

LEATHERN, WILLIAM

23.5.1910. Sandringham House.

File 59, nbk. 33, pp. 1-3.

- 1 [Sandringham House is 400 yards from where the tram stops at the bottom of Commercial Road.]

My father arrived at Port Elizabeth in 1820 (started for S.A. in 1819). I arrived in Natal in 1842, about July, before Pietermaritzburg was taken. It may have been 1843.¹ I was born 3rd October 1827; my father was born 3rd October 1804. He was married 3rd October 1826. My father's name was William.

I met Mbuyazi² first in Durban. I forget the year. I lived in West Street.

I went with Theo Shepstone across the Mzimkulu after some chief.³ I never went on any expedition with H.F. Fynn. I am 82; will be 83 on 3rd October next.

Fynn frequently came to see me. When my father was in Durban I did not know anything of Fynn. I left Durban and returned after getting married, and opened a butcher's shop. I knew and saw most of Fynn when waggon-driving all over the country, e.g. Durban - Pietermaritzburg; also to Bloemfontein, also Pretoria. He never travelled with me. He used to get his meat from me to give kaffirs who came to see him. He was a great friend of my father.

- 2 Fynn, when he came from Wentworth, his farm, used to come and see us. He often stayed in town a week at a time. He was an early riser like myself. He used to have a cup of coffee with me in the early morning. He never related to me his experiences.

I remember his meeting me when I was with my waggons at Field's Bush, near Pinetown. He got off and stayed. A kaffir came past. Fynn had a sjambok in his hand, one he always carried. The kaffir did not greet him, and Fynn asked why, when he saw a white man, he did not greet him. The native was cheeky, saying, 'What have you got to do with me?' Fynn asked him who he was. The native replied that it had nothing to do with him. Fynn said, 'Do you know who I am?' He said, 'No, I know nothing about you.' Fynn got up and walked to him and said, 'Do you know Mbulazi?' He said, 'No.' Fynn said, 'Have you heard of him?' Fynn now made a jump and caught hold of him and said, 'I'm Mbulazi, and I'll learn you, when you see a white man, to salute him.' He then gave him a downright good thrashing, whereupon the native called out that he would be careful to do this in future. The native went down on his knees to him then.

3 The other natives were looking on laughing, for they all knew Fynn. This did a great deal of good.

Fynn was a very honest, straightforward man. He told anyone just

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what he thought. I liked him very much. He very often gave me advice when I sought it. He used to ask how I was getting on, and wanted to know. He was a big man, broader than Gwalagwala,⁴ and strong. He spoke the native language splendidly. He knew how to handle a native. He and Sir Theophilus Shepstone were the two best I ever saw with natives. There may be men that have known natives better than he (Fynn) did, but I don't think so. He knew all about them.

Fynn always had an old, quiet nag; he was never a furious rider. Dick King⁵ could ride anything.

If Sir T. Shepstone had been left in the Transvaal, there would have been no war. Sir Owen Lanyon was a very austere man; he would no sooner give his hand to a Boer than he would to a piece of dirt.⁶

Fynn never told me his experiences in the early days in Zululand or Natal: at any rate I can't recollect anything. He did not say how he first came to Natal, overland or by sea, nor did he make mention of Nandi's death or the attack on him at Mbilanhlola.⁷

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File 59, nbk. 33, pp. 4-7.

- 4 Fynn and Joe Kirkman⁸ told me sickness came into Zululand; they could not tell the cause. The kaffir doctors were called together and told to find *medicine* to stop it. At last they got together, and the king (Tshaka or Dingana) was going to kill them because they were no good. They then told him it was impossible for them to do away with the disease or find any *cure* for it, so long as his people were wearing these here white rings. That was the cause of the sickness, and until they were made away with, the sickness would never be got rid of. They wished him to send word out all over the country to bring all the armlets, leg rings, neck rings of this white metal, and that they were to have holes dug and bury the rings and not allow anyone to come near the place and have it guarded and the sickness would cease, but not before. This was close on to the winter. (This disease was supposed to be smallpox.) After
5 this the sickness went away. That is how the doctors escaped being killed.

I tried to find this when in Vryheid, but could never get any trace. There must have been a great lot. The silver was, I believe, found in lead, which contains a lot of silver. I believe the locality where the silver was buried was Ntabankulu.⁹ Snakes are said by Brooks (surveyor) to be about there.

I only once went to Mr Fynn's place. He used to deal with me. He was humorous, would joke every now and then, and was very good company. I always liked to see him. I used to learn from him. He walked erect, and did not stoop - ordinary pace walking.

We came to Natal just after Dick King's ride to Grahamstown, and the same year.¹⁰

- 6 Joe Kirkman was father of the Kirkmans of Umzinto. He used to be with Grout¹¹ the missionary (who lived near the Umlazi drift where the road goes to Isipingo). He knew Zulu very well. He and Fynn told me the story about the silver. He also said he met a blind woman on the coast who knew the silver bangle story, but, being blind, it was necessary for her to taste various metals before she discovered the one similar to the metal of the bangles. As soon as she tasted

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a silver spoon she declared that to be the metal, but she would not or could not say where the silver had been buried.

G.C. Cato¹² and Alfred Matham (afterwards apprenticed to John McKenzie, tinsmith, who had a sugar plantation near the Mkomazi and used to have a store at the place where Shepherd's is now) are the two who rowed Dick King across when going on his famous ride. Matham himself told me he went across in the boat. He became a tinsmith. I knew Matham well. I know only one boat was rowed across. I never heard of a second one. There were two horses, but I am not sure. I think King got his boy (Ndongeni¹³) at Isipingo.

Alfred Matham went to live at Port Elizabeth, and I think he must still be living.

The native had been with King along the coast route, and King knew it well.

Matham was strong and heavily built. He was younger than he looked - younger than me.

Joe Cato¹⁴ was a carpenter. I was apprenticed to him. Orlando Cato arrived after I did, and was made foreman in his brother's shop. Orlando must know a good deal of Fynn. I was with Joe Cato only a year. My indenture was for five years, but it was mutually agreed I should leave and go and help my father. I had learnt all Cato could teach me.

We came up in 1848 to live in Pietermaritzburg.

I tied the yokes on the 'trek-tow' for the wagon to bring the troops up to take Pietermaritzburg from the Boers. This was just after we arrived in 1842.

Dick King came back from the Cape by land.

[See Russell's Old Durban where the Catos are referred to as having taken across two horses and two boats when Dick King started off on his ride.]

Notes

¹Colonel Josias Cloete, commander of a British occupation force, entered Pietermaritzburg, capital of the Voortrekker republic of Natalia, on 14th July 1842. British troops do not seem to have occupied the town in any numbers until August 1843 after the official British annexation.

²H.F. Fynn.

³Probably a reference to Shepstone's expedition against the Nhangwini chief Fodo in January 1847.

⁴H.F. Fynn junior.

⁵R.P. King, one of the first whites to settle in Natal.

⁶Lanyon succeeded Shepstone as Administrator of the Transvaal in 1879, and was still in office when the Afrikaners of the Transvaal took up arms against British rule in December 1880.

⁷Shaka's mother Nandi died in October 1827. At the mouth of the Mbilanhlola river, near present-day Margate on the Natal south coast, a force of Dingane's Zulu attacked Fynn and a party of his African adherents in 1831. For Fynn's accounts of these events see his Diary, pp. 132-5, 205-6.

⁸One of the first whites to settle in Natal.

⁹Probably the mountain of that name just north of the village of Glückstadt in the Vryheid area.

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- ¹⁰Dick King made his famous ride to Grahamstown in May-June 1842 to secure aid for the British occupation force that was besieged at Port Natal by burghers of the republic of Natalia.
- ¹¹Probably Alden Grout of the American Zulu Mission who arrived in Natal in 1835 with George Champion and Dr Newton Adams, founder of the Umlazi Mission. Lewis Grout, also of the American Zulu Mission, arrived in Natal in 1847 and established the Msunduze Mission.
- ¹²A prominent early white settler. He was elected first mayor of Durban in 1855.
- ¹³Ndongeni ka Xoki of the Zulu accompanied King for part of the way on his ride.
- ¹⁴Possibly George Joseph Cato, son of George Christopher Cato.