

Some remarks on the Bushmen of the Orange River.

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IN that neighbourhood,* and along the Hornberg, purer examples of that extraordinary race are perhaps nowhere to be found; and whatever follows, regards only them, and may differ from any account of other portions of the tribes along the African frontier. Small in stature as the Hottentot race is, they are, in the quarter mentioned, less than any where else, seldom exceeding five feet, but of the most perfect symmetry; they are active in their movements, but indolent in disposition; their colour is dark, but is rendered still darker by filth; their features are peculiarly forbidding, on account of the great distortion of the bones of the face; and the facial angle approaches considerably to that of the monkey. The Bushman will seldom submit to coercion and restraint,—if he does, he becomes the Boor's most wretched menial, and perhaps is worse treated than any slave in the world. In the state of liberty, they dwell in kraals, under the authority of a chief, whose rank is among them hereditary. The number in one

* The writer refers to a military post, which was situated on a branch of the Orange River, known by the name of Nurgatiep, or Black River, and close to the country inhabited by the Tambookies.

kraal seldom exceeds thirty—men, women, and children. Their dwellings are formed of mats, if in the plain, just large enough to creep into; but they often reside in a high and ridgy mountain, under some projecting ledge of rock, the approach to which is narrow and difficult. If attacked there, they seldom flee. They have no fear of death; and, if possessed of a more powerful weapon, might defy the attacks of the Boors, make them less frequent, and more fatal. Nothing but the privations they suffer would make any one of them submit to the cruelty of the farmers; and, living as they do on locusts, ants, and some farinaceous roots, there can be no better proof of the insufficiency of their tiny bow, and of the general inertness of their celebrated poison; yet they are themselves impressed with the conviction of its strength, and they have been able to impress their enemies with a dread of its effects, if not of its fatality. I have never been able to procure one well authenticated relation of death produced by it in man. I have known some cases of horses and dogs dying from the insertion of the arrow into the leg; but some of them seemed to die rather from the effect of violent inflammation in the limb, than from any specific power in the poison itself. In one instance of a dog, however, the animal became stupid and insensible in a few minutes, and died in twenty. Some colonists who have been wounded, assert that they are subject to periodical attacks of insanity, under certain states of atmospherical influence; but I believe this to be, like most of their tales, quite unworthy of credit. The poison of the Bushman of the Hornberg is extracted from plants, and from plants only, so far as I have been able to learn. In that quarter, they use no mineral poison, nor the venom of snakes. Two specimens of plants used by them accompany this; the bulb is a species of *Hæmanthus*; but never having seen the other plant in flower, I have been unable to learn its name. Its leaf exudes a milky juice, and, cut up and bled, forms a tenacious extract, which is spread on the arrow, to some thickness. There is another plant which they use likewise, either above or with the other two; which, together, forms the strongest they procure; its name is "mountain poison." Growing on the stony hills, and very rarely to be found, I have never got a specimen of it.

Their dexterity in the use of their bow is remarkable, and the distance they can shoot, with such a light arrow, is astonishing. They will throw the arrow upwards of an hundred yards, and with great correctness; but, as might be expected, it will seldom wound at such a distance; and I have known a cavalry cloak protect a soldier at twenty paces. The bow is not brought to the eye in shooting. They fix their eye upon the object, grasping the bow with the left hand, while

the arrow passes through the finger on the right side,—a mode of shooting I believe peculiar to them.

Their treatment of a wound made by a poisoned arrow is truly scientific. It is laid freely open, the poison cleaned out, and a horn applied in the manner of a cupping-glass, exhausted by suction at the small extremity. This, as far as I could learn, is the only treatment they adopt, never making use of any herb as a specific. The Boors consider gunpowder and urine as very efficient, and prescribe those in every arrow wound, and in every case of snake-bite. Cupping would seem to be the Bushmen's favourite treatment of every complaint accompanied with pain, and so frequently do they resort to this, that by the time they are full grown they appear scars all over.

The length of time a Bushman can live without food is surprising, often living for three and four days without a mouthful; and the quantity they can devour after such abstinence is equally remarkable, one man having been known to eat an African sheep (30 lbs.) in a single night. When unable to procure food, a belt round the body is tightened as the craving increases, and they resort to the smoking of *dakka* (a species of chanvre, or hemp), which produces intoxication. The narcotic effects of this plant no doubt produce much of that shrivelled appearance which is observable in all of any age. When possessing plenty of their *dakka*, they can smoke and sleep for several days and nights without eating.

A Bushman has no idea of the perpetuation of property; I might say, no notions of a prospective existence. He is wholly dependent on nature or on man: he will neither imitate the Caffer nor the Boor, will neither grow corn nor breed cattle.

The figures drawn by them on the rocks are often remarkable for the correctness of the outline; they hit the attitude of the animal, but seldom care about truth in the colouring: speaking phrenologically, they have the organ of form, but not of colour. I have never seen any animal resembling the unicorn among their paintings, but such an animal is said to exist beyond the Orange River. They are fond of music and dancing, but their musical instrument is rude, and without power or variety, consisting of one string stretched upon a bow, whose vibrations are produced by the breath, with great exertion.

The Bushman's conception of a Supreme Being is, that he is an evil deity; and their notion of futurity, that there will be an eternity of darkness, in which they will live for ever, and feed on grass alone. They imagine that the sun sends rain, and when he is clouded, they hold up burning wood, in

token of disapprobation. They believe that the sun and moon will disappear, to produce the darkness they anticipate.

The Bushman's bow is made of a peculiar tree, called the Blue Bush, whose branches are almost moulded by nature to the artificial form. The sinews of the quagga yield powerful bow-strings, and the arrow is formed of a slender reed, headed with antelope's horn, and pointed with a small triangular piece of metal, which they procure from the Caffers.