

## THE KAFFIR WIFE'S STATUS.

S.N. ————— Apr. 2 '03  
INTERVIEW WITH MR. FOX BOURNE.

The relations of the Kaffir to his wives has been a good deal under discussion of late, and Miss Werner and Sir William Harcourt have protested against the view that the Kaffir buys his wife, who thereafter is his slave. A representative of "The Daily News" has called upon Mr. H. R. Fox Bourne, Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, whose views on the subject will command general respect. He was asked about the "lobola," or so-called "marriage contract"—the gift of cattle given by the bridegroom to the bride's father, a gift which has in some quarters been termed the purchase money paid by the husband for the wife, and in others the property which the father held in trust for his daughter and her children.

Mr. Bourne said: "The idea of the lobola is that it is for the protection of the wife and of her offspring. Each wife has the custody of her own children, and keeps them in her hut. A wife has no objection to her husband's taking another wife, as it lightens her labour and gives her society."

"And the cattle, Mr. Bourne; what becomes of them?"

### The Marriage Settlement.

"Cattle among Kaffirs," replied Mr. Bourne, "are in the place of money, and the cattle which the man gives to the bride's father are really in the nature of a marriage settlement. The man arranges a marriage with the girl herself, or her father, and in exchange for her he deposits with the father—or, if her father is dead, with a relative—a certain number of cattle, which may be from four or five to ten or fifteen, according to the value of cattle at the time, or the rapacity of the parent, or his social dignity. The father keeps the cattle, and is entitled to their milk, but they are really the property of his daughter, or of her children. It would be quite against native custom and feeling for a man to sell or kill them, though if they die the loss is not made good. These cattle would, in time, be represented by their progeny, each cow by one other cow, the number being kept by themselves. I cannot say whose property these animals would be if the children grew up, but I think that in that case they would remain with the wife's father. The arrangement is a sort of Women's Property Act. According to all that I have heard, the wife feels that it gives her security."

Mr. Bourne here opened his pamphlet on "Forced Labour in British South Africa," and called our representative's attention to the statement of the Rev. Brownlee J. Ross, an experienced missionary in the eastern provinces of Cape Colony, on the subject of "lobola." Mr. Ross denies that women, under this custom, are bought as slaves, and says that it gives them a sound social and legal standing. In case the husband dies and leaves nothing to support his widow, she goes home—that is, to the man who has her dowry cattle or their progeny, and who must maintain her and her infants. If the man does not do her justice, she can appeal to the chief, who will order him to do what is right, or will hand over the cattle to some one who is ready to maintain her in a manner proportionate to the number of cattle paid as dowry. Mr. Ross further says that native women express their feelings thus: "If cattle are paid for me, I am mistress in my kraal; if cattle are not paid for me, I am nothing more than a cat, a thing to be kicked out and ill-treated just as my husband fikes."

Our representative asked what happened in case of disagreement between husband and wife, and Mr. Bourne replied that if the wife left her husband, the chief or headman would hear the case; if the wife had gone away for a frivolous reason, the cattle would be returned to the man, but if the husband had ill-used her the chief would decide whether he should be fined by losing the cattle.

### Division of Labour.

Mr. Chamberlain is reported to have said at Johannesburg that the Kaffir bought what he called a wife, and that these so-called wives were really slaves who worked to keep him in idleness. Mr. Bourne having answered the first part of this statement, our representative inquired whether the husband lived in idleness, and the wives did all the work.

"In the old times," he replied, "the man's business was primarily to fight and carry his assegai. In later days he looks after the cattle, with which a woman has nothing to do. The women attend to the garden."

"You mean the growing of mealies?"

"Yes; whatever is grown the women look after. That they consider a part of their domain. But if ploughs are used they are drawn by oxen, and the man then does the ploughing. This, however, is a new thing. Cultivation in the old way is very superficial—a mere scratching of the ground."

Mr. Bourne further stated that in Rhodesia the effect of the taking of cattle from the natives and of cattle disease had been that a money equivalent for cattle was now paid on marriage. This was much more in the nature of purchase than the former custom, and money was more likely to disappear than the cattle which used to be handed over.