

ART. IV.—*Kay's Travels in Caffraria.*

Travels and Researches in Caffraria ; describing the Character, Customs, and Moral Condition of the Tribes inhabiting that Portion of Southern Africa, &c. New York. 1834.

THIS book, which was published last year in London, is the production of the Rev. Stephen Kay, a missionary of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, who has been engaged some eleven years, as he expresses himself in his Introduction, 'in the service of the perishing progeny of Ham,' and of Christian missions generally, and has, of course, enjoyed very considerable opportunities of personal observation in regard to the country and people which he has here undertaken to describe. We deem it but justice to him, to say,—previously to any examination of the interesting details of his volume,—that he has manifestly entered upon the composition of it, not as a book-maker, but conscientiously ; and although some portions of it are not very clearly arranged, and others are borrowed literally, and pretty liberally too, from preceding travellers in the same regions, the whole collation constitutes, nevertheless, what we may safely pronounce the most accurate, complete and valuable account of the Caffers, which has yet been given to the world. There is also a good deal of information in it regarding the present condition of the English settlement in the Colony of the Cape, the neighboring Hottentots and other tribes, the progress of civilization and Christianity among these people, and other incidental subjects of no little interest. We propose, in the following pages, to present our readers with a brief view of the whole ground of the Researches, derived as well from all the previous authorities on the subject, which have come to our notice, as from the last of the series, which lies before us.

There has been heretofore a great want of definiteness in the accounts furnished us of the people comprehended under the title of *Caffers*. The application of this title has been quite as variable as its orthography, and frequently as irrelevant as its original meaning,—the word being the Arabic for

liar or *infidel*, and first employed by certain more northerly African nations, with whom the Europeans were earlier acquainted, to designate all the South-eastern tribes who had not embraced the Mohammedan faith. We do not wonder much, under these circumstances, that some of the latter are, as Lichtenstein states in his travels, 'offended at being called Caffers.' Had they been thus generically denominated thieves, instead of liars, certain facts, which we shall have occasion to notice, would seem to give a color of pertinency to the designation.

It is remarkable that the word *Hottentot*, as Barrow has pointed out, is of unknown origin. The name, in use among that people themselves, is *Quiquae*. We are not aware that the Caffers recognise any such generic appellation, or rather, we should say, that any occasion exists for such appellation: for in fact the compliment conveyed, as above stated, in the term used by the northerly nations, has been since applied by Europeans, with an altogether arbitrary looseness of liberality, to combinations of nations, as various as those of the kaleidoscope. Mr. Kay, in the use of the term, apparently intends to designate those tribes which '*lie along the eastern coast from the colonial boundary, in 33 degrees south latitude, northwards.*' This description is not particularly definite, but the sketches are actually in a great measure confined to three tribes, the Amaxosæ, Amatembu, and Amaponedæ, and to these our remarks will chiefly have reference. They occupy the country from the eastern frontier of the English colony to Port Natal.

The Caffers, then,—since convenience, rather than courtesy, must model our phraseology in this instance,—are admitted by most travellers, notwithstanding their name, to be a well-formed, decent-featured, and comely people. Their countenances are more European than African, although their hair is woolly and their color dark brown. From their physical traits, Barrow has drawn the inference of an Arabic origin for them. He says, they have not the smallest resemblance to the negroes in either conformation or features, and that they differ from the Arab superficially in nothing but a deeper shade of complexion; and this theory is somewhat plausibly confirmed, in the view of this writer by their nomadic habits, their hospitality, the shape of their habitations, and especially

tread upon us, mighty chief,'—plying him lustily meanwhile with their spears, and raising a tremendous shout the instant the animal falls. The tusks are the prize sought for. One of them falls to the lot of him who first pierces the game with his weapon, and the other to the chief of the party.

The Caffer does not however subsist wholly on vegetable food. The issue of the very elephant hunts just described, is usually celebrated by the feasting of the whole company upon an ox, which the successful hunter must furnish: and on other occasions a rhinoceros is despatched and devoured with as much *goût*, and as little ceremony or cookery, as if he were no better or bigger than a cabbage-head. 'Plain animal food, without salt, seasoning, or vegetable, is the greatest luxury the Caffer desires, and whenever any one kills a cow, it is an invariable custom throughout the country for all around to flock to the feast.* Even this custom, however, rather indicates the infrequency of the use of such food, and on the whole it may doubtless be asserted safely, that it enters in a very small proportion into their regular subsistence. They are substantially a milk-fed nation; and if the physiologists, philosophers, or physicians have any theories to form or confirm in respect to the influence of such aliment on the character of the people with whom it prevails, they will probably find few cases where the data are more conveniently set before them.

We may properly take this occasion to remark, without discussing a question which we are not prepared to decide, that, whatever the cause may be, the Caffers are generally admitted to be favorably distinguished from most barbarous nations by their mildness of disposition,—a position, which is not much contradicted by the existence of many harsh and cruel customs among them, rather appertinent to condition than character, and chiefly the immediate result of excessive superstition. Not only Mr. Kay, but travellers generally, and especially missionaries, when known to be such, have always been treated with signal civility. 'The treatment we met with from the natives on this journey,' says the former, 'was far better than we had anticipated, *as the clans living along the base of the mountain are celebrated thieves and robbers.*† Again,—'their habits of life induce a firmness of carriage, and an open manly demeanor, altogether free from that apparent

* P. 97.

† P. 101.

between them and the Europeans, which requires only a strict supervision to render it productive of much benefit to the former, and especially by affording them opportunities of witnessing the comforts of civilized life in their best aspect, and by inducing them, in view thereof, and of the profits of the commerce we refer to, to adopt industrious, frugal, and regular habits and modes of life. From 1824 to 1829, the amount of native produce brought into the colony, to the fairs, was rated at £50,000, at least. A Cape paper of April, 1832, estimates that brought into Graham's Town alone, at from £500 to £700, weekly, for several months then last past. This importation is composed mostly of ivory, hides, horns, and sambocs, or whips made of the hide of the rhinoceros and hippopotamus. Those portions of this trade, of which the materials are supplied by wild animals, must diminish, and probably disappear altogether, at some future day; but, so far as the cause of civilization is concerned, this can hardly be a subject of regret. The benefits, which ought to result from the trade meanwhile, so long as it lasts, are not so likely to be lost, even though it should not give place to a source of pecuniary profit, more consistent with and more conducive to an agricultural subsistence.

A publication cited by our author, under the title of the Cape Directory, bears testimony to the decreased amount of Caffer depredations on colonial cattle, to the entire cessation of murders by the same people within the boundary, and to the fearless impunity with which the frontier settlers now expose themselves unarmed in the most retired jungles of the country;—all attributed to this new direction given to the Caffer capability, by the creation of the new market. Individuals of approved character have been licensed also to pass the boundary, and trade with the natives out of their own hamlets; and at one of the missionary stations is a shop, which, as Mr. Kay states, has been of great benefit in supplying the surrounding clans with English apparel,—and that is becoming fashionable,—iron cooking-pots, knives, hatchets, agricultural implements, and other useful articles, at moderate prices, and in a manner best adapted to the circumstances of the purchasers.

In another quarter, an extensive and very desirable communication has been opened between the colony and Port Natal, across the Caffer territory, by the traders making a direct road, over what has been hitherto an impassable country, with the aid of about a hundred of the natives. Some