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THE BUSHMEN TRIBES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

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When I was a little girl living down near Cape Town, a Bushman or two formed a regular part of our household. My father had come to this country to study all the native languages of South Africa, (and to compare them with each other and with the languages spoken in other parts of the world.) For the languages of the larger and more settled races, Hottentots, Kafirs, Zulus, Basutos, etc., he could get vocabularies and grammars, or at any rate some books printed by the missionaries; but of Bushmen nothing had been written down or printed, save one or two small lists of words in the works of early travellers. And day by day the Bushmen were dying out, passing utterly away; if their speech was to be preserved for the future, it had to be done then - another thirty years would have been too late.

So, hearing that a number of Bushmen prisoners had been sent down from up-country to the Breakwater, my father got leave to take a couple into his home as garden boys. This was done with some anxiety, as the men were convicts and were of a race supposed to be wild and unmanageable. But very soon all fears passed away, the Bushmen, well-fed and kindly treated, proved very harmless fellows, though not workers. Still, as the object in having them there was to record their language and folk-love, in which they were very pleased to help, all parties were suited.



First one man and then another ^{was} ~~would~~ be with us for some months, some as prisoners, but many others after their release; for they were only too glad to earn clothes and food for the journey home. Indeed, if we could have got their families down, many would have stayed for years.

Now these men were in prison for sheepstealing, and one for manslaughter, yet we found them scrupulously honest and the grown-up men quite peaceable and trustworthy. A very old lady still living at the Cape has told me laughingly, that when she used to walk over from Rondebosch to Mowbray to visit my parents in the old days, my father would offer her his "pet murderer" to see her home, and certainly she had a trusty escort.

In their spare time the men made bows and arrows, or fashioned a "góin!góin," an instrument similar to the Australian bull-roarer. One old man made quite a number of musical instruments in imitation of violins he had seen and heard. One was made of a shoe box, one of an old dustpan, and one of a bit of leather given him for the purpose. They also made their own musical instrument, a bow having at one end of the string a flat piece of quill. On this they blow.

All these elder Bushmen were very particular in their manners. To cough in the presence of a superior was not allowed. If they had colds they asked to be excused from coming in. A gift must never be taken with one hand. Both hands together must be held out, the meaning being, they explained, to show the recipient is as grateful as if both hands full were given. They were respectful



too. But once on a later occasion a young Bushman behaved in a rather forward manner during a day's visit to our house and my mother commented on it to some older Bushmen. They said: "Missis must please excuse him, he was brought up by white people."

Later on four Bushman boys came to us from Lake Ngami and spent a couple of years with us. All our former men had come from South of the Orange River and all had spoken in much the same way, though one came from as far east as Colesberg, and others as far west as the Katkop hills in Calvinia. One of these old Bushmen was still with us, when the boys from Lake Ngami arrived. He recognised them as Bushmen at once, but could not understand their language, nor they his, so different were the dialects, yet when written down, one could trace a resemblance between them, could see that both are of the same family of speech.

These boys were a handful; they ranged from about 6 years old to about 16. They fought each other in rough play all over the garden, shooting off their arrows everywhere. One day the coloured lads of the village attacked them while they were out on an errand, and hit them with belts. In a fury the Bushmen came home to fetch their bows and arrows, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they were stopped from shooting their aggressors. Only a promise to have the latter up before the Magistrate, and get them punished, pacified the lads. Yet these wild boys were perfectly honest, and generally respectful.



Now how comes it that this race has got such a bad name? Why do the early explorers and farmers speak of their cruelty, their treachery, their ferocity and thievishness. We found them loyal and honest and well behaved. I think it has arisen in the first place from the white man's not understanding what a Bushman considers his property and consequently acting in what seemed to the Bushmen a hostile manner, without intending to do so. No one expects natives to have boundary stones and title deeds, but the land they actually occupy or cultivate is considered theirs. A traveller in old days would recognise a Hottentot's flocks of sheep and herds of cattle as his property; he would not intrude uninvited into a Kafir kraal nor onto the tilled land belonging to it. If any white man did so, he would expect to be attacked in turn and have his property seized in retaliation. But a Bushman has no settled village, no flocks nor fields of mealies. Why then should he attack the man merely travelling through his country, who has perhaps not even seen him? A Bushman's property is the water. This spring belongs to this family or group of families, that vlei is owned by that man and his children. All the beasts drinking here are the lawful spoil of the former; all those over there are the destined food of the latter and are respected as such by other Bushmen. And as they depend for their food supplies upon game, they take good care not to live too near the water, lest they scare the animals away.

Perhaps an hour's walk away or more, two or three little huts or screens of bushes are hidden behind some trees - that is the owner's home. Thence in the heat of the day, when the game is not stirring, the young women walk all the way to the water, with a kaross or a " riempi " net full of ostrich eggshells. These they fill with water, stopping up the opening of the shell with grass, and leisurely wend their way home again. This supply lasts till next day; they do not waste water on washing. On some evening or early morning the men go out with their bows and arrows and if successful, bring home a buck or an ostrich. Some of the meat is cooked at once and the rest dried on the bushes, when it will last quite a while.

Into this peaceful life comes the white man with his wagon and, of course, makes straight for the spring, where he camps on apparently unoccupied land. Of course he shoots the buck, doing with his gun more damage in a week than the little people would in a month. His oxen tramping about scare the game away to a great extent. The Bushman sees himself deprived of food and water by one who appears to him as a robber. If he protests, he speaks to deaf ears, no one understands a word he says; nor even if he did, would the ordinary hunter or explorer admit that he was wronging the native by camping on uninhabited, uncultivated land. Yet in the Bushman's eyes he is a robber, and what wonder if he tries to kill the intruder, and, matching his poisoned arrow against the



white man's gun, shoots without warning. To him there is no treachery in attacking the man, who is attacking his property rights, in retaliating by the destruction of sheep and cattle, for the shooting and driving away of his bucks and birds.

On the other hand, the white man feels in his rights in camping and hunting there, and then suddenly there comes a Bushman arrow, "when he was not doing anything to them." Naturally, he puts this down to treachery; and when next day an ox is missing and its bones are traced to the nearest Bushman hut, he calls that theft. He retaliates by killing some Bushmen and seizing the children as servants, and the Bushman, infuriated, resorts to general destruction of the white man's possessions and the war of extermination is on. And just as a Bushman is loyal and never forgets a friend, so he is revengeful and never forgives an enemy. The fight once started must go on. If this is to be a white man's country the Bushman had to go, but there is no need to give him a bad name; to call his efforts to preserve his free life and support his family anything but what they were; - proofs of courage and love of liberty.

The Bushman of the Cape Colony has fought his fight and lost, has gone his way and is no more. A few scattered individuals, old and forlorn, are dependent on the white man's bounty. Any young ones, even if they chance to be of pure Bushman descent, have lost the individual characteristics of the race; they are no different from the mixed population of the locations.