

RUSSIAN VISITORS TO SOUTH AFRICA ONE HUNDRED AND TEN YEARS AGO

One wonders how many South Africans are aware of the fact that Russian blood has flowed in the veins of some of their Cape Coloureds for nearly one hundred and fifty years. "A few Russian names persist in Simonstown to this day", says Mr. D. H. Varley who has done some research on this matter. That is not surprising for a Russian soldier, captured by the French in 1814 and again captured by the English at the Battle of Waterloo, was later brought by them to the Cape. He settled there, married a "black woman" and had six children by her. The meeting with this man, grown old by 1853, is one of the minor incidents described by the Russian writer Ivan Alexandrevich Goncharov (1812-1891) in the chapter *At the Cape of Good Hope* of his book *Fregat Pallada* (Frigate Pallas) which was published in Russia in 1856.

A good, and evidently the only existing translation into English, by N. W. Wilson, appeared in the December, 1940, and March, June and September, 1961 issues of the *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* under the title *A Russian view of The Cape in 1853*. It has an introduction and valuable footnotes by D. H. Varley.

It was high time that this work, familiar to most educated people in Russia, should also have become known in the country which it describes. *Fregat Pallada* is the story of a round-the-world voyage of a Russian naval sailing ship. It is unique in the Russian literature of the 19th century both for the subject chosen and for the manner of treatment.

There are many Russian descriptions of travels by land but no other well-known literary work was entirely devoted to a sea voyage during the last century. A Russian ship sailing round the world for two years and "carrying on board a small Russian world of four hundred inhabitants" in itself was a rare and special event. What made it even more so was the presence on board of an outstanding writer, who put down on paper everything which struck him as worthy of attention, endowed it with life and produced a fascinating, witty, yet sympathetic account of the journey.

The narrative, told in letter form, flows evenly, without any striking effects. It cannot be read as an exciting novel, where the plot and the fate of the heroes grip one so that one cannot part with the book until it has been finished. One can read *Fregat Pallada* for a while, leave it and return to it later with increased pleasure. The style is easy, conversational yet elegant and concise. Goncharov is a master of his art. He is a realist with a remarkable power of observation and a wealth of colourful detail, which never becomes tedious. His canvas is vast. The reader is forever confronted with new people and situations. A fresh light is shed on the author's companions in his journey. One can read the same pages over and over and each time discover something, unnoticed, unsavoured before, and let one's mind dwell on it unhurriedly and with renewed pleasure.

Goncharov's real fame, as one of the accepted Russian classic writers

was to come later with the publication of his masterpieces *Oblomov* in 1853 and *The Precipice* in 1869. However before 1852 he had published a very successful first novel *A Common Story*, which had appeared in 1847.

At that time writing was his hobby for he was a civil servant and was working in the Ministry of Finance. During the course of 1852 he was appointed, at his own request, as secretary to Admiral Putiatin, who was being sent on a diplomatic mission to Japan.

The *Fregat Pallada* left Russia on 7th October, 1852. Her first port of call was Portsmouth, which she left on the 6th of January, only, since being an old ship and rather battered by storms in the Baltic, she had to be put in dry dock for repairs. Delayed by the lack of favourable winds in the tropics, she entered Simon's Town harbour on the 10th of March. The frigate stayed in South African waters for over a month, and left on April 12th on her journey to the Far East, for she first had to be caulked and have a complete overhaul. This gave the author and a few of his companions, who were thirsty for knowledge, the opportunity to go ashore and to undertake an expedition into the interior.

At the Cape of Good Hope is but one out of the seventeen chapters in *Fregat Pallada*. It takes up seventy-seven of 604 pages of the 1957 text edition of the Soviet text. That is the only portion with which we are concerned in this article.

Goncharov visited the Cape Colony just after the Eighth Kaffir War (1851-3). Shortly before that the English had decided (in 1852) to recognise the independence of the Orange Free State.

The visit of the Russian travellers coincided with that of Livingstone who arrived in Cape Town in April, 1852, went up North and at that particular time was somewhere in the Kalahari near the Zambezi. There is no indication of whether the Russians were aware of his presence. Goncharov was very interested in exploration and explorers. He never travelled beyond the boundaries of Russia before or after this particular journey. But he had read a great deal. Speaking of South Africa he says: "Any descriptions I had read about the farmers, about their way of life, how greedily I had followed their adventures, their fights with savages, with wild beasts, never thinking that one day . . ." — he himself would set foot on South African soil.

It was the first Russian "scientific" expedition to land in South Africa. Its object was to collect all the information available in such a short space of time, about the country, its historical background, its natural history, its inhabitants and their ways of life. Goncharov allocates an important place to the history of the Cape Colony and to descriptions of South African scenery. Some of them are of considerable literary merit, but they are outside our present scope. Suffice it to say that the author was giving as much information as possible about a country which was as mysterious and as little known to Russians as Russia was and still is to the average South African.

Consequently *At the Cape of Good Hope* is an enlightening and fascinating historical document not only to Russians but also to South Africans, as seen through Russian eyes.

The Russians stayed in South Africa for too short a time to do any extensive research. The ground the expedition covered did not exceed 350 kilometres. They set off from Cape Town towards Stellenbosch, from there to Paarl, and so to Wellington and Worcester, and returned by the same route. The expedition comprised a handful of men only — who intended to botanize — among them two of the ship's doctors. Fortunately for the group it was headed by a distinguished scholar K. N. Possyet who spoke Dutch fluently. The others knew only Russian, French or a few words of English.

After sixty days at sea the Russians were delighted to be on terra firma in a new country and were curious about everything in it, the climate, the vegetation and the scenery, but mainly its people, their appearance, customs, way of life, the houses they lived in, the food they ate, etc.

What struck Goncharov mainly to begin with was the contrast between the same things in South Africa and in Russia. To him even a dog's bark sounded strange: "As if it were barking in a foreign language."

Before setting out from Cape Town the Russian visitors received a call from "a certain tall well-built gentleman, spruce and with the most becoming side whiskers. On his face played a constant smile, born of a modest consciousness of his worth . . . "Van Dyk" he introduced himself. "A whole train of associations flashed through my mind," says the author. "Van Dyk" a descendant, of course, of the renowned painter . . . He had come to make the acquaintance of the Russians, uncommon guests here, just like the major A.D.C. to the Governor . . . "I am your guide to the Colony. Your banker engaged me yesterday with two carriages and horses."

"My train of associations was shattered", commented the disappointed writer. As the Russians walked about the streets of Cape Town and in the square, where they were told "troops are ordinarily drilling but not now, for they have been at war with the Kaffirs again," they were impressed by the multiracial aspect of the city. "Swarthy, curly headed urchins ran about the streets and black or brown women thronged in them together with Malays in high straw hats like bells, but with flaired brims . . . Three black women were following our path. I asked one of them to which tribe she belonged. 'Fingo', she said and then shouted out 'Mozambique' and 'Hottentot'. All three began to roar with laughter." Which was not surprising, for the Russians, must have appeared as strange to the natives as the latter to them. Apart from their foreign clothes and accents, the Russian walked, followed by their servants "one with a gun, a second with a butterfly net and a third with a hammer for cracking stones."

"It was not the only time I heard that kind of cheeky laughter from black women," goes on the author. "Just pass them and nothing happens, but ask a black beauty something, for example her name, or about the path,

she talks nonsense and after her answer, her laughter and that of her friends — if there are any — ring out. “Bechuaan, A Kaffir”, the peasant woman continued to shout. And peasant woman she really was. She was dressed like our peasants with a cloth on her head, a kind of skirt round her waist in place of a sarafan and a blouse . . . Some of the coloured women are amazingly like our sunburned old village women, but the blacks are unlike any other people.” There is a point worth noting in connection with the wording of the above. In the prerevolutionary editions of *Fregat Pallada* the adjective “cheeky” is used for the black woman’s laughter, but in the 1953 edition, which Mr. Wilson used, this adjective is omitted. Such liberties with the text which occur later are hardly fortuitous.

Because of this it is particularly interesting to hear Goncharov’s own impression of race relations in South Africa. Everything he sees and hears convinces him and his companions that the real masters of the Cape are the English. From the condition of the hotels alone it is possible to conclude that the Dutch are on the down-grade and the English on the up-grade. The remains of Holland’s dominion are scarce. “I hardly saw any Dutchmen in Cape Town; however the Dutch language was much in vogue. Old men and servants of both sexes speak it particularly.” The English are on the “up-grade” says the author but he obviously does not care for them, although he recognizes their good points. (Relations between Russia and England were becoming more and more strained over the Near East and the Balkans; this was to lead to the Crimean War.)

“The Englishman, whoever he may be, is a gentleman here; he is always dressed with refinement, is cold and gives his orders to a black disdainfully. He sits in his spacious office or in a shop or in the Commercial Exchange; he bestirs himself at the quay or is an architect, engineer, planter or official; he arranges, directs, does his work — then he drives in his carriage or rides on horseback and enjoys the coolness on the stoep of his villa, which hides itself in the shade of a vineyard.”

And the blacks? “Here’s a well built, handsome negro who is Fingo or Mozambique. He carries a bale on his shoulders; he is a coolie — a hired servant, porter, errand boy, here’s another of the Zulu tribe, or more often a Hottentot, who from the box skilfully directs a pair of horses harnessed to a cabriolet. A third, a Bechuaan, leads a riding horse, a fourth sweeps the street raising a cloud of yellowish-red dust. Here’s a Malay, his head covered with a cloth according to the Mahometan custom, driving a covered wagon harnessed to six, eight, twelve oxen. Here’s an old woman with a kerchief, wrinkled and ugly, another, more ugly still, is haggling over some kind of trash, a third, ugliest of all, is begging . . .

“A crowd of boys and girls ranging from jet black to pure white is running about, laughing, crying and scuffling. The hair of the blacks is like a heap of soot. Half castes of both sexes are wearing European dress; farther on are drunken English sailors waving their hands, bawling at the tops of their voices, some with hats, some hatless who are driving

in carriages or jostling on the quay.

"And through all this vari-coloured throng pass those exquisite creations the Englishwomen . . ." One of them is Caroline, the daughter of the proprietress at the Welch Hotel, where the travellers stayed. "She was a beautiful girl with ugly hands; her eyes were dark blue and radiant . . . through her tender white skin glimmered the thin blue lines of her veins . . . her mouth small and graceful with the same perpetual smile for one and all . . . How gracefully even though with ugly hands she presented each guest with his beautifully written bill. How nicely she said 'Thank you' when in return for the bills they gave her a pile of sovereigns."

Though the author says that in the English hotels "everything is gay, new and fresh", he was not very pleased with the service, as can be surmised from the following scene. In the morning after his arrival at the hotel he rang. "A pimply short sighted youth appeared and the room suddenly smelt of dog. 'Water for shaving', I said. 'Yes, Sir' he answered and did not bring it. I rang and he reappeared with a jug of water. 'A clothes-brush for my suits.' The same 'yes' and the same disobedience."

It is also amusing to read about the author's indignation at the prevailing system of lighting. "In the hall on the round table I saw a whole array of copper candlesticks and oh horror! Tallow candles! They had been got ready for the guests. In England it had amazed me that such a tidy, refined people as the English, so fantastic in their way of life, and into the bargain so inventive had not invented a substitute for candles."

Food — its quality and variety also was an item of considerable importance to the author. He describes several of the meals they had with a now kindly, now malicious sense of humour.

Their first breakfast in South Africa consisted of "omelette, cold tough beef and hot tough ham" (probably bacon and eggs). As for the tea — "I tasted it and could not decide whether to swallow it or not. I tried to remember what it was like and recalled that together with rhubarb, mint, elder, camomile and other drugs with which they so generously regale children, they also dispensed a sort of herb, like this tea. In England I thought it bad, but here it was like nothing on earth . . . additionally sand was served instead of sugar, sugary sand of course, but still sand, which made the muddy tea even muddier."

And later they had "Roast beef, beefsteaks, ham, chicken, ducks, mutton, with as flavourings mustard, pepper, soy, pickles and other poisons, which are bad enough when used externally as plasters but which the English administer wholly internally."

The author give an entertaining description of their introduction to curry. "We not knowing what sort of a dish it was, put it trustingly in our mouths. Then began a variety of troubles. One man stopped chewing, in doubt as to what he should do with his mouthful. Another gulped and all at once made a wry face as if speaking English", and so on.

The "English dinner would exhaust anybody", he says later. As

for the English breakfast (at Welch Hotel) at "only nine o'clock in the morning — what sort of breakfast so early", exclaims Goncharov (the well-to-do Russians were usually very late in rising and in retiring). "How does breakfast differ from dinner," he asks, seeing the abundance of dishes, and receives the reply from one of his companions that "it really is dinner only there is no soup."

There are many more comments about the food in the different places they visited with particular mention — very favourable — of all the luscious South African fruits.

What makes the reading off *At the Cape of Good Hope* so enjoyable to the average reader is the wealth of information presented in a lively, entertaining way. Here and there we are given actual dry facts; we learn for instance that "Cape Town by means of aqueducts, provides itself with excellent water from the mountain springs," that it has "about 25,000 inhabitants, reckoning Europeans and coloured together", that at the entrance to the town "they collect 8d. for each conveyance using the highways" and so on.

Here is a passage dealing with their sightseeing in Cape Town: "We called at our banker's office and afterwards at shops. One bought books, another suits, shoes and a variety of things. The book trade here is quite important. There are plenty of shops, the principal Robertson's, being on the main street. They have their own independent literature here. I saw many periodicals, almanacs, books of verse and prose, maps and engravings and bought several books published here especially about the Cape Colony . . . They have many of their own mills and factories for hats, glassware and cotton, which fully satisfy the requirements of the Territory. Looking at the great number of shops of different kinds I asked myself 'Where are the customers?'"

"At midday the sun was scorching. The venetian blinds were closely drawn. Movement ceased i.e. movement on foot, but driving continued — carriages tore along at full speed, oxen slowly drew heavy wagons, laden with corn and other freight and sometimes with people. In such a wagon I have seen up to fifteen people. In the middle of the street, as in England, stood a single row of carriages for hire; victorias, cabriolets, for one horse and for a pair. The carriages are as if brand new, none is old fashioned, all are glossy with paint and spick and span. The black coachmen try to catch your eye but do not say a word . . . In and behind the town you constantly meet horsemen and sometimes whole cavalcades. The horses are almost all of middling size but handsome. The demand for them is so great that on Sunday, if you have not arranged about it the day before, you won't find a single one. On that day, all the townsmen scatter to their country houses. However, at one spot I saw the notice 'omnibus office'. I ask where they go and they mention the nearest places, which are about 40 or 50 miles from Cape Town."

The omnibus company was obviously owned by the English, for the author speaks of "the Hollander-farmer, stubborn in his hatred of the

English who with his floppy hat brim turned down over his eyes and in his grey jacket, still jogs for thirty miles astride his nag, rather than take a seat in an omnibus, which for three shillings and in about four hours will deliver him at the same destination."

"They (the Dutch) still use the same huge, heavy plough, which was used two hundred years ago, inspanning up to twelve oxen, and the same cumbersome clumsy harrow. They know nothing about the rotation of crops. The English agricultural implements seem too light and fragile to them." This is criticism, or rather a statement of fact but without any sting in it. When Goncharov speaks of Dutchmen, or Afrikaners, his scorn vanishes. He is not blind to their shortcomings but speaks of them with kindly humour and a warmth wholly absent when he is dealing with the English, whose spirit one feels, is totally foreign to him. He views the latter coldly, notes their idiosyncrasies but does occasionally give them their due. For instance, he is impressed with the system of education, and having been taken round a school at Stellenbosch "celebrated for its verdancy, fruit and fresh air" he speaks of it as "one of the best in the colony, which has turned out several good teachers for other places" and which impressed him so much that he wonders: "Who knows what oak of learning will grow in this ancient, yet still young colony, which is remoulding itself? Perhaps Stellenbosch may become the African Göttingen or Oxford?"

But, on the whole, Goncharov is prejudiced against the English. He does not like them and sits in judgment on them, without making any effort to understand them.

As for the Afrikaners, he feels a natural bond of sympathy towards them. They might be somewhat difficult and obstinate at times, but they are more like the folk at home, perhaps peculiar and quaint, but always dear to his heart. (The sympathy felt by the Russians for the Afrikaners in 1853 is especially significant in view of the Russian attitude and help during the Boar War nearly fifty years later.)

Something of this feeling of his passes to inanimate objects as well. Here is a passage describing a room, or more exactly a bed in an English-owned hotel.

"There were no windows in their rooms, for they would have let in the hot sunlight and if anyone needed light he could always open the door. It was as you see, simple, primitive, African". Then he went to his bedroom "for I too wanted finally to lie down and sleep but first devoted several minutes to the survey of my bed.

"It was a double bed universal in the English dominions but I had never seen such a specimen as this before. It was a four-poster with a canopy of dark woollen material hanging in heavy festoons with tassels and fringes. On the headboard stood a sort of shield on which was carved a representation as if of a crown and coat of arms. Sombrely coloured curtains with big folds closely shut off the big bed. After three circuits round the dismal catafalque I still did not know how to climb into it and took fright . . . However it was necessary to go to bed. I parted

the curtains and before me there was a whole mountain of feather beds with the inevitable long cylindrical pillow. Several blankets, one on top of another, were so massive that I could only lift them with an effort. I wanted to climb but could not, it stood so high. Twice I tried to reach the middle of the bed and twice rolled down. So I stayed on the edge. I was just dozing off when suddenly I heard a rustle. What was it? . . . The rustle became louder and louder, soon a faint and repeated scurrying began in the canopy — mice. Well that was no misfortune . . . but suddenly a doubt came into my head; for we were in Africa, the trees and cattle, and people, even the frogs were not like ours, perhaps, for all I knew, even the mice were not either."

How different are his descriptions and his reflexions about an Afrikaans inn. "The dark sooty room furnished in the Hollands style, looks cordially at the traveller, just as an unshaved man regards you frowningly but with a friendly expression in his eye. Scales were to be seen, there was smell of cinnamon, coffee and spices — in a word of housekeeping." It reminds him of the "comfortable, little house of some poor aunt in the depths of the country . . . It is true that the armchair is rather hard and that you can't move it easily from place to place, that the varnish and gilt are almost quite gone, that rags are hanging instead of curtains, that the inn-keeper himself looks pitifully poor, but it's an honest and hospitable poverty which will always feed you . . . which will give away its last cent."

Here is more about an inn near Stellenbosch. "We opened one of the doors leading out . . . and pulled up before an original picture of the Flemish school. The room was high with a wooden floor and was crammed with dilapidated cupboards blackened by time, and with various household utensils. All along the wall stood a couch with part of the seat fallen through, in front of it was a round table covered with a coarse table cloth. The rest of the wall space was taken up by simple benches and stools. On one bench sat a very old woman in a Hottentot cap, without a frill and dipped tallow candles, another elderly woman sat behind a spinning wheel; a third, a young girl, with the blondest of curls, and white skin, the colour of baked milk . . . bustled about the housework."

Not all the Dutch dwellings they visited were so poor as is demonstrated by their visit to the farm Elsenberg.¹ Below is a delightful description of the visit: 'On the threshold (of the house) stood a tall, grizzled old man with beetling brows in a long cloth coat covering his waist completely, a waistcoat as long and broad nankin trousers falling in folds around his feet.

1. The farm Elsenberg, now a well-known experimental agricultural station, was granted in 1698 to Samuel Elsevier, Secunde to W. A. van der Stel. By 1754 it had been acquired by Martin Melk, grandfather of the owner whom Goncharov describes and planter of the famous vine.

"He held out his hand and stood not moving on the threshold but looked at us so gently and kindly that all the features of his face smiled. On the stoep lay countless pumpkins; threading our way through them we got to our host and his hand, which we shook one after the other.

"At last we were visiting a Dutch farmer at the Cape in Africa . . . We went into a big room, from which the coolness wafted out on us. At the door into the drawing room three new phenomena met us; the mistress of the house with a narrowish frill and a brown dress, her daughter, a pretty girl of 13, dressed like her mother, who gazed at us youthfully and freshly with childish, shy curiosity; also some other woman, a guest or a relative. They invited us into the drawing room by signs. I could not believe it; were they really farmers-peasants? The drawing room was a still bigger room in which twilight reigned as in a fashionable boudoir; in the middle of it, damask covered pouffes were grouped together and a massive walnut table stood laden with various curiosities, shells and other objects. In the corners nestled heavy but handsome old fashioned couches and armchairs. At the windows and doors hung thick silk curtains of a material not made nowadays. The cleanliness was incredible. It was a pity to tread on the varnished floors. I was afraid to sit down on one of the pouffes, on which it appeared nobody had ever sat. Evidently the room was swept out, cleaned, shown to guests then swept out again and locked indefinitely."

He goes on: "Not one of our hosts spoke English, much less French. Our host's grandfather had been noted for his aversion to the English and his grandson was too." The English had done them much harm "that is, had bought up the blacks, had appeased and were appeasing the Kaffirs and other predatory tribes." During the conversation the Russians also learned that the English "have spoiled the blacks and have trained them to be idle. They earn enough by working to live for a time, then they leave. They are not fond of permanent work but loaf around and indulge in drinking bouts until destitution forces them to work again."

The visitors were told that their host had an annual income of about R2,000, but he told them that "markets are poor. They are only good at all when there is a war on, as there has been recently . . . Then everything becomes two and a half times dearer" for "consumption is greater, the demand for bread and wine from an English army of up to 12,000 men is excellent and the sales are splendid."

Their host exported his wine to England and Mauritius. After a delicious meal on products of the farm the travellers were about to leave.

"Finally Possyet spoke in Dutch and excused himself for the unexpected and perhaps inopportune visit. The old man replied unhurriedly and without fuss that he was glad to have such guests from far away. And obviously he was indeed glad. My God, what a long time since I saw such a way of life, such simple and kindly people and how glad I should have been to stay with them a bit longer." Besides the striking portrait of the old farmer, three other characters stand out in particular and for

entirely different reasons.

First of all there is Dr. Weatherhead² "an English military doctor" who speaks several languages, has travelled extensively and has a wife "who however coquettishly she might dress, her dull sunken eyes and pale lips could inspire only sympathy for her sickness". He is spending his long leave in the Cape and surprises the Russians with his flattering, extravagant praise of them for their "modesty, sobriety and general good behaviour" and with harsh criticism of his compatriots. He tells them, for instance that upon the arrival of an English ship, "the English naval officers got so drunk that many could not leave their places, as for the others, they were not able to even do that and had fallen on the floor." This kind of talk makes the Russians have doubts about the doctor's true nationality, for "no one would talk in this way about one's own people, particularly with strangers." The doctor speaks about incomes and salaries, and ends up by asking the travellers what the position is of Jews in Russia. This convinces them that he is not English, but Jewish.

The interesting point here is the fact that the whole discussion concerning this, which occupies almost a page, of the pre-revolutionary text is omitted from the Soviet edition. One cannot help wondering why. The passage has nothing anti-semitic in it, but the contrary applies; it is another dig at the English. Actually he admires the doctor: "There is nothing whatsoever English about him," says Goncharov. "He does not stare as if his eyes are popping out of his head; his thoughts and judgment are not corsetted by pressure; he does not put his words through a strainer when he speaks. His thoughts flow lightly and freely; it is obvious that his brains are not stuffed up with prejudice, and his opinions are not shaped in the English starched-shirt style. In a word, everything about him is cosmopolitan — Jewish . . ."

The second character of interest is Mr. Bain³ who "is a remarkable man in the Colony. He has lived in it from his early years and four times . . . has walked to its furthest limits and across the Orange River to 20 degrees S. latitude. His journeys were undertaken partly for geological exploration partly from a passion for travel and adventure.

"Bain is tall, sturdily built and strong, he walks a great deal and takes long firm strides like an elephant. He eats a lot like a workman and drinks even more. His face is reddish and he is bald. From learned conversation, he passes on to joking and he sings so loud, that all of us in chorus could not shout him down. He has an amazing falsetto. He sang Scottish songs and ballads for us."

His hobby was geology and he showed his Russian visitors "a huge and splendid map on which in detail were represented the formations of all

2. Dr. Thomas Allmann Weatherhead, first appointed to the Bengal Army in 1838, was promoted Surgeon-Major on Jan. 11th, 1852, and attached to Hodson's Horse. Retired Aug. 16th, 1862. (*India Office Lists*.)

3. For a biographical sketch of Andrew Geddes Bain (1797-1864) "trader, explorer, soldier, road engineer and geologist" see *The Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain* ed M. H. Lister (Van Riebeeck Society Publications, No. 30, Cape Town, 1949).

the mountains from the Cape itself to the furthestmost frontiers of the Colony." The plan was elegantly drawn. Bain had done all the work himself. He had worked at his task for fifteen years and had sent a copy to London. Bain's second speciality was the discovery and description of the fossil animals of the Colony. His third and main speciality was road building. He was at the time busy constructing a road, which later became known as Mitchell's pass. On the whole the roads seem to have been good to the Russians, who were used to some pretty bad ones at home. However, the author does complain occasionally as for instance in the following passage describing their approach to Worcester.

"Ah, what punishment! In places we drove over long stretches of cobblestones; that meant that we were driving along the course of a dried up stream. The wheels ground so loudly on the stones that it was impossible to converse. We made several mistakes, taking hills at close quarters or bushes for town buildings. Then we got tired of both driving and making mistakes and sat glumly silent, only clinging to the side when there were jolts."

Mr. Bain told them several amusing anecdotes of strange incidents, which had happened to him in his chequered career, among others one in which he was forced by a native chief to fight for him against other natives and did not only wage war, but won it with blank shots, which frightened the enemy so much that they fled "leaving their dwellings in the victor's hands."

An aspect of Mr. Bain, which left a vivid impression on the Russians was a visit to his home where "Bain presented us to his daughters, four mature 'Afrikaner' maidens. Around the girls were a lot of little dogs, signs of vanishing hopes for love and matrimony. "Mature maidens, when they leave off dreaming, focuss their need for love on cats and little dogs, the more tender spirits on flowers."

Striking is the account of the interview with the native chief, *Seyolo*,⁴ imprisoned for the active part he played in the Kaffir Wars. The Russians arrived with a present in the form of compressed slabs of tobacco leaves for "smoking or chewing". The chief cooped up in a penthouse, received them; "lying on a mattress, next to another one occupied by his wife. After stretching his hand to the visitors, he took the tobacco, without attempting to see what was in the paper, put it down beside him. Then we silently began to scrutinize one another. I looked at him and at his

4. Seyolo was the right hand son of the Xhosa Chief Dunshane, whom he succeeded in 1828. Of warlike disposition he bore arms in the Sixth and Seventh Kaffir Wars, making a treaty with the British Government at the end of each, but could not resist the warcry in the Eighth Kaffir War and finally surrendered to Col. Maclean in Oct. 1852. Tried by court-martial, he was sentenced to death but this was commuted to imprisonment for life. He remained a state prisoner at Wynberg until May, 1869, by which time his half-brother Siwani had taken his place and many of his followers had died in the famines of the sixties. He was allowed to return to Kaffraria but never regained his influence with the tribes. (G. M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1920. Vol. 5, (index) vol. 3. page 214.)

wife with pleasure, although I thought it gave them no pleasure to look at us. He was a man of about thirty, tall, well built, and athletic, with a dull dark brown colour. He wore a jacket and blue trousers, his feet were naked and his chest was bare. She had a chintz dress of European cut on with shoes and stockings. Her head was bound up in a cloth . . . she was no more than nineteen or twenty. She had a swarthy yellow face, dark grey eyes with a kindly expression and smallish, well made feet."

They could not converse, since the interpreter was out, but one of the party had taken a snapshot of Seyolo a few days previously, which Goncharov showed to Seyolo. Seyolo looked at it, laughed loudly and gave it to his wife. When they were leaving "Seyolo gave his hand and amiably nodded his head . . . The wife was very pleased also, gave her hand, and nodded her head." Upon taking their leave Goncharov remembered that some of his companions had found that Seyolo's wife "was ugly with a malicious face" and took up her defence, "astonished that ideas about a woman's appearance could differ so much." He was even more astonished when he learnt that she was only one of the chief's seven wives who "come to him in turns and spend three or four weeks with him . . ."

Goncharov simply could not make that out. Earlier on he mentions seeing "negroes with knapsacks on sticks, but well dressed", who their guide had told them, "were black people coming from the war. The war with the Kaffirs had just ended, but some of the negro tribes had taken part in it at the invitation of the English Government."

The Russians were very interested in the blacks, not only as curiosities in a strange land but as human beings, "as yet in their infancy, who like small children bite the hand that feeds them: "The whites try to civilise the blacks by peaceful means, they give them ploughs, axes, nails. The blacks give elephant tusks and pelts in return and await the occasion to drive away (the white man's) cattle and to destroy their enemy . . . They, together with wild animals, are retreating into the interior, luring the whites to penetrate further and to bring Europe into Africa."

And what about the Whites? What about the future of South Africa? Goncharov speaks of this country "where every inch of the ground, burned down by the sun, has been washed by blood, where each mountain and bush offer a natural obstacle to the Whites and protect and act as a defence to the blacks." He is aware of the magnitude of the problem. He sees too much land, too few people, and thinks that an increase in the white population might improve matters.

"But where to get the population." There is no gold, and crowds do not rush in as they do in Australia and California. Pioneers are wanted here; or perhaps emigrants could be lured by telling them that treasure was buried in the ground, as the dying farmer told his children, so that they should dig it all up. "Everything here changes not from day to day, but from hour to hour, and is in a constant state of flux. The invincible energy of man is struggling against unconquerable nature — spirit — versus matter . . .

“What awaits the Colony? Will it be a home for Whites only? . . . Will the Blacks, as children of the same father, share the common heritage of freedom, religion and civilisation? . . . Will the Whites ever receive that reward which they are fully entitled to expect for the enormous expenditure of labour and money, or will these labours remain a great and unselfish exploit performed solely for the good of humanity?” . . . There is no answer to these questions states the author. “The present state of affairs”, he goes on to say, “offers no correct solution as to the future of the colony. All the onlooker can do is to observe, collect facts and build a whole world of conjectures . . .”

E. Williams-Foxcroft.