

CHAPTER V. TWO BUCKS AND THE DOE

It may be thought that, as a sequel to this somewhat remarkable scene in which I was absolutely bowled over--perhaps bowled out would be a better term--by a Kafir girl who, after bending me to her will, had the genius to drop me before I repented, as she knew I would do so soon as her back was turned, thereby making me look the worst of fools, that my relations with that young lady would have been strained. But not a bit of it. When next we met, which was on the following morning, she was just her easy, natural self, attending to my hurts, which by now were almost well, joking about this and that, inquiring as to the contents of certain letters which I had received from Natal, and of some newspapers that came with them--for on all such matters she was very curious--and so forth.

Impossible, the clever critic will say--impossible that a savage could act with such finish. Well, friend critic, that is just where you are wrong. When you come to add it up there's very little difference in all main and essential matters between the savage and yourself.

To begin with, by what exact right do we call people like the Zulus savages? Setting aside the habit of polygamy, which, after all, is common among very highly civilised peoples in the East, they have a social system not unlike our own. They have, or had, their king, their nobles, and their commons. They have an ancient and elaborate law, and

a system of morality in some ways as high as our own, and certainly more generally obeyed. They have their priests and their doctors; they are strictly upright, and observe the rites of hospitality.

Where they differ from us mainly is that they do not get drunk until the white man teaches them so to do, they wear less clothing, the climate being more genial, their towns at night are not disgraced by the sights that distinguish ours, they cherish and are never cruel to their children, although they may occasionally put a deformed infant or a twin out of the way, and when they go to war, which is often, they carry out the business with a terrible thoroughness, almost as terrible as that which prevailed in every nation in Europe a few generations ago.

Of course, there remain their witchcraft and the cruelties which result from their almost universal belief in the power and efficiency of magic. Well, since I lived in England I have been reading up this subject, and I find that quite recently similar cruelties were practised throughout Europe--that is in a part of the world which for over a thousand years has enjoyed the advantages of the knowledge and profession of the Christian faith.

Now, let him who is highly cultured take up a stone to throw at the poor, untaught Zulu, which I notice the most dissolute and drunken wretch of a white man is often ready to do, generally because he covets his land, his labour, or whatever else may be his.

But I wander from my point, which is that a clever man or woman among the people whom we call savages is in all essentials very much the same as a clever man or woman anywhere else.

Here in England every child is educated at the expense of the Country, but I have not observed that the system results in the production of more really able individuals. Ability is the gift of Nature, and that universal mother sheds her favours impartially over all who breathe. No, not quite impartially, perhaps, for the old Greeks and others were examples to the contrary. Still, the general rule obtains.

To return. Mameena was a very able person, as she chanced to be a very lovely one, a person who, had she been favoured by opportunity, would doubtless have played the part of a Cleopatra with equal or greater success, since she shared the beauty and the unscrupulousness of that famous lady and was, I believe, capable of her passion.

I scarcely like to mention the matter since it affects myself, and the natural vanity of man makes him prone to conclude that he is the particular object of sole and undying devotion. Could he know all the facts of the case, or cases, probably he would be much undeceived, and feel about as small as I did when Mameena walked, or rather crawled, out of the hut (she could even crawl gracefully). Still, to be honest--and why should I not, since all this business "went beyond" so long ago?--I do believe that there was a certain amount of truth in what she said--that, for Heaven knows what reason, she did take a fancy to me,

which fancy continued during her short and stormy life. But the reader of her story may judge for himself.

Within a fortnight of the day of my discomfiture in the hut I was quite well and strong again, my ribs, or whatever part of me it was that the buffalo had injured with his iron knees, having mended up. Also, I was anxious to be going, having business to attend to in Natal, and, as no more had been seen or heard of Saduko, I determined to trek homewards, leaving a message that he knew where to find me if he wanted me. The truth is that I was by no means keen on being involved in his private war with Bangu. Indeed, I wished to wash my hands of the whole matter, including the fair Mameena and her mocking eyes.

So one morning, having already got up my oxen, I told Scowl to inspan them--an order which he received with joy, for he and the other boys wished to be off to civilisation and its delights. Just as the operation was beginning, however, a message came to me from old Umbezi, who begged

me to delay my departure till after noon, as a friend of his, a big chief, had come to visit him who wished much to have the honour of making my acquaintance. Now, I wished the big chief farther off, but, as it seemed rude to refuse the request of one who had been so kind to me, I ordered the oxen to be unyoked but kept at hand, and in an irritable frame of mind walked up to the kraal. This was about half a mile from my place of outspan, for as soon as I was sufficiently recovered I had begun to sleep in my wagon, leaving the big hut to the

"Worn-out-Old-Cow."

There was no particular reason why I should be irritated, since time in those days was of no great account in Zululand, and it did not much matter to me whether I trekked in the morning or the afternoon. But the fact was that I could not get over the prophecy of Zikali, "the Little and Wise," that I was destined to share Saduko's expedition against Bangu, and, although he had been right about the buffalo and Mameena, I was determined to prove him wrong in this particular.

If I had left the country, obviously I could not go against Bangu, at any rate at present. But while I remained in it Saduko might return at any moment, and then, doubtless, I should find it hard to escape from the kind of half-promise that I had given to him.

Well, as soon as I reached the kraal I saw that some kind of festivity was in progress, for an ox had been killed and was being cooked, some of it in pots and some by roasting; also there were several strange Zulus present. Within the fence of the kraal, seated in its shadow, I found Umbezi and some of his headmen, and with them a great, brawny "ringed" native, who wore a tiger-skin moocha as a mark of rank, and some of his headmen. Also Mameena was standing near the gate, dressed in her best beads and holding a gourd of Kafir beer which, evidently, she had just been handing to the guests.

"Would you have run away without saying good-bye to me, Macumazahn?" she

whispered to me as I came abreast of her. "That is unkind of you, and I should have wept much. However, it was not so fated."

"I was going to ride up and bid farewell when the oxen were inspanned," I answered. "But who is that man?"

"You will find out presently, Macumazahn. Look, my father is beckoning to us."

So I went on to the circle, and as I advanced Umbezi rose and, taking me by the hand, led me to the big man, saying:

"This is Masapo, chief of the Amansomi, of the Quabe race, who desires to know you, Macumazahn."

"Very kind of him, I am sure," I replied coolly, as I threw my eye over Masapo. He was, as I have said, a big man, and of about fifty years of age, for his hair was tinged with grey. To be frank, I took a great dislike to him at once, for there was something in his strong, coarse face, and his air of insolent pride, which repelled me. Then I was silent, since among the Zulus, when two strangers of more or less equal rank meet, he who speaks first acknowledges inferiority to the other. Therefore I stood and contemplated this new suitor of Mameena, waiting on events.

Masapo also contemplated me, then made some remark to one of his attendants, that I did not catch, which caused the fellow to laugh.

"He has heard that you are an ipisi" (a great hunter), broke in Umbezi, who evidently felt that the situation was growing strained, and that it was necessary to say something.

"Has he?" I answered. "Then he is more fortunate than I am, for I have never heard of him or what he is." This, I am sorry to say, was a fib, for it will be remembered that Mameena had mentioned him in the hut as one of her suitors, but among natives one must keep up one's dignity somehow. "Friend Umbezi," I went on, "I have come to bid you farewell, as I am about to trek for Durban."

At this juncture Masapo stretched out his great hand to me, but without rising, and said:

"Siyakubona [that is, good-day], White Man."

"Siyakubona, Black Man," I answered, just touching his fingers, while Mameena, who had come up again with her beer, and was facing me, made a little grimace and tittered.

Now I turned on my heel to go, whereon Masapo said in a coarse, growling

voice:

"O Macumazana, before you leave us I wish to speak with you on a certain matter. Will it please you to sit aside with me for a while?"

"Certainly, O Masapo." And I walked away a few yards out of hearing, whither he followed me.

"Macumazah, he said (I give the gist of his remarks, for he did not come to the point at once), "I need guns, and I am told that you can provide them, being a trader."

"Yes, Masapo, I dare say that I can, at a price, though it is a risky business smuggling guns into Zululand. But might I ask what you need them for? is it to shoot elephants?"

"Yes, to shoot elephants," he replied, rolling his big eyes round him.

"Macumazah, I am told that you are discreet, that you do not shout from the top of a hut what you hear within it. Now, hearken to me. Our country is disturbed; we do not all of us love the seed of Senzangakona, of whom the present king, Panda, is one. For instance, you may know that we Quabies--for my tribe, the Amansomi, are of that race--suffered at the spear of Chaka. Well, we think that a time may come when we who live on shrubs like goats may again browse on tree-tops like giraffes, for Panda is no strong king, and he has sons who hate each other, one of whom may need our spears. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you want guns, O Masapo," I answered dryly. "Now, as to the price and place of delivery."

Then we bargained for a while, but the details of that business transaction of long ago will interest no one. Indeed, I only mention the matter to show that Masapo was plotting to bring trouble on the ruling house, whereof Panda was the representative at that time.

When we had concluded our rather nefarious negotiations, which were to the effect that I was to receive so many cattle in return for so many guns, if I could deliver them at a certain spot, namely, Umbezi's kraal, I returned to the circle where Umbezi, his followers and guests were sitting, purposing to bid him farewell. By now, however, meat had been served, and as I was hungry, having had little breakfast that morning, I stayed to eat. When I had finished my meal, and washed it down with a draught of tshwala (that is, Kafir beer), I rose to go, but just at that moment who should walk through the gate but Saduko?

"Piff!" said Mameena, who was standing near me, speaking in a voice that none but I could hear. "When two bucks meet, what happens, Macumazahn?"

"Sometimes they fight and sometimes one runs away. It depends very much on the doe," I answered in the same low voice, looking at her.

She shrugged her shoulders, folded her arms beneath her breast, nodded to Saduko as he passed, then leaned gracefully against the fence and awaited events.

"Greeting, Umbezi," said Saduko in his proud manner. "I see that you feast. Am I welcome here?"

"Of course you are always welcome, Saduko," replied Umbezi uneasily, "although, as it happens, I am entertaining a great man." And he looked towards Masapo.

"I see," said Saduko, eyeing the strangers. "But which of these may be the great man? I ask that I may salute him."

"You know well enough, umfokazana" (that is, low fellow), exclaimed Masapo angrily.

"I know that if you were outside this fence, Masapo, I would cram that word down your throat at the point of my assegai," replied Saduko in a fierce voice. "Oh, I can guess your business here, Masapo, and you can guess mine," and he glanced towards Mameena. "Tell me, Umbezi, is this little chief of the Amansomi your daughter's accepted suitor?"

"Nay, nay, Saduko," said Umbezi; "no one is her accepted suitor. Will you not sit down and take food with us? Tell us where you have been, and why you return here thus suddenly, and--uninvited?"

"I return here, O Umbezi, to speak with the white chief, Macumazahn. As to where I have been, that is my affair, and not yours or Masapo's."

"Now, if I were chief of this kraal," said Masapo, "I would hunt out of it this hyena with a mangy coat and without a hole who comes to devour your meat and, perhaps," he added with meaning, "to steal away your child."

"Did I not tell you, Macumazahn, that when two bucks met they would fight?" whispered Mameena suavely into my ear.

"Yes, Mameena, you did--or rather I told you. But you did not tell me what the doe would do."

"The doe, Macumazahn, will crouch in her form and see what happens--as is the fashion of does," and again she laughed softly.

"Why not do your own hunting, Masapo?" asked Saduko. "Come, now, I will promise you good sport. Outside this kraal there are other hyenas waiting who call me chief--a hundred or two of them--assembled for a certain purpose by the royal leave of King Panda, whose House, as we all know, you hate. Come, leave that beef and beer and begin your hunting of hyenas, O Masapo."

Now Masapo sat silent, for he saw that he who thought to snare a baboon

had caught a tiger.

"You do not speak, O Chief of the little Amansomi," went on Saduko, who was beside himself with rage and jealousy. "You will not leave your beef and beer to hunt the hyenas who are captained by an umfokazana! Well, then, the umfokazana will speak," and, stepping up to Masapo, with the spear he carried poised in his right hand, Saduko grasped his rival's short beard with his left.

"Listen, Chief," he said. "You and I are enemies. You seek the woman I seek, and, mayhap, being rich, you will buy her. But if so, I tell you that I will kill you and all your House, you sneaking, half-bred dog!"

With these fierce words he spat in his face and tumbled him backwards. Then, before anyone could stop him, for Umbezi, and even Masapo's headmen, seemed paralysed with surprise, he stalked through the kraal gate, saying as he passed me:

"Inkoosi, I have words for you when you are at liberty."

"You shall pay for this," roared Umbezi after him, turning almost green with rage, for Masapo still lay upon his broad back, speechless, "you who dare to insult my guest in my own house."

"Somebody must pay," cried back Saduko from the gate, "but who it is only the unborn moons will see."

"Mameena," I said as I followed him, "you have set fire to the grass, and men will be burned in it."

"I meant to, Macumazahn," she answered calmly. "Did I not tell you that there was a flame in me, and it will break out sometimes? But, Macumazahn, it is you who have set fire to the grass, not I. Remember that when half Zululand is in ashes. Farewell, O Macumazana, till we meet again, and," she added softly, "whoever else must burn, may the spirits have you in their keeping."

At the gate, remembering my manners, I turned to bid that company a polite farewell. By now Masapo had gained his feet, and was roaring out like a bull:

"Kill him! Kill the hyena! Umbezi, will you sit still and see me, your guest--me, Masapo--struck and insulted under the shadow of your own hut? Go forth and kill him, I say!"

"Why not kill him yourself, Masapo," asked the agitated Umbezi, "or bid your headmen kill him? Who am I that I should take precedence of so great a chief in a matter of the spear?" Then he turned towards me, saying: "Oh, Macumazahn the crafty, if I have dealt well by you, come here and give me your counsel."

"I come, Eater-up-of-Elephants," I answered, and I did.

"What shall I do--what shall I do?" went on Umbezi, brushing the perspiration off his brow with one hand, while he wrung the other in his agitation. "There stands a friend of mine"--he pointed to the infuriated Masapo--"who wishes me to kill another friend of mine," and he jerked his thumb towards the kraal gate. "If I refuse I offend one friend, and if I consent I bring blood upon my hands which will call for blood, since, although Saduko is poor, without doubt he has those who love him."

"Yes," I answered, "and perhaps you will bring blood upon other parts of yourself besides your hands, since Saduko is not one to sit still like a sheep while his throat is cut. Also did he not say that he is not quite alone? Umbezi, if you will take my advice, you will leave Masapo to do his own killing."

"It is good; it is wise!" exclaimed Umbezi. "Masapo," he called to that warrior, "if you wish to fight, pray do not think of me. I see nothing, I hear nothing, and I promise proper burial to any who fall. Only you had best be swift, for Saduko is walking away all this time. Come, you and your people have spears, and the gate stands open."

"Am I to go without my meat in order to knock that hyena on the head?" asked Masapo in a brave voice. "No, he can wait my leisure. Sit still, my people. I tell you, sit still. Tell him, you Macumazahn, that I am coming for him presently, and be warned to keep yourself away from him,

lest you should tumble into his hole."

"I will tell him," I answered, "though I know not who made me your messenger. But listen to me, you Speaker of big words and Doer of small deeds, if you dare to lift a finger against me I will teach you something about holes, for there shall be one or more through that great carcass of yours."

Then, walking up to him, I looked him in the face, and at the same time tapped the handle of the big double-barrelled pistol I carried.

He shrank back muttering something.

"Oh, don't apologise," I said, "only be more careful in future. And now I wish you a good dinner, Chief Masapo, and peace upon your kraal, friend Umbezi."

After this speech I marched off, followed by the clamour of Masapo's furious attendants and the sound of Mameena's light and mocking laughter.

"I wonder which of them she will marry?" I thought to myself, as I set out for the wagons.

As I approached my camp I saw that the oxen were being inspanned, as I supposed by the order of Scowl, who must have heard that there was a row

up at the kraal, and thought it well to be ready to bolt. In this I was mistaken, however, for just then Saduko strolled out of a patch of bush and said:

"I ordered your boys to yoke up the oxen, Inkoosi."

"Have you? That's cool!" I answered. "Perhaps you will tell me why."

"Because we must make a good trek to the northward before night, Inkoosi."

"Indeed! I thought that I was heading south-east."

"Bangu does not live in the south or the east," he replied slowly.

"Oh, I had almost forgotten about Bangu," I said, with a rather feeble attempt at evasion.

"Is it so?" he answered in his haughty voice. "I never knew before that Macumazahn was a man who broke a promise to his friend."

"Would you be so kind as to explain your meaning, Saduko?"

"Is it needful?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "Unless my ears played me tricks, you agreed to go up with me against Bangu. Well, I have gathered the necessary men--with the king's leave--they await us

yonder," and he pointed with his spear towards a dense patch of bush that lay some miles beneath us. "But," he added, "if you desire to change your mind I will go alone. Only then, I think, we had better bid each other good-bye, since I love not friends who change their minds when the assegais begin to shake."

Now, whether Saduko spoke thus by design I do not know. Certainly, however, he could have found no better way to ensure my companionship for what it was worth, since, although I had made no actual promise in this case, I have always prided myself on keeping even a half-bargain with a native.

"I will go with you," I said quietly, "and I hope that, when it comes to the pinch, your spear will be as sharp as your tongue, Saduko. Only do not speak to me again like that, lest we should quarrel."

As I said this I saw a look of relief appear on his face, of very great relief.

"I pray your pardon, my lord Macumazahn," he said, seizing my hand, "but, oh! there is a hole in my heart. I think that Mameena means to play me false, and now that has happened with yonder dog, Masapo, which will make her father hate me."

"If you will take my advice, Saduko," I replied earnestly, "you will let this Mameena fall out of the hole in your heart; you will forget her

name; you will have done with her. Ask me not why."

"Perhaps there is no need, O Macumazana. Perhaps she has been making love to you, and you have turned her away, as, being what you are, and my friend, of course you would do." (It is rather inconvenient to be set upon such a pedestal at times, but I did not attempt to assent or to deny anything, much less to enter into explanations.)

"Perhaps all this has happened," he continued, "or perhaps it is she who has sent for Masapo the Hog. I do not ask, because if you know you will not tell me. Moreover, it matters nothing. While I have a heart, Mameena will never drop out of it; while I can remember names, hers will never be forgotten by me. Moreover, I mean that she shall be my wife. Now, I am minded to take a few men and spear this hog, Masapo, before we go up against Bangu, for then he, at any rate, will be out of my road."

"If you do anything of the sort, Saduko, you will go up against Bangu alone, for I trek east at once, who will not be mixed up with murder."

"Then let it be, Inkoosi; unless he attacks me, as my Snake send that he may, the Hog can wait. After all, he will only be growing a little fatter. Now, if it pleases you order the wagons to trek. I will show the road, for we must camp in that bush to-night where my people wait me, and there I will tell you my plans; also you will find one with a message for you."