads a life of *gossip*; he talks incessantly, and much of his talk concerns the doings of his relatives and neighbours, and the general relations of his social state. When he walks forth over the sunny hills to pay his visit to some neighbouring or distant kraal, he carries with him matters that have to be made there the theme of patient discussion and grave deliberation. It is not possible for men to gossip through long years without doing some thinking as well, and, wherever there is thinking, there is also intellect and progress. But, in the case of the wild Kaffir, the progress is individual, and not collective. Each man has to go through the same process for himself, and the result dies when the man dies. Tradition may carry on some very small shadow of the sum total and gain to the next generation, but the main bulk of the personal advancement and experience must disappear. And can it be said that it would not be the same, even in England, if there were no permanent and recorded accumulation to be transferred on from generation to generation? if there were no books and no formal teaching? Men may say that the negro races cannot be raised much, or at all, above their present stand points, and they may be right; but, at any rate, an appeal necessarily lies from such judgments to events and time; and, not until it has been seen what the modifications are, that a formal, a designed, and a well considered training and education can introduce, can the question of Kaffir civilization be held to have received a practical settlement. It yet remains to state, indeed, that something has already been actually achieved in Natal, which does give promise of a higher capability in the native race than the theory of unprogressive stagnation and ready retrogression would allow. This is reserved for another opportunity.

* There is no satisfactory ground for believing it true of the negro. The balance of evidence is on the other side.—ED.