

CHAPTER XIV. UMBEZI AND THE BLOOD ROYAL

After this I think that some of the Usutu came up, for it seemed to me that I heard Saduko say:

"Touch not Macumazahn or his servant. They are my prisoners. He who harms them dies, with all his House."

So they put me, fainting, on my horse, and Scowl they carried away upon a shield.

When I came to I found myself in a little cave, or rather beneath some overhanging rocks, at the side of a kopje, and with me Scowl, who had recovered from his fit, but seemed in a very bewildered condition.

Indeed, neither then nor afterwards did he remember anything of the death of Umbelazi, nor did I ever tell him that tale. Like many others, he thought that the Prince had been drowned in trying to swim the Tugela.

"Are they going to kill us?" I asked of him, since, from the triumphant shouting without, I knew that we must be in the midst of the victorious Usutu.

"I don't know, Baas," he answered. "I hope not; after we have gone through so much it would be a pity. Better to have died at the beginning

of the battle."

I nodded my head in assent, and just at that moment a Zulu, who had very evidently been fighting, entered the place carrying a dish of toasted lumps of beef and a gourd of water.

"Cetewayo sends you these, Macumazahn," he said, "and is sorry that there is no milk or beer. When you have eaten a guard waits without to escort you to him." And he went.

"Well," I said to Scowl, "if they were going to kill us, they would scarcely take the trouble to feed us first. So let us keep up our hearts and eat."

"Who knows?" answered poor Scowl, as he crammed a lump of beef into his big mouth. "Still, it is better to die on a full than on an empty stomach."

So we ate and drank, and, as we were suffering more from exhaustion than from our hurts, which were not really serious, our strength came back to us. As we finished the last lump of meat, which, although it had been only half cooked upon the point of an assegai, tasted very good, the Zulu put his head into the mouth of the shelter and asked if we were ready. I nodded, and, supporting each other, Scowl and I limped from the place. Outside were about fifty soldiers, who greeted us with a shout that, although it was mixed with laughter at our pitiable appearance,

struck me as not altogether unfriendly. Amongst these men was my horse, which stood with its head hanging down, looking very depressed. I was helped on to its back, and, Scowl clinging to the stirrup leather, we were led a distance of about a quarter of a mile to Cetewayo.

We found him seated, in the full blaze of the evening sun, on the eastern slope of one of the land-waves of the veld, with the open plain in front of him. It was a strange and savage scene. There sat the victorious prince, surrounded by his captains and indunas, while before him rushed the triumphant regiments, shouting his titles in the most extravagant language. Izimbongi also--that is, professional praisers--were running up and down before him dressed in all sorts of finery, telling his deeds, calling him "Eater-up-of-the-Earth," and yelling out the names of those great ones who had been killed in the battle.

Meanwhile parties of bearers were coming up continually, carrying dead men of distinction upon shields and laying them out in rows, as game is laid out at the end of a day's shooting in England. It seems that Cetewayo had taken a fancy to see them, and, being too tired to walk over the field of battle, ordered that this should be done. Among these, by the way, I saw the body of my old friend, Maputa, the general of the Amawombe, and noted that it was literally riddled with spear thrusts, every one of them in front; also that his quaint face still wore a smile.

At the head of these lines of corpses were laid six dead, all men of large size, in whom I recognised the brothers of Umbelazi, who had fought on his side, and the half-brothers of Cetewayo. Among them were those three princes upon whom the dust had fallen when Zikali, the prophet, smelt out Masapo, the husband of Mameena.

Dismounting from my horse, with the help of Scowl, I limped through and over the corpses of these fallen royalties, cut in the Zulu fashion to free their spirits, which otherwise, as they believed, would haunt the slayers, and stood in front of Cetewayo.

"Siyakubona, Macumazahn," he said, stretching out his hand to me, which I took, though I could not find it in my heart to wish him "good day."

"I hear that you were leading the Amawombe, whom my father, the King, sent down to help Umbelazi, and I am very glad that you have escaped alive. Also my heart is proud of the fight that they made, for you know, Macumazahn, once, next to the King, I was general of that regiment, though afterwards we quarrelled. Still, I am pleased that they did so well, and I have given orders that every one of them who remains alive is to be spared, that they may be officers of a new Amawombe which I shall raise. Do you know, Macumazahn, that you have nearly wiped out three whole regiments of the Usutu, killing many more people than did all my brother's army, the Isigqosa? Oh, you are a great man. Had it not been for the loyalty"--this word was spoken with just a tinge of sarcasm--"of Saduko yonder, you would have won the day for Umbelazi.

Well, now that this quarrel is finished, if you will stay with me I will make you general of a whole division of the King's army, since henceforth I shall have a voice in affairs."

"You are mistaken, O Son of Panda," I answered; "the splendour of the Amawombe's great stand against a multitude is on the name of Maputa, the King's councillor and the induna of the Black One [Chaka], who is gone. He lies yonder in his glory," and I pointed to Maputa's pierced body. "I did but fight as a soldier in his ranks."

"Oh, yes, we know that, we know all that, Macumazahn; and Maputa was a clever monkey in his way, but we know also that you taught him how to jump. Well, he is dead, and nearly all the Amawombe are dead, and of my three regiments but a handful is left; the vultures have the rest of them. That is all finished and forgotten, Macumazahn, though by good fortune the spears went wide of you, who doubtless are a magician, since otherwise you and your servant and your horse would not have escaped with a few scratches when everyone else was killed. But you did escape, as you have done before in Zululand; and now you see here lie certain men who were born of my father. Yet one is missing--he against whom I fought, aye, and he whom, although we fought, I loved the best of all of them. Now, it has been whispered in my ear that you alone know what became of him, and, Macumazahn, I would learn whether he lives or is dead; also, if he is dead, by whose hand he died, who would reward that hand."

Now, I looked round me, wondering whether I should tell the truth or hold my tongue, and as I looked my eyes met those of Saduko, who, cold and unconcerned, was seated among the captains, but at a little distance from any of them--a man apart; and I remembered that he and I alone knew the truth of the end of Umbelazi.

Why, I do not know, but it came into my mind that I would keep the secret. Why should I tell the triumphant Cetewayo that Umbelazi had been driven to die by his own hand; why should I lay bare Saduko's victory and shame? All these matters had passed into the court of a different tribunal. Who was I that I should reveal them or judge the actors of this terrible drama?

"O Cetewayo," I said, "as it chanced I saw the end of Umbelazi. No enemy killed him. He died of a broken heart upon a rock above the river; and for the rest of the story go ask the Tugela into which he fell."

For a moment Cetewayo hid his eyes with his hand.

"Is it so?" he said presently. "Wow! I say again that had it not been for Saduko, the son of Matiwane, yonder, who had some quarrel with Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti about a woman and took his chance of vengeance, it might have been I who died of a broken heart upon a rock above the river. Oh, Saduko, I owe you a great debt and will pay you well; but you shall be no friend of mine, lest we also should chance to quarrel about a woman, and I should find myself dying of a broken heart on a rock

above a river. O my brother Umbelazi, I mourn for you, my brother, for, after all, we played together when we were little and loved each other once, who in the end fought for a toy that is called a throne, since, as our father said, two bulls cannot live in the same yard, my brother. Well, you are gone and I remain, yet who knows but that at the last your lot may be happier than mine. You died of a broken heart, Umbelazi, but of what shall I die, I wonder?"[*]

[*--That history of Cetewayo's fall and tragic death and of Zikali's vengeance I hope to write one day, for in these events also I was destined to play a part.--A. Q.]

I have given this interview in detail, since it was because of it that the saying went abroad that Umbelazi died of a broken heart.

So in truth he did, for before his spear pierced it his heart was broken.

Now, seeing that Cetewayo was in one of his soft moods, and that he seemed to look upon me kindly, though I had fought against him, I reflected that this would be a good opportunity to ask his leave to depart. To tell the truth, my nerves were quite shattered with all I had gone through, and I longed to be away from the sights and sounds of that terrible battlefield, on and about which so many thousand people had perished this fateful day, as I had seldom longed for anything before. But while I was making up my mind as to the best way to approach him,

something happened which caused me to lose my chance.

Hearing a noise behind me, I looked round, to see a stout man arrayed in a very fine war dress, and waving in one hand a gory spear and in the other a head-plume of ostrich feathers, who was shouting out:

"Give me audience of the son of the King! I have a song to sing to the Prince. I have a tale to tell to the conqueror, Cetewayo."

I stared. I rubbed my eyes. It could not be--yes, it was--Umbezi, "Eater-up-of-Elephants," the father of Mameena. In a few seconds, without waiting for leave to approach, he had bounded through the line of dead princes, stopping to kick one of them on the head and address his poor clay in some words of shameful insult, and was prancing about before Cetewayo, shouting his praises.

"Who is this umfokazana?" [that is, low fellow] growled the Prince. "Bid him cease his noise and speak, lest he should be silent for ever."

"O Calf of the Black Cow, I am Umbezi, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,' chief captain of Saduko the Cunning, he who won you the battle, father of Mameena the Beautiful, whom Saduko wed and whom the dead dog, Umbelazi, stole away from him."

"Ah!" said Cetewayo, screwing up his eyes in a fashion he had when

he meant mischief, which among the Zulus caused him to be named the "Bull-who-shuts-his-eyes-to-toss," "and what have you to tell me, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants' and father of Mameena, whom the dead dog, Umbelazi, took away from your master, Saduko the Cunning?"

"This, O Mighty One; this, O Shaker of the Earth, that well am I named 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,' who have eaten up Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti--the Elephant himself."

Now Saduko seemed to awake from his brooding and started from his place; but Cetewayo sharply bade him be silent, whereon Umbezi, the fool, noting nothing, continued his tale.

"O Prince, I met Umbelazi in the battle, and when he saw me he fled from me; yes, his heart grew soft as water at the sight of me, the warrior whom he had wronged, whose daughter he had stolen."

"I hear you," said Cetewayo. "Umbelazi's heart turned to water at the sight of you because he had wronged you--you who until this morning, when you deserted him with Saduko, were one of his jackals. Well, and what happened then?"

"He fled, O Lion with the Black Mane; he fled like the wind, and I, I flew after him like--a stronger wind. Far into the bush he fled, till at length he came to a rock above the river and was obliged to stand. Then there we fought. He thrust at me, but I leapt over his spear thus,"

and he gambolled into the air. "He thrust at me again, but I bent myself thus," and he ducked his great head. "Then he grew tired and my time came. He turned and ran round the rock, and I, I ran after him, stabbing him through the back, thus, and thus, and thus, till he fell, crying for mercy, and rolled off the rock into the river; and as he rolled I snatched away his plume. See, is it not the plume of the dead dog Umbelazi?"

Cetewayo took the ornament and examined it, showing it to one or two of the captains near him, who nodded their heads gravely.

"Yes," he said, "this is the war plume of Umbelazi, beloved of the King, strong and shining pillar of the Great House; we know it well, that war plume at the sight of which many a knee has loosened. And so you killed him, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,' father of Mameena, you who this morning were one of the meanest of his jackals. Now, what reward shall I give you for this mighty deed, O Umbezi?"

"A great reward, O Terrible One," began Umbezi, but in an awful voice Cetewayo bade him be silent.

"Yes," he said, "a great reward. Harken, Jackal and Traitor. Your own words bear witness against you. You, you have dared to lift your hand against the blood-royal, and with your foul tongue to heap lies and insults upon the name of the mighty dead."

Now, understanding at last, Umbezi began to babble excuses, yes, and to declare that all his tale was false. His fat cheeks fell in, he sank to his knees.

But Cetewayo only spat towards the man, after his fashion when enraged, and looked round him till his eye fell upon Saduko.

"Saduko," he said, "take away this slayer of the Prince, who boasts that he is red with my own blood, and when he is dead cast him into the river from that rock on which he says he stabbed Panda's son."

Saduko looked round him wildly and hesitated.

"Take him away," thundered Cetewayo, "and return ere dark to make report to me."

Then, at a sign from the Prince, soldiers flung themselves upon the miserable Umbezi and dragged him thence, Saduko going with them; nor was the poor liar ever seen again. As he passed by me he called to me, for Mameena's sake, to save him; but I could only shake my head and bethink me of the warning I had once given to him as to the fate of traitors.

It may be said that this story comes straight from the history of Saul and David, but I can only answer that it happened. Circumstances that were not unlike ended in a similar tragedy, that is all. What David's

exact motives were, naturally I cannot tell; but it is easy to guess those of Cetewayo, who, although he could make war upon his brother to secure the throne, did not think it wise to let it go abroad that the royal blood might be lightly spilt. Also, knowing that I was a witness of the Prince's death, he was well aware that Umbezi was but a boastful liar who hoped thus to ingratiate himself with an all-powerful conqueror.

Well, this tragic incident had its sequel. It seems--to his honour, be it said--that Saduko refused to be the executioner of his father-in-law, Umbezi; so those with him performed this office and brought him back a prisoner to Cetewayo.

When the Prince learned that his direct order, spoken in the accustomed and fearful formula of "Take him away," had been disobeyed, his rage was, or seemed to be, great. My own conviction is that he was only seeking a cause of quarrel against Saduko, who, he thought, was a very powerful man, who would probably treat him, should opportunity arise, as he had treated Umbelazi, and perhaps now that the most of Panda's sons were dead, except himself and the lads M'tonga, Sikota and M'kungo, who had fled into Natal, might even in future days aspire to the throne as the husband of the King's daughter. Still, he was afraid or did not think it politic at once to put out of his path this master of many legions, who had played so important a part in the battle. Therefore he ordered him to be kept under guard and taken back to Nodwengu, that the whole matter might be investigated by Panda the King, who still ruled

the land, though henceforth only in name. Also he refused to allow me to depart into Natal, saying that I, too, must come to Nodwengu, as there my testimony might be needed.

So, having no choice, I went, it being fated that I should see the end of the drama.