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A SARGA

Consultation with the leading dictionaries and other works on the English language, such as Websters' and The Oxford English Dictionary, disclose that the Old Norse term "saga" relates specifically to a saying or story of Scandinavian battles, customs and mediaeval legend. On many occasions I have heard the true Norse sagas sung, or perhaps chanted, before the fire in the long winter nights in the Shetland and neighboring islands. Here, in the last remaining Viking area the"up-hally-ah"still exists as a reality on the departure of the old year, as does a Viking warrior in his burning ship.

However, it is not in this primary meaning of the true saga that I wish to speak. It is in the secondary and allowable meaning of the term that generally applies to "any long story of adventure or heroic deeds" (Webster). Strangely, Fowler in his work on "Modern English Usage" ignores this secondary meaning. Nonetheless, I doubt, that anyone will object to applying the term to the emmigration of the few hundred Puritans to New England as a "saga", even though there is a Norse "saga" which relates to the story of those who followed "Eric the Red" in Mediaeval times. However, the little known "saga" of the great emmigration to South Africa involved more than 5000 people and has left its imprint on South Africa of a significance as great, if not greater, than that of the

Puritans in North America. This was the Saga of 1820 Settlers which constitutes the real and extensive colonization of South Africa, so little understood in the United States and in Great Britain itself.

The story begins with the rounding of the Cape by the Portugese in 1487 at the instance or inspiration of Prince Henry the Navigator who prevailed upon his nephew, King John II, to send three ships under the command of Bartholomew Diaz to find a sea-route to India and the Far East. Diaz, despite the dissatisfaction among his crew, reached "Angra Pequena" (today Luderitzbucht) at the mouth of the Orange River in South-West Africa. He compromised with his crew promising to return to Portugal if they went on for another three days. Fortunately (or unfortunately for the crew) Diaz encountered a storm at sea and was driven south-east for thirteen (13) days. Meeting no land, he knew that he had rounded the Cape of Storms (later called the Cape of Good Hope) and sailed past the Bushmans, Kariega, Kowie, and Great Fish Rivers, when he reluctantly turned back. At the mouth or rather a little beyond, he landed and erected a padraa (or stone column) which has recently been found as it had toppled into the sea. Some years later (1497), Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached Malabar. Although the Portugese built forts at Cochin (1506) and Socotra (1507) to divert the India trade from the Red Sea, little more happened save the explorations of Antonio de Saldanha (1503) and Francisco d'Almoida (1570) who lost a number of his followers to the Hottentots. Spain was troubled, as well as suffering the loss of seamen. Thereafter, the loss led to Portugese withdrawal, although they used the Cape

route to India, victualing their ships in Delgoa Bay (Loronzo Marques), (now Maputo) and the land saw few further visits and no colonization for over a century. However, the rounding of the Cape by Diaz and the definite establishment of a sea route by da Gama changed little, for European interests now turned to the Americas with the return of Christopher Columbus. It is intriguing to wonder what would have happened to the outlook of the Western World if da Gama had returned a year sooner.

Edward Terry tells us that in 1614, ten men who had been condemned to death at the Old Bailey in London, were exiled on the entreaties of some London merchants rather than be hung. They were put ashore with guns, ammunition and food, and left to their fate. It is said, further, that their leader, Cross, was killed, and six of the marooned men in attempting to board an English ship were swept away and drowned. The rest on return to their native land were soon in trouble again and executed. Those were the first immigrants, if you so wish. A few years later, in 1620, two English Captains, Shillinge and Fitzherbert of the British East India Company, recognized the significance of the Cape for maritime affairs and took possession of the country in the name of James I of Britain + and hoisted the British Flag on the Lion's Rump. But with the characteristic disdain of London beaurocrats, this far sighted action was not confirmed, and the territory went abegging until the Dutch East India Company in 1652 sent out Johaan Van Reibeeck with a party of 125 to establish a victualling station which was to become Cape Town. Growth was slow at this crossroads of the sea which had become a shelter for all European nations. Notably in 1688 the

Huguenots, following the Revocation of the Edicts of Nantes, established a flourishing wine and lace industry and the largest collection of Huguenots in the world, but they were forbidden to speak their own language, French. Nevertheless French names such as de la Harpe, de Villiers, Fouré and the like abound in South Africa.

Where were the ama Bantu during these first three hundred and fifty years of the existence of the Cape Station? There were none for the great migrations of the Bantu did not move southwards until the end of the 18th. Century. Who were the indigenous people?
x First, the Bushmen (pygmies) and on the coastal area the "sandloopers", or hottentots. The Bushmen lived in the wild mountainous regions and were little seen. They were a dangerous people, noted for their hunting abilities and a most difficult language full of clicks. They hunted with a small (36 inch) bow and used arrows tipped with poison which sent the animals to sleep. In the Kalahari desert the arrow-poison is primarily obtained from the larvae of Diamphidia simplex
x and in the South-East from the Bushman's plum. In both forms the animal when shot, does not die immediately but has to be tracked for several hours. The Bushman's plum is quite harmless when eaten being destroyed by gastric and intestinal ferments, but if there is a crack in tongue or lip, or a gastric ulcer, it can cause death. As a boy in mountainous terrain we usually avoided Bushmen but, as an act of bravado we ate the Bushman's plum.

Both Bushmen and Hottentot were poor workmen, thus the early white settlers usually employed indentured slaves brought by

the Dutch East India Company from Malaysia. Ineed, the Malayian language is that most frequently heard on the Cape Coast and indeed, along the whole coast of East Africa. The descendants of these slaves comprise the so-called "Cape Coloured" found primarily in the Cape or in coastal cities. The "coloured" carried with them their skills as artisans and today are jewelers who polish the rare stones, work in gold and silver, or are the musicians, tailors, builders, and designers of the Cape. Their religion is Muslim and wherever a mosque is found in coastal cities or the "cry" is heard from the minaret, you will find the "tarboosh" and seek a good tailor in a Malayian colony.

What of the Bantu or native? In earlier times they were totally absent from the Cape and Southern Africa. At sometime in the 16th and 17th centuries, they began to migrate, possibly from somewhere in the Congo Gulf although some say from Central Africa. These people are quite unlike the West Coast African whose skin is usually quite black. The "Bantu" (a word meaning "people" and more correctly with its concord separated, "aba-ntu" are different in build, features, colour, customs and speech and they often refer to themselves as the "oche" people or "brown" people. Without going into linguistic and other details one can say that primarily the Bushman is the hunter, the Hottentot the wandering nomad; and the Bantu, the pastoral in a cattle economy; some, but very few, tribes are agriculturalists or "sod-busters" to use an American expression.

Before going any further it must be emphasized that the

language is only a "spoken" tongue and not a written language until missionaries and travellers tried their prentice hands during the middle of the 19th century to write it down and often with glaring errors. Indeed, full knowledge of the Xhosa language had to await to early part of the 20th century before it was complete. Even John Bennie who has been called the Father of Kaffir language missed entirely the discovery of the "Alliterative Concord", which is basic to understanding Xhosa. However, his ear was so good that he recorded the existence of semantu tone. Further his son and grandsons were personal friends who continued John Bennie's work and from whom my family and myself received much helpful advice on the meaning and use of Xhosa phrases, words, and grammar. As John Soga, great authority on Xhosa customs, would say: "Akuko qili linoku-zikota emhlanu" (No genius is clever enough to be able to lick his own back). Indeed, "it is not easy to speak Xhosa" (Akulula ukuthetha isixhosa) as its grammatical structure is fundamentally just the opposite to any Indo-European language since the grammar is prefixed rather than a suffix.

In the history of a people who had no written language there is always difficulty in separating fact from fiction. Time itself is of no object. What we do know is at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th there had been a slow but preceptible migration of the "ababantu" progressively to the South and notably on the East coast of Southern Africa. Tribes from the center of Africa did not move much, blocked by inclement conditions of desert or arid land. Those at the spearhead of the movement to the

South, such as the Ama-Xhosa tribes, came in contact with the Bushmen and Hottentot, decimated or absorbed them incorporating much of their "click" language. This curious language and the amount of its absorption tells us a great deal about this migration. Thus the Zulu people whose degree of contact with Bushmen and Hottentot was limited, since they lay to the North of the Xhosa, absorbed and used less of the "click" language.

Contact with the British and Dutch by the Xhosa and Zulu occured through hunters and missionaries at the beginning of the 19th century. Consequently, through them, both customs and dates come to be historically more secure.

The first white contact began around 1806 when a Dr. Cowan was sent by the British Governor of the Cape, Lord Caledon, on an expedition of exploration. He was quickly followed by a missionary, Robert Moffat, who passed through Bechuanaland in 1807. Two Scots, hunters and traders, named Robert Schoon and William McLuckie, set out some 20 years later from Grahamstown (where I was born) to explore the North, but in reality they were attracted by fanciful riches beyond the Orange and Molopo rivers to provide further understanding of the interior of Southern Africa following the routes of the Rev. John Campbell and the Rev. James Archbell with John Hamilton, Andrew Geddes Bain, and Dr. Burchell the naturalist and others who opened the interior.

* The great Zulu general and Caesar, Shaka [178-1828], who *

eventually became the Zulu paramount chief, together with his general Mzilekazi [1790-1868] of the "Great Broad Road", and consumate slaughterer of hundreds of thousands over and above those of Shaka, exercised enormous pressure on the Zulu and Xhosa whose broken tribes fled either to unite as the Basuto or as the Fingoe (wanderers).

x Although Mzilikazi turned North to found the Matabele nation of cattlemen and the Second Bulawayo (or place of slaughter), nonetheless his inroads to the South before he turned back, resulted in the attempt of the buffer nation of Xhosa to cross the great Fish river and steal the cattle of the Dutch and other benign settlers.

On the other hand Vasamazulu Credo Mutwa, the Hereditary High Witchdoctor to the Zulu nation, Guardian of Tribal History and Religion, called "The Chosen One" asserts, as late as 1966, that the Xhosa nation were a migrant people who "attacked the white men first, with one motive only -- to take their cattle". He reiterates "That the first four Kaffir Wars were sparked off by aggressive acts on the part of the Xhosa who invaded white farms and drove off the cattle". He says further that it was not the pressure from behind by the Zulu people since "the First Kaffir War broke out in the year 1779 (when) the Zulu tyrant Shaka had not ascended the Zulu throne. He, in fact, was not yet born,..."However Credo Mutwa says nothing of Dingiswayo, Shaka's paramount chief and predocessor, who had engaged already on the Expansion of the Zulu tribe by swallowing up neighboring tribes and slaughtering their leaders, their army, their married women and children in his absorption and expansion policy. Dr. A.T. Bryant, the

(an opinion supported by Prof. J.B. Peires in his recer
book on "Phalo'

great historian of the Zulu nation, says quite otherwise as does E.A. Ritter, who wrote on Shaka and whose father Captain Ritter fought in those wars; Peter Becker advised by the Paramount Chief Nyangayezizwe Bhekuzulu, direct descendant of Shaka and Dingane of the Zulu; and John Soga of the Xhosa. All these writers are fluent in Zulu which was their first language and Soga in Xhosa. I am afraid that Credo Mutwa, who despises Shaka, being from another tribe, is not entirely correct. It was Shaka who broke the hysterical power of the witchdoctor over their attempts to kill his two generals Mgobozi and Mellaka at a "Smelling out" ceremony. Mgobozi's horrible death initated by Nolela the female leader of the witchdoctor solely because he called her "umdidi we mpisi" (hyena's anus) was averted by Sha a by breaking her customary power.

This was apparent to the first British governor of the Cape, Lord Caledon. He implored the British government to send out troops to protect the colony which, including slaves, numbered scarcely 2000 individuals. As was common in those days, London being 6 months to a year away, the British government ignored the pleading of the Governor-General who possessed little authority. Caledon's policy was to interpose a properly trained and equipped regular force between the Khosa and the farmers and secondly, to increase the civilian population "so that it would properly develop the <u>almost vacant</u> Zuurveld ..."Indeed this policy was to be the key element in the protection of the colony, but was ignored by the London authorities.

Caledon's successor, Sir John Cradock, attempted pacific

methods by sending Andries Stockenström Sr. to persuade the Xhosa to leave the colony, but he and his followers were surrounded while in parley and all stabbed to death. His son, Sir Andries (and I have learned much at his feet) later became Lt. Governor of Albany, a province so named in honour of Major Cuyler, scion of the famous
+ American family who founded and became the first mayor of the capital of New York - Albany. This Cuyler also established a small village on the frontier named Culyerville. This village lies on the Great Fish River to the south; a village which I have often visited. The Major barely escaped with his life. Cattle-stealing and lethal raids with the burning of houses by the Xhosa (then known by the name Kaffir or Caffre which is an arab word meaning "infidel".) (The land became known as Kaffaria). Consequently these raids led to the Fourth Kaffir War of 1811-12 initiated to drive out those who had crossed the Great Fish River. The troops were led by Colonel John Graham, a son of the Duke of Montrose and an able soldier, a great favourite of the Duke of Wellington in the Pennisular Wars [1808-14] in Spain and Portugal who distinguished himself against Napoleon's troops. Col. John Graham succeeded in driving out the Ama-Xhosa and established the frontier town which took his name, Grahamstown, where I was born. In addition Col. Graham proposed to the British Government a scheme for settling 500 Highlanders in the territory and in addition collected several hundred prospective settlers. However the scheme, at this time, fell through. Napoleon required Britain's full attention until 1814 when Napoleon abdicated unconditionally and was granted the island of Elba. Despite the surrender to the Allies, in 1815 occurred the

"100 days", which ended with the battle of Waterloo and Napoleon's banishment to the island of St. Helena, which after the 2nd Boer War housed the recalcitrant Boer prisoners. This island I know only too well because of my father's relationship to it as governor.

After Waterloo, Britain was in turmoil over the Corn Laws which exploded in the so-called Peterloo Massacre in Manchester following what the administration wrongly held to be political riots. This period, if any date can be given, introduced the theory of Socialism, not to be confused with that of Karl Marx, although the Communist movement later adopted many of its maxims.

Further, it was not only the state of unrest in Britain after Waterloo, but the series of invasions and hostile Maratha leaders which gave great concern. The Indian unrest led to the withdrawal in 1817 of the whole of the calvary and most of the infantry from South Africa for service in that country. Consequently Kaffir depredations increased enormously so that Lord Bathurst, the prime minister, began to appreciate that with Xhosa break through disaster was imminent to the newly acquired colony at the Cape. In April of 1819, the fifth Kaffir war broke out and 10,000 or more attacked Grahamstown, the chief military center of the frontier, in broad daylight. Colonel Willshire with a puny force of 400 defended the town and drove the vast collection of warriers across the Keiskama River, i.e. some 30 miles beyond the Great Fish River. These centennary of those events, stimulated my mother to initiate the

memorial of the foundation of Grahamstown and an extraordinary act of bravery by a woman. This memorial stands on the very spot where Col. Graham stood beneath a tree to choose the site of his future town.

The fifth Kaffir War was when the town was almost obliterated.

The governor at the Cape at this time was Lord Charles Somerset, a younger son of the 5th Duke of Beaufort and a scion of the ancient House of Plantagenet. He arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1814. He immediately saw the peril and wrote to the Secretary of State, Lord Bathurst, suggesting, no imploring, the Secretary to fill the gap and to adopt Col. Graham's earlier scheme of settling the interval with Highlanders from Scotland. Now the peril was at hand and something must be done to protect the colony. Since the colony could not supply the manpower and the peril urgent.

Bathurst at long last responded to the many calls, but a little late. Recognizing that Grahamstown was the pivot for the defense of the colony, the leader of the Xhosa, Makanna, egged on by his witchdoctor, on the morning of 22 April 1819, threw some 10,000 warriors from a hill overlooking the town in a swift attack. Two cannon at the Drosody gate and 350 men with rifles opposed the Xhosa who had adopted the Zulu Shaka's method of close combat with the stabbing assegai. An eye witness relates how the use of shrapnel mowed the Xhosa down and how the muskets finished off the mob. Over 900 dead littered the street and the rest turned and fled. This

action occurred in front of the house where I was born.

In England the time was propitious although the great cartoonist of the era, Cruickshank, made fun of the recruitment of the new settlers who were to fill the gap. Thus, in one of the most extraordinary migrations of some 4000 individuals began. They were to occupy the Zuurveld, an unpopulated land and to initiate the "saga" of the 1820 settlers. The children of those settlers and their grandchildren were my friends, schoolmates or acquaintances in a town noted for its "togetherness".

To recruit those settlers, the British Parliament provided around £50,000 ($250,000) and alotted 100 acres of land to each family who elected to go to the Cape. Public interest was whipped up by calling on William Barrymore, actor-playwright- manager (ancestor of the famous American family of actors) to put on a melodramatic spectacle in London entitled the Cape of Good Hope; or Caffres and Settlers.

Some 68 leaders were appointed, frequently from distinguished families, to recruit likely candidates from every walk of life. Notable were Thomas Pringle, a Scot who initiated a free press in South Africa; several devines of whom the Rev. Phillips was outstanding; a number of lawyers, doctors, and other professionals; a number of naval and military officers; artisans of all sorts. Finally almost half of the complement were agriculturists. After a voyage of more than 3 to 6 months, the 21 ships made it to Algoa Bay in the Zuurfeld, an empty and untamed territory, almost untouched by human hand.

The families of these settlers had lived all their lives in cities, in homely market towns or in the garden like countryside of Britain. Few had ever left their native heath save those in the military services. Here on the Zuurveldt they suddenly found themselves surrounded by raw Nature, without house or home and with little knowledge of native warfare or of the needs of the special agriculture and who were to be interposed as a barrier before the inroads of savages whose language few if any could speak.

To locate the various parties Colonel Cuyler, the deputy-mayor or landdrost of Grahamstown, Captain Somerset, brother of the governor, their staff and those persons who had some knowledge of the little-known Zuurveldt shared the task of guiding the settlers to their allotments. The early parties were located on the bank of the Great Fish river where the troops had fomerly occupied small forts before their removal to India. These settlers had to bear the brunt of the raids and quickly came to understand Colonel Cuyler's warning, "Gentlemen, when you go out to plough never leave your guns at home" -- an admonition reminiscent of the Indian wars in America, a century earlier. Mr. Dugmore an early settler wrote of this period, "It was a forlorn-looking plight in which we found ourselves, when the Dutch waggoners had emptied us and our luggage on the green-sward and left us sitting on our boxes and bundles under the open firmament of heaven. Our roughly-kind carriers seemed, as they wished us good-bye, to wonder what would become of us. There we

were in the wilderness; and when they were gone we had no means of following, had we wished to do so. Towns, villages, inns, hostelries, there were none. We must take root and grow, or die where we stood. But we were standing on our own ground, and it was the first time many could say so. This thought roused to action, tents were pitched, the night-fires kindled around them to scare away the wild beasts, and the life of a settler was begun. The parallel with the American experience of the West two or more centuries earlier needs no saying.

It became almost immediately apparent that 100 acres could do little to provide the necessities of life. Meanwhile the frequency and intensity of the raids increased. Many of their newly built houses were put to the torch, their stock, if they had any, was lifted and Nature with its periodic droughts, so characteristic of Africa, or the torrential rains soon destroyed their plantings. It was increasingly apparent that civilian population were not there for any philanthropic or economic considerations, such as to reduce the population of Britain after the Napoleanic wars, or to overcome post war disaffection. The purpose was wholely strategic to protect the colony and the road to India. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and the repeated attacks and the destruction of property, the immigrants remained and very few left.

To make matters worse Great Britain, under the influence of Bishop Wilberforce (whom my father heard preach in London) and his friend Thomas Henry Huxley forced through the parliament the anti-slavery bill. At the Cape it had at Oxford. become impossible to utilize the indigenous element, which was essentially still in the stone age, since neither Bushman or Hottentot knew nothing or next to nothing about the production of iron or steel.

Further the indigens only knew how to steal from one another or from their employers. The indentured slaves were recruited in Malaysia or India chiefly by the Dutch East India Company to forward their station. It is stated that the number of slaves and apprentices in 1819 was around 35,000, so that by the time the emancipation act of Britain was passed almost a generation later in 1834, the slaves numbered some 60 to 70,000. Characteristically the bureaucrats of Whitehall insisted that compensation for slavery could only be received in London which was by fast sailing ship from 6 months to a year away. Very few agriculturists or those living in remote areas could afford to give up their livelihood for such a length of time. Naturally, London entrepreneurs arrived in Capetown to buy up the farmers compensation at the huge discount of 400% (6^{d} in the £1). This as well as the failure of the government to protect the new colony from war and constant raids from the Xhosa was responsible for the great migration of the Dutch known as the "Great Trek". Of the premanent population of 47,000 whites it is probable that in 1819 only 4,000 were British who may have doubled to 8 or 10,000 in 1834.

The emancipation act had scarcely reached the Cape when one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the young colony occurred. Without warning at mid-summer (Dec. 21st) of 1834 some 20,000 natives swarmed across the border to initiate the sixth Kaffir War. In 10 days they had burnt 456 farm houses, pillaged

300 others, destroyed 60 laden wagons (300 tons of goods) and driven off 5,700 horses, 12,000 cattle and 162,000 sheep. The havoc was devastating. The Grahamstown Journal, the oldest newspaper in South Africa, later acquired by my father, describes the monstrous devastation. The natives were opposed by 700 regular troops, thinly spread along the border. Colonel Smith (later General Sir Harry who named the town, where the Boy-Scout organization arose, after his wife Lady Smith,) after his arrival in January 1835, to take charge of Grahamstown after riding some 600 miles in six days on horseback, wrote "The land is filled with the lamentations of the widows and the fatherless. The indelible impressions already made upon myself by the horrors of an eruption of savages upon a scattered population almost exclusively engaged in the peaceful occupation of husbandry, are such as to make me look on those I have witnessed in a service of thirty years -- ten of which in the most eventful period of war -- as triffles to what I have now witnessed...." Nonetheless the church and what was called the "negrophilists" exhibited a complete lack of sympathy and indeed, open hostility. Although thousands of miles away they launched slanderous attacks on the victims. The Superintendent of the London Missionary Society and the English Clapham Sect accused the farmers as being the cause of the war, while they maintained that the Xhosa, the mild and peace loving natives had been provoked into attacking the colonists. Those savage, violent and slanderous allegations were not lost on the local population. They constituted the last straw which resulted in

the Dutch migration and the establishment of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

The attitude, still extant, of the settlers and their descendants can well be imagined. But this war was not the last. Ten eruptions of the natives have occurred, the last being in 1919. Even the Zulu cannot understand. Vusamazulu Cedo Mutwa has written as late as 1966 on the lack of provocation. He writes without equivocation "The Kaffir Wars were caused by the Xhosa who had been trading peacefully with hundreds of white men. Rather suddenly they started raiding white-owned farms beyond the Kei and Fish rivers -- for no apparent reason whatsoever." Only those who were born and have lived there know the mind of the savage. My sister after 40 years as advisor to the Paramount-chief of the Xhosa said to me "John, you know how difficult it is to penetrate the Xhosa mind, after 40 years I wonder if I have not wasted my time" -- a sad commentary from one who has done so much for them in hospitals and in medicine. As one who has faced 100,000 Xhosa as a 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry aged 16, in 1919, I still wonder. So much for the Saga of the 1820 Settlers.

After the siege of Grahamstown, there were no less than four Xhosa Wars. It is strange that the tenth, intended by Germany to provide a diversion which would relieve the pressure of British forces in German Africa did not break out until World War was over. Just as in the sixth Kaffir War the Xhosa gathered upon Makanna's Kop, but this time 100,000 strong. The greater part of the armament was

in East Africa. Available were 6000 infantry and 3000 cavalry. On a beautiful Sunday of November 1919, the cavalry which had out-flanked the Xhosa on Nakana's Kop could be seen deploying on the plain beyond the hill. Armed with the lance they charged in two lines to break the opposition which fled down the hill into the arms of the infantry entrenched in a dried-up dorga. The infilading rifle and machine gun fire was too much and surrender quickly ensued. What is strange is that the battlefield and the tactics were almost identical to that which had occured exactly a century before. This was the last of the armed raids.