MAHARANG THE FREEBOOTER

1800 - 1830

by

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M Mararang the Freebooter.

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The sun was just showing over the Lulu Mountains in the North Eastern Transvaal, when old Native Massechouw came trudging along and having deposited his old tattered overcoat and a knapsack (from which was protruding a number of roots from which he would make the best medicine) near the rocks, he turned and greeted me, and, having returned his greeting, I enquired of his health. "Boss, it does not help to complain, but the hunger chases me, and the hungry worms pinch and pinch the inside of my stomach. They creep and creep after me. The rain won't come - we shall die from the hunger. The Lord knows what is inside the egg. I do not know. 'Awa!'"

Offering him some bread and meat he took it with both hands, then going to a near-by rock he sat down and ate it. After this he rubbed the fat into his hands and finally drying them on his old shrivelled legs, he thanked me, and said the worms were now satisfied and did not pinch any more.

Having often heard when an act of great strength has been accomplished the natives call the one who did it "Ke Mararang". I was curious to know who this Mararang, this Samson, was, who was, and still is, looked upon by the Bakone tribe as their hero. I gave Massechouw a piece of tobacco to chew and questioned him about this history, and this is the story he told.

"Boss, ......."
"Boas, many, many years ago - Kikgalie - there were no white people here. There was no Middelburg, no Pretoria. Just black people and wild animals lived here. One day the Mazulus came here with Mazilakatse and drove nearly all the Bapedies under Chief Sekwatie to the other side of the Olifants River into the Pietersburg District. Some of them remained and crept away under different head men, a lot of them had no head men, no food, no nothing, so they became Cannibals. They were of all tribes - Bakones, Bapedies and Morokas. They killed and ate one another, and this place was not healthy for people to walk about, as the Cannibals were ugly, vicious and aggressive. After Mazilakatse had gone by, the Swazies, under Sumtoobie, the grandfather of Chief Sanpian, Dam Kaal Kaffire drove some of the Bakones into the Lydenburg District. Amongst these were Magalego, grandfather of Mocis (now living on the 6ulus), Fatane grandfather of Masha Madebulla (at Steelpoort) and Mararang. Their sacred animals (Seboko’s) were the Elephant, Duiker, Crocodile and Lion. Mararang belonged to the Men of the Lion, and was son of Hooesquanie and father of Li'laking (a native 98 years old, living at Schoonoord).

Mararang with his followers went and lived near the Crocodile River - near Bullers Ant heap on the Lydenburg Machadodorp Road and the remainder spread over the Northern part of the Lydenburg District.

Mararang was living contentedly and became the possessor of a large herd of cattle. The Swazies in the Pretoria District heard of this, and one day they came and attacked his kraal. Mararang was a very strong man -

"Magtig! .....
"Magtig! Boss he was very strong". His legs, arms and body were very large and fat. He could throw his assegai farther than any other native. He did not throw the assegai like the other natives, but took it by the handle and then threw it over his head with such force that it would go right through one native and into another behind.

When Mararang saw the Swazies coming he went alone into the hills at the back of his kraal and walked about, furiously swinging his battle axe. The Swazies, seeing him, rushed up, but he killed three of them and then he told them that they could take his cattle. It was this act that branded him a slayer of men and he decided to become a Freebooter.

He left the Crocodile River and made his kraal on the Mountain named Sekaneng near the Dwar River on the farm Valhalla near the Lydenburg-Sukukumin Road and from there he initiated raids, to kill, rob, and pillage wherever he went and soon his name became a by-word of terror for miles around. Sometimes he would go raiding 100 miles from his headquarters. He showed mercy to no one - killing the men and taking the women and cattle back to his kraal and so exterminated nearly all of the Cannibal people in these parts.

Whence he came with his band, where he was going, no one knew. Men, hearing that he was on the warpath, would hide in the bush. If he caught a man from another clan he would pierce his head with his assegai, then cut off some of the hair, push it into the hole and leave him lying there, so that all seeing the dead man knew that Mararang had passed .......
passed. After a while Mararang gathered the other
scattered natives towards him and one day at Manogy (Mokinies)
they were all gathered together under headmen Magalego and
Fatane. Mararang was also there.

Now Magalego and Patane had an argument over a
heifer. There were many cattle there but this was a select
heifer and they both wanted her. Mararang, whilst the
argument proceeded went to the spruit to drink and whilst in
the act of drinking, Makulametsi (father of Mogale, living at
Schoonoord), tried to assassinate him with an assegai but the
assegai missed the mark. Mararang sprang up, rushed out
of the fight and in the fight both Magalego and Patane were killed. They
then moved over to where Masermule now lives, near the Jane
Furse Memorial Hospital, and after a council had been held
Mararang was elected Chief. In the fight Patane's people
beat Magalego's people and so came to belong to Mararang.

Mararang now being headman of a large body of men,
made further invasions, plundering, killing and causing havoc
wherever he went. Masilakatze's people having gone, Sekwatsie,
Chief of the Bapedies, returned to near the Olifants River
about 15 miles from Mpethelele. Some of Mararang's people
then sent and asked Sekwatsie to come back and help them -
they did not want Mararang as their headman.

One day Mararang crossed the Olifants River and
took cattle from Masermules, near the present Adriaans Kop.
Sekwatsie, afraid that Mararang would become very powerful
and hearing what a strong and good leader he was; hearing
how he carried out his plans with great ability, sent a
messenger to Chief Rampulane in the Pietersburg District
and ....
and asked him to give him some medicine so that he could
give it to Mararang and then he would be able to overpower
him. Chief Rampulane then called the witch-doctor, Rachuney,
who knew Mararang. He received from Sekwatie a "Tgaga"
(one of the ancient beads which are prized as sacred and a
National treasure and which are used only by the great chiefs)
and rubbed it in some medicine prepared by Rachuney and
returned it to Sekwatie, who finding another Native named
Semabie (and who also knew Mararang) sent him with the "Tgaga"
to present it to Mararang. He was instructed to greet Mararang
and then to offer him the Tgaga and tie it around his neck and
to tell him that he would see that Sekwatie was his friend, who
was eager to be peaceful with him. He was to tell him the
Tgaga would so work it that he would be recognised as a Chief.
He was to ask him to stop fighting and they would live at
peace.

Semabie, having received these instructions went
and found Mararang at his headquarters at Sekaneng and after
he had delivered his message and tied the "Tgaga" around his
neck Mararang was very pleased for he was now a Chief and
would be recognised as one. He treated Semabie with marked
hospitality, gave him a hut to sleep in and to cover him he
lent him his personal Kaross which was made from Jackal skins.
In the night Semabie pulled some of the hairs from the Kaross
and hid them on his person. He then went outside the hut and
he was met by three Natives whom he recognised as Bapedies
and belonging to Sekwatie. These three boys were staying with
Mararang and were Sekwatie’s spics. Their names were Kgoro,
Konyan and Seboonya. Semabie held Council with them and then
Seboonya, the following morning, instructed one of Mararang's
wives ......
wives, named Malepaydo (who was a Bapedie and had previously been captured by Cannibals and afterwards rescued by Mararang, who made her his wife), to cut "Goboola" Mararang's hair and give the hair to him. This she did. The hair was then given to Semabie who departed and, taking with him two of Mararang's assegais carring them in one hand, the one pointing to the front, the other to the rear, he went on his way. By this he was drawing Mararang to Sekwatle.

Mararang, proud of his "Tgaga", wanted to make peace with Sekwatle, but Seboonya, knowing him to be a strong man, thought that, if he joined Sekwatle he in time would become dominant, kill Sekwatle and become their Chief. He said to himself, "Why do you want to make peace? You are a big Chief yourself, come, let us go and fight Matsobane (Chief of Mpethelleles) then when we have finished him off, we will finish Sekwatle". Mararang, knowing how successful he had previously been listened to him and finally decided to go and try his strength against others.

One bright moonlight night, Kgoro, Kenyan and Seboonya acting as guides led Mararang and his followers through the present Geluks location over the Gifants River and into the hills at Mpethelleles. Great cries rent the air, the women, men and children shouting, - "Mararang was coming! Mararang is coming! Mararang is here!". The women, panic stricken, snatched up their children and fled. The war alarm was sounded on the Palafalia or war horn and the men picking up their assegais made ready for battle. But Mararang not wishing to engage at once, stayed in the hills and Sekwatle sent Rachuney, the doctor, to interview him ......
him, and to find out what his plans were and to ask him again not to attack them. Mararang sent word to Sekwaitie, not to be alarmed, he would not harm them. He said that Masermules had too many cattle, and could not herd them all, so he was going down to help him to herd them. He told Rachuney that he was suffering from a tooth ache and asked whether he would extract it for him. Rachuney said to himself "the medicine is working" and consenting to poke out the tooth, he told Mararang to sit down on a stone and then with Mararang's knife, he poked and twisted with the knife until the tooth came out. Rachuney stooped down, picked up a stone and threw it into the air, saying to Mararang, "you see I have thrown away the tooth (as is the native custom), but he lied, for he had put the tooth secretly into his bag.

Rachuney then left Mararang and returned to Sekwaitie and said "you see, the medicine is working. Look here is one of Mararang's teeth that I have taken out". The tooth was of enormous size and they looked upon it and handled it and said "yes, that is the big tooth that has eaten all the people and their cattle, but now the tooth is drawn, he will not be able to eat any more of them".

Mararang took some of Masermule's cattle and returned to the hills at Mpetheleies and lived well in order that he and his followers would be strong. Sekwaitie and Rachuney powdered the tooth and mixed it with the hair of Mararang's, which, Semabie had brought and the hairs from the Kaross and other medicine, then sent word to Matsobane to tell him that the bird was coming and that he was going to attack him, but that he and his people must not be afraid, they must fight, the bird's wings had been cut and he would be unable to fly.

On......
On the following day, Mararang attacked Matsobane and the fight lasted till mid-day. First one then the other appeared to be victorious. Then it was that Sekwatie, seeing Mararang was winning, sent Rachaney with the medicine made from the tooth, hairs, etc., with instructions for him to sprinkle it on the ground over which Mararang must proceed. This was done and Mararang, driving his enemies before him, came to the place near a large Marula tree (this same tree is still growing at Mpetheleles) where the medicine had been strewn, when suddenly he went lame and could not run any more so he stood at bay under the tree. When his followers saw their leader unable to run they became superstitious and panic stricken and they all with the three spies leading fled, and left him to face his enemies alone. Mararang, at bay, showed how he could fight. Standing a giant in build, with his back to the tree (they say he was six feet 6 inches tall and broad in proportion), assegais pierced his body, arms and legs, but he alone slew no less than twenty-six of his enemies that day, and as he stood at bay, roaring like a lion, he would make sudden darts at his antagonists and send them helter and skelter all over the place. Then he cried out to them, and asked them why they wanted to kill him. Why did not they take him Captive? They in return, asked, "did you ever take Captives. Did you ever spare?" - and rushing in continued throwing their assegais at him. At last, being wounded all over and as the sun was sinking his knees sagged under him and he fell over. They then rushed in and with assegais and battle axes cut his head and neck open. So passed away the hero of the Bakones.

When ......
When he was lying dead, some said it was not Mararang and so an argument started and finally Rachuney was called and he said "Look at his fat arms, body and legs, that is from all the cattle he has eaten" and opening his mouth, he said, "look, that is from where I drew his tooth". The native woman, Malapaydo, heard that Mararang her husband and deliverer, and who she had betrayed, was dead, then went and lived at Sekwatie's Kraal.

Sekwatie knowing that Mararang had exterminated the Cannibals and himself was dead, said "this place (Adriaans Kop) where we are living cannot be defended against our enemies - this is no place to retreat to. He then sent men out to seek a suitable place wherein to live, and they returned and spoke highly of the Lulu Mountains, saying that if they were attacked, they would not all be killed. There were good hiding places for the women and children, good lands and plenty of water. Councils were held and it was decided that they should go and live in the Lulu Mountains and when all was ready an ox was killed and skinned. They cut the skin into strips and fastened it to four poles that had been cut for the purpose, and so made a machila. Sekwatie was old and in it he was placed. Three boys on one side, three boys on the other side and two boys at the head and two boys at the feet, carried Sekwatie, and all his followers, with their women, children and cattle came on behind. At each mile, relays of ten boys were used to carry their Chief.

When they arrived at Lebeah (Mangeneet's Vlakte) they halted for three days and then continuing their journey they crossed over the Mountain and arrived at Oommanien (Dejate).

Having....
Having rested a while there, they proceeded to a Mount which they called Thaba Mosego (on the farm Hackney). Now this Mount was an ideal place for defence. Water was running along the foot of it in the river Mutai. In those days water was plentiful and there was much rain. Having inspected the Mount and surrounding country they decided to remain there, build their kraals with Thaba Mosego in the centre. Chief Sekwatie then became Chief of all the tribes in the vicinity including the Bakones. Sukukunie the 1st and son of Sekwatie being brave and warlike was thought well of by all his followers, so one day he went to Sekwatie and said "Father, allow me to send boys to Natal to buy guns". Sekwatie, being and fat, was like an old woman and had lost his strong heart, and he saw danger threatening him on every side, but more especially from the Swasies, so he said to Sukukunie - "My child, I am old, I cannot fight any more. I want to live in peace. If you send our men away, who will protect us"? Sukukunie argued and got the better of his father and said "we must have guns. We cannot sit here and be helpless. The other natives are getting guns and they will come and destroy us". Sekwatie answered and said, "Child if they go, they will never return," but Sukukunie had his own way and the boys were ready to go.

Now Mampoer, a half brother of Sukukunie, was living in the Middelburg district and Sekwatie, fearing that his boys would leave him, sent word to Mampoer to close the road so as to prevent his boys going to Natal. Mampoer, receiving this message took council with his people, who said "No, we will let them go by and then on their return, we will ......."
will catch them, and take their guns from them”. That was the plan they framed.

Mampoer was not virtuous. He collected the Kaal-Kaffers (Wahlangana), and all who went near there were killed, even Europeans. If they were lost their tracks reached and ended at Mampoer’s, who would take their wagons and make doors from the wood and assegais, battle axes and hoes from the iron. Sekwatie spoke in foul terms about Mampoer. Sekwantie was now very old and nearly exhausted. He called his son, Sukukunie, and said “Child, I shall soon be going across the great waters. You see I am finished. Listen, I want to talk to you. I want you to take my advice, so that you will be blessed and prosper. You see Mpatheleles, they are good, they are many, and their men fight well. You must be friends with them and take your wives from amongst them. Also, Likadamane, he is good. He is strong and he will be useful to you. You must give him wives from your people and they will be your friends. Also Nkoane, he is strong and his men fight well. You must keep them. Also Mathlales, they are good - you must keep them as your friends. If you do this you will be guarded on the North, East and West”.

Sekwatie having attained a great age, died, and was buried on the top of Mount Moses. When we are in great distress or in need of rain, we offer burnt offerings to his Spirits. Sometimes our prayers are answered, but if the Spirits are angry, we pray in vain.

After his death, Sukukunie, grandfather of the present Sukukunie became Chief, and he went to Mampere and said “Why do you close the road against my people?” Mampore answered and said, “Sekwatie told me to close the road. He did…….
12.

did not want you to send your men to Natal."

Sukukunie replied "you lie!" - Sekwatie spoke ugly things of you and ugly words came from Sekwatie's mouth. Now I am Chief, you beware!"

Sukukunie then sent messengers to Mthethelen, Mkoane, Lekademan and Mathalela and told them that wherever they saw Mampore's men they must kill them. Mampore's men used to come and exchange grain. They came in twos, threes and fours, and for two days all Mampore's boys that were found, were killed - many were killed - they were no good! Then the Swazies came and Sukukunie drove them back for they were cowards, and ran away.

With this old Massechow put on his knapsack and throwing his coat over his shoulders, went away. Something must have stirred his memory and brought back unpleasant recollections.

Walking off in fury he rounded the kopje and there came wafting back "Daw Kaal Kaffir. I will smash them!"