



ADULPHE DELEGORQUE. *Travels in Southern Africa. Volume I.* (Translated from the French by Fleur Webb.) Killie Campbell Africana Library Publications No. 5. University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg, 1990. 359 pp. Illus. R58,70 (exclusive). ISBN 0 86980 727 7.

I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated reading Delegorgue's *Travels*. Painted with Gallic élan, Delegorgue presents his flamboyant and graphic record with bold and evocative strokes. With all credit to the gifted translator Fleur Webb, the narrative engrosses one with its engaging style. Delegorgue's vibrant personality permeates every page. He had a zest and curiosity for life that filled his experience with real interest, but he is far from being overawed by the dynamic events in which he was an active and courageous participant.

The eventual availability of the full text of this source in this handsome volume makes it a must for historians interested in the period 1838-1844. Delegorgue is an incisive and independent observer of the interrelationship between Zulu, Boer and Briton, seen against the pristine loveliness of Natal's nature in most of its forms. His contribution is unique because he maintains his proud French outlook as he minutely, enthusiastically and ingenuously comments on the human foibles around him. He does not hesitate to express his opinions on many aspects of Natal — for example the Boers are real people who have faults unknown to most South African history text books. (Read about Andries Pretorius' vanity on p. 107.) Generally he admires the Zulu people but often lapses into paternalistic judgements. For example, after witnessing a sjambokking he is of the opinion that 'while we grit on teeth with pain, they (Zulus) in similar circumstances simply laugh' (p. 124) and 'I say that the Cafre has feelings' (p. 173). Delegorgue's passion as an observer is seen in the memorable description and comments on the trial of Dambuza and Khambezana (pp. 111-114), the events surrounding the extension of the Republic of Natalia from the Thukela to the Black Mfolozi (pp. 120-121) on 14 February 1840 and life at Mpande's royal *umuzis*.

Delegorgue came to Natal to collect specimens (p.54). This he did with verve; for example he was ecstatic about the 'brilliant plumage' of the Natal birds. But he was also one of those 19th century European 'sportsmen' who participated in the often wanton decimation of vast numbers of Natal's big game. He even gives us insight into traditional Zulu hunting methods. What makes his observation so valuable is that it enables one to see Natal in its pristine ecological glory when, for example, herds of 500 to 600 elephants roamed Zululand.

This volume is of great value to the historian because of the particular skills of those scholars who have been dedicated to its publication over a long period. It is indeed a consummation that was devoutly wished, and for me not unexpected. Professor Colin Webb's final comment is peculiarly appropriate. All praise to him for his erudite introduction and annotated index, to Stephanie Alexander's scholarly introduction on Delegorgue as a scientist and her natural history index, to the immaculate oversight of Margery Moberley and finally to Fleur Webb who enabled the irrepressible Frenchman to come alive for readers of the English language. Seldom have such magnificent talents been harnessed in one volume. This handsome addition to the history of Natal will remain one of its foremost classics.

A.E. CUBBIN
University of Zululand