

A Story of Native Uthais.

BY AN AGED FINGO.

THE following narrative is an account of his life given by an old man named Platje Mhlanga, and is translated as literally as the two languages will admit of. The narrator is well known here and in Uitenhage as a man of probity and honesty, and I believe his statements are thoroughly to be depended upon. It is, of course, hardly possible to get anything like what an Englishman would consider a biography, from any native whatever—no matter how honest and truthful—in a direct way. Their thoughts and ours run in different channels, and they must be allowed to tell their stories after their own fashion. They must not be interrupted by questions nor disturbed in any other way, and I believe it is always best for a listener to conceal any knowledge he may himself have of the subject they are dealing with. In this instance I took a young native schoolmaster to the old man, with whom I am well acquainted. I said to him,

“This young man knows very little about the past history of his own people. That is not as it should be, and I have therefore brought him to you to receive instruction. Will you teach him?”

He at once consented. A few weeks afterwards I said to him,

“I would like to take down your history for the benefit of others.”

To this he agreed, but said he wished first to consult the two old men whose names are mentioned below, as they had gone through the same troubles as himself, and would be able to correct him if he went wrong. It was then arranged that they should be present to check him, and that the schoolmaster should take down his words as he spoke. It took some time before they could arrange everything to their satisfaction, but at length the narrative was completed, and, after having been read over carefully, was pronounced to be correct. I have omitted some sentences, but have added nothing except in the form of notes.

T.

Victoria East, February, 1877.

I am an Umbo. Mahlutshana is a Zizi, and Nomgonjo is a Kuze. We came from one country, but our chiefs were different. The chief of the Abambo was Bungane. His great son was Mtimkulu. The next was Bangazeta. They were the sons of two wives. Mkamswazi was the mother that bore Mtimkulu. The one who bore Bangazeta was Makesa. The Tugela was the river on which these tribes lived. The villages of the Amahlubi were on the river Mzinyata.

Zita, the great chief of the Amazizi, died in the war. Mtimkulu also died in the war before we were driven from our own country.

Bangazeta was killed by the Amangwana.* This tribe was an enemy to us. They lived further down the river. Gobinca, the chief of the Amakuse, also died in the war before we left our country.

Matiwana was chief of the Amangwana. It was he that waged war against us. He was driven from his country by Zwide with an army of Tshaka.

Bangazeta went over the high mountains to the country of the Basutos. In this journey the first people we met were those under Mncwazi. Her husband, Ngojo, was dead. Her son was then too young to become chief.† Little children (pointing to some five or six years old) were left beside the paths, on account of the enemy. When a woman fell down from fatigue, her husband left her. Otherwise he beat her to compel her to go on.

We said:—"We shall die like grasshoppers" (meaning, we shall die while travelling); "we are making a rope to reach the sky, but it will break" (meaning, we shall not reach the end of our journey). The great chief of the Abambo said:—"Our bones will be seen white, we shall stretch ourselves on the grass" (that is, we shall die, and leave our bones on the way to bleach). These words were true. Bungane was the last of our chiefs that was buried. He died before we fled.

"Ladla impakata nodiza" (literally, they devoured the heads of grain and the stalks also, but signifying that the enemy spared neither young nor old). None of the tribes that were conquered went towards the north. The people of Tshaka were there. We came this way. Some came over the mountains through the country of the Basutos. Others did not go over the mountains. They kept along this side.

There was war between Bangazeta and the wife of Ngojo. The Amangwana went to take the cattle of the Basutos. A great battle was fought. Many of the Amangwana were killed. The next day they fought again. The Amangwana were defeated, and many more were killed. The cattle were taken from them. They then went against the people whose chief was Dzedze. Those people were Basutos, not of Mshweshwe (Moshesh). Afterwards they were conquered by the Amahlubi.

The Amangwana fell upon us again. Bangazeta was defeated. Three great persons were killed that day. Nongazi was one. Another was Shiba. In the night Bangazeta collected his people again. In the morning we fought once more. We were beaten and were compelled to disperse. Two great ones were killed. Zita, the son of Umba, was one. Ngalonkulu was the other. The chief with some men fled to a mountain. It was a place of strength.

* He was killed in Basutoland after the dispersion, but his death is mentioned here, probably because the fate of other chiefs is told at this time.

† The tribe here referred to was the Mantati, that had recently invaded Basutoland from the north, and established itself on the head waters of the Caledon. The young chief, spoken of as a boy, was Sikonyela, afterwards so well known in the Basuto wars.

The Amangwana went after them, and drove them from it. I was not there, because I had gone another way. Mahlutshana was there. The Amahlubi became servants to the Amangwana. They rose against them and fought many times. Bangazeta was killed in a battle that lasted five days.

I was wandering on a path. I saw a man who called to me to stop. He came to me and told me to sit down. He caught hold of my skin mantle. I left it in his hand and ran as fast as I could. He was a cannibal, and wished to kill me. Afterwards I met two children (pointing to lads about fifteen or sixteen years of age). One was dead. The living one was eating the flesh of the dead one. I passed on. Next I saw a company of people digging plants. I was afraid of them, and hid myself. When I was still going I saw a long stone wall, not very high. There were people sitting there cooking. I saw human heads on the ground. I took another way, and escaped from these cannibals.

I came to some people of Ngojo. They asked who I was. I told them. It was night already. They took me to a hut, where I slept. To get warmth I slept in the fire circle,* from which the fire had been taken. I found my father† with the people of Ngojo.

* The floors of all native huts are made of anthills, and are very hard and smooth. Round the centre a circle, of the same material of which the floor is made, is raised, two or three inches high, and three or four feet in diameter. The fire is made inside this circle. Sometimes a particularly neat and industrious housewife will make two or three concentric bands round her fireplace, and ornament them with colours. A coil of large rope, with one of a smaller size on each side and close to it, would give a good representation of one of these circular fireplaces.

† Among the natives of South Africa relationship is viewed differently from what it is by Europeans. I have heard more than once Kafirs accused of falsehood because they asserted one person to be their father or mother at one time and a different person at another time. Yet they were telling the truth, according to their ideas. A common complaint concerning native servant girls is that they claim every other person they meet as a brother or a sister. Now, from their point of view, what we would term cousins are really brothers and sisters. It is not poverty of language, for they have words to express shades of relationship where we have none, but a difference of ideas, that causes them to use the same word for father and paternal uncle, for brother and cousin, &c. *Barwo* is the word used in addressing father, father's brother, or father's half-brother. Little children say *Tata*. But there are three different words for father, according as a person is speaking of his own father or uncle, of the father or uncle of the person he is speaking to, or of the father or uncle of the person he is speaking of. Speaking of my father, *ubarwo* is the word used; of your father, *uyihlo*; of his father, *uyise*. Speaking of a father's brother, he can be distinguished by saying *ubarwokazi*. *Malume* is the brother of anyone called mother. *Ma* is the word used in addressing mother, any wife of father, or the sister of any of these. The one we would term mother can only be distinguished from the others, when speaking of her, by describing her as *uma wam kanye*—i.e., my real mother; or *uma ondizalayo*—i.e., the mother who bore me. Speaking of my mother, *uma* is the word used; of your mother, *unyoko*; of his or her mother, *unina*. A paternal aunt is addressed as *dadebobawo*—i.e., sister of my father. *Mnakwetu* is the word used by females in addressing a brother, half-brother, or male cousin. Males, when addressing any of these relations older than themselves, use the word *mkuluwaa*; and when addressing one younger than themselves say *mninarwe*. The Fingoes use the word *umza* when speaking of a father's sister's child, or a mother's brother's child (male or female); but the word is not used by the Kafirs. *Dade* is used in addressing a sister, a half-sister, or a female cousin. Females, when speaking to any of these relations younger than themselves, usually say *msakwetu*. *Mtakama* is an endearing form of expression, meaning child of my mother. *Barwomkulu* is the address of a grandfather. *Makulu* is grandmother, but is sometimes used by Kafirs, not by Fingoes, in addressing the father of a mother. *Mtshana* is the son of a sister.

While I was there my father went one day to steal cattle. He returned with two.

From this village we went to another one. We saw on the way some Basutos in a cave under a rock. They asked us to stay with them, but we would not. We were afraid. We saw the skulls of many people beside this rock. At the village where we were staying they asked us to go with them to hunt. We formed two parties. One party went along one side of a mountain, the other party went along the other side. I was with one, my father was with the other. We came to the top of the mountain. I found my father lying on the ground dying. The Basutos had stuck an assegai in the left side of his stomach. Then they went away. I remained with my father. I laid the skin I had on him. Then he died. I asked him to preserve my life wherever I went (one of the usual petitions to the dead). I then went to a village. The Amangwana came there and destroyed the village. I was taken away by them. Mahlutshana was already with them. We became servants. Tshaka sent an army to fight with Matiwana. We were defeated, and the Amazulu went back again. Matiwana then came to attack the Abatembu. We crossed the Orange River. After we were across our faces were towards the high mountains. The grass was long and dry. By some means it caught fire. This fire was so great that many people were burned. Matiwana was nearly burned. The reason why he was not burned was because he got up on a high stone. After this we met a cold wind. We stopped, and many of those who were burned died. Afterwards we came into the high mountains. Here many more died through the cold and fatigue. It was so cold that the water was frozen. We were walking in snow. Through these mountains we came to the country of the Abatembu. Tshaka had already been there. We found that the people of many villages had fled, and that their cattle had been taken.* We attacked the villages that remained, and took many cattle. Matiwana did not wish his name to be known by those people. We were commanded, therefore, to call ourselves the people of Magagadlana. We came further, capturing many cattle. We ate only the fattest. One afternoon we were roasting meat. It was at a place near to a forest. There came an army of white men on horseback and fired at us. The Abatembu were with them. Many were killed. We fled into the forest. In the night we went out and tried to get corn out of the pits of the villages. The women remained in the forest. The Abatembu fell upon us, and went between us and the forest. After this we were attacked by a great army. The

* Matiwana must have crossed the Drakensberg into the country now known as Griqualand East, or St. John's Territory, and then journeyed along the base of the mountains as far as the present village of Queen's Town. The Amangwana are better known to colonists as the Fecani or Fecani. The Tembus applied to the Colonial Government for assistance, and a commando was sent to their aid. In August, 1828, the Fecani were defeated and destroyed.

Abatembu and the Amagcaleqa were there. Even the Amampondo were our enemies. The white men had guns, and we could not stand against them.

The end of the Amangwana is this—Matiwana asked for peace. It was to be that he should give all the cattle and the feathers of the blue crane (*i.e.*, the plumes with which his warrior's heads were adorned). They would not. Some of the people then became servants to the Tembus and the Gcalekas. Others escaped with the chief Kabingwe, who was a relative of Matiwana. Matiwana himself fled to the country of Tshaka. Tshaka was already dead. He went to the chief Malamlela.* Malamlela said, "Where are your people?" Matiwana replied, "These are all that are left." Malamlela caused the people to be killed by twisting their heads round. The eyes of Matiwana were first put out, then his head was twisted.

The son of Matiwana was Zikali. He fled with some people to the Amahlubi. When the Amahlubi saw him they wanted to kill him, because Matiwana had killed Mtimkulu and Bangazeta. Langelibalele was then the chief of the Amahlubi. He said, "We must not avenge past offences." Zikali rose up at night with his people. He killed some of Langelibalele's people, and then fled. Langelibalele is the greatest of our chiefs since the dispersion. We would be very glad if the Government would forgive him †

After the defeat of Matiwana I escaped and went back to the country of the Basutos. A long time after that the Amabulu (the Boers) came there. I was taken to be a servant. My master lived near the Orange River. There I first heard the word of God. I said to myself, "What do these people praise and pray to?" I heard it was God. I felt that I too had a soul in me. I began to pray secretly to God. Then I came to the Tarka River. From that place I went to Uitenhage. It was during the time of the measles. The Rev. Mr. Edwards spoke to me of the love of God. I have not yet forgotten his words. I then saw how that God had led me through many troubles to come into the light. I was baptized in Uitenhage. My Christian name is Platje. Since that time I have tried to bring my friends to a knowledge of God.

(The remainder is a detail of the narrator's experience as a Christian, and need not be given here).

* Malamlela means the deliverer. It was a title given to Dingaan by some people who were in expectation of being put to death by Tshaka, and who were relieved of anxiety by the assassination of that monster. Dingaan's subsequent career showed how little he deserved to be called a deliverer; but the title once given remained with him.

† The Amahlubi was the principal division of the great tribe of the Abambo. Its chief was, therefore, the great chief of the whole tribe, in the same way that Sarili (Kreli) at present is chief of the Gcalekas, and at the same time great chief of the Amaxosa. The direct line of the Abambo chiefs was cut off in the person of Mtimkulu, and then the next in rank, Bangazeta by name, became the head of the nation. This Bangazeta was called Pakaſita by the Basutos. He is mentioned by Casalis in his well-known and highly interesting work. Langelibalele is his grandson. There are several villages of the Hlubi as well as of other clans of the Abambo in Victoria East and the adjoining district of King William's Town. They all express the keenest sorrow for the trouble that has overtaken the representative of the ancient ruling house of their tribe.