

**Mayne Reid**

*Odd People: Being  
a Popular Description  
of Singular Races of Man*

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# Chapter One.

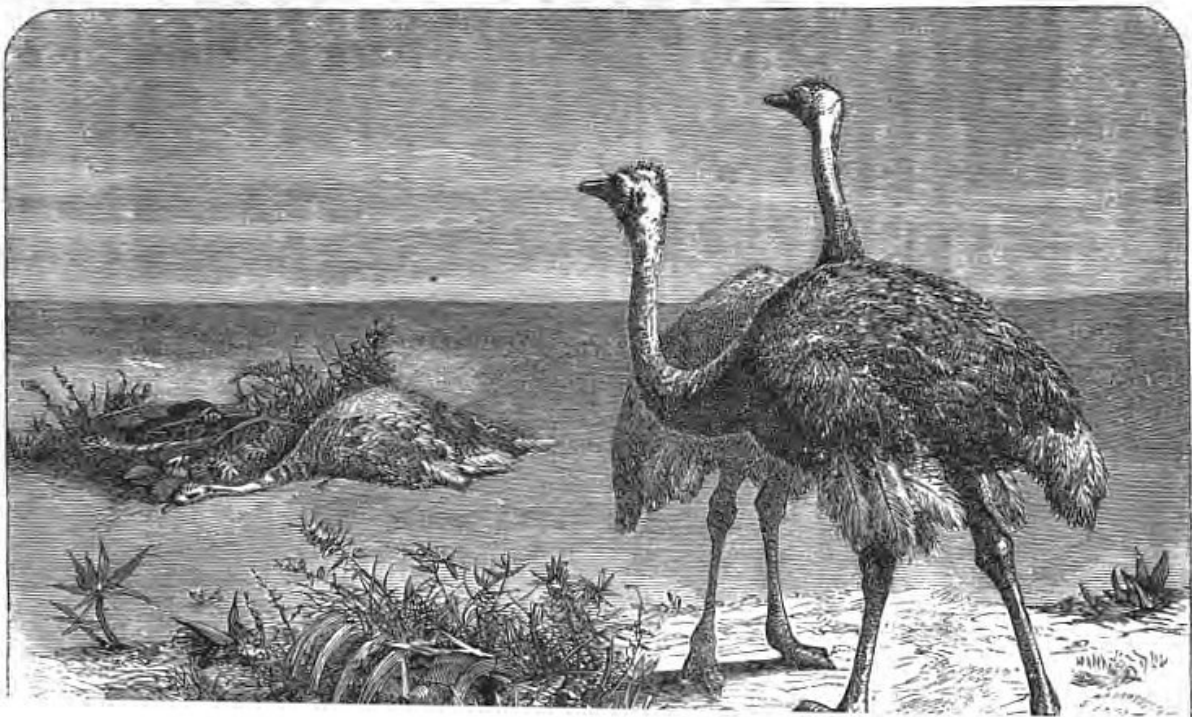
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### **Bosjesmen, or Bushmen.**

Perhaps no race of people has more piqued the curiosity of the civilised world than those little yellow savages of South Africa, known as the *Bushmen*. From the first hour in which European nations became acquainted with their existence, a keen interest was excited by the stories told of their peculiar character and habits; and although they have been visited by many travellers, and many descriptions have been given of them, it is but truth to say, that the interest in them has not yet abated, and the Bushmen of Africa are almost as great a curiosity at this hour as they were when Di Gama first doubled the Cape. Indeed, there is no reason why this should not be, for the habits and personal appearance of these savages are just now as they were then, and our familiarity with them is not much greater. Whatever has been added to our knowledge of their character, has tended rather to increase than diminish our curiosity.

At first the tales related of them were supposed to be filled with wilful exaggerations, and the early travellers were accused of dealing too much in the marvellous. This is a very common accusation brought against the early travellers; and in some instances it is a just one. But in regard to the accounts given of the Bushmen and their habits there has been far less exaggeration than might be supposed; and the more insight we obtain into their peculiar customs and modes of subsistence, the more do we become

satisfied that almost everything alleged of them is true. In fact, it would be difficult for the most inventive genius to contrive a fanciful account, that would be much more curious or interesting than the real and *bonâ fide* truth that can be told about this most peculiar people.



Where do the Bushmen dwell? what is their country? These are questions not so easily answered, as in reality they are not supposed to possess any country at all, any more than the wild animals amidst which they roam, and upon whom they prey. There is no Bushman's country upon the map, though several spots in Southern Africa have at times received this designation. It is not possible, therefore, to delineate the boundaries of their country, since it has no boundaries, any more than that of the wandering Gypsies of Europe.

If the Bushmen, however, have no country in the proper sense of the word, they have a "range," and one of the most

extensive character—since it covers the whole southern portion of the African continent, from the Cape of Good Hope to the twentieth degree of south latitude, extending east and west from the country of the Cafires to the Atlantic Ocean. Until lately it was believed that the Bushman-range did not extend far to the north of the Orange river; but this has proved an erroneous idea. They have recently “turned up” in the land of the Dammaras, and also in the great Kalahari desert, hundreds of miles north from the Orange river and it is not certain that they do not range still nearer to the equatorial line—though it may be remarked that the country in that direction does not favour the supposition, not being of the peculiar nature of a Bushman’s country. The Bushman requires a desert for his dwelling-place. It is an absolute necessity of his nature, as it is to the ostrich and many species of animals; and north of the twentieth degree of latitude, South Africa does not appear to be of this character. The heroic Livingstone has dispelled the long-cherished illusion of the Geography about the “*Great-sanded level*” of these interior regions; and, instead, disclosed to the world a fertile land, well watered, and covered with a profuse and luxuriant vegetation. In such a land there will be no Bushmen.

The limits we have allowed them, however, are sufficiently large,—fifteen degrees of latitude, and an equally extensive range from east to west. It must not be supposed, however, that they *populate* this vast territory. On the contrary, they are only distributed over it *in spots*, in little communities, that have no relationship or connection with one another, but are separated by wide intervals,

sometimes of hundreds of miles in extent. It is only in the desert tracts of South Africa that the Bushmen exist,—in the karoo, and treeless, waterless plains—among the barren ridges and rocky defiles—in the ravines formed by the beds of dried-up rivers—in situations so sterile, so remote, so wild and inhospitable as to offer a home to no other human being save the Bushman himself.

If we state more particularly the localities where the haunts of the Bushman are to be found, we may specify the barren lands on both sides of the Orange river,—including most of its headwaters, and down to its mouth,—and also the Great Kalahari desert. Through all this extensive region the *kraals* of the Bushmen may be encountered. At one time they were common enough within the limits of the Cape colony itself, and some half-caste remnants still exist in the more remote districts; but the cruel persecution of the *boers* has had the effect of extirpating these unfortunate savages; and, like the elephant, the ostrich, and the eland, the true wild Bushman is now only to be met with beyond the frontiers of the colony.

About the origin of the Bushmen we can offer no opinion. They are generally considered as a branch of the great Hottentot family; but this theory is far from being an established fact. When South Africa was first discovered and colonised, both Hottentots and Bushmen were found there, differing from each other just as they differ at this day; and though there are some striking points of resemblance between them, there are also points of dissimilarity that are equally as striking, if we regard the two people as one. In personal appearance there is a certain general likeness: that



is, both are woolly-haired, and both have a Chinese cast of features, especially in the form and expression of the eye. Their colour too is nearly the same; but, on the other hand, the Hottentots are larger than the Bushmen. It is not in their persons, however, that the most essential points of dissimilarity are to be looked for, but rather in their mental characters; and here we observe distinctions so marked and antithetical, that it is difficult to reconcile them with the fact that these two people are of one race. Whether a different habit of life has produced this distinctive character, or whether *it* has influenced the habits of life, are questions not easily answered. We only know that a strange anomaly exists—the anomaly of two people being personally alike—that is, possessing physical characteristics that seem to prove them of the same race, while intellectually, as we shall presently see, they have scarce one character in common. The slight resemblance that exists between the languages of the two is not to be regarded as a proof of their common origin. It only shows that they have long lived in juxtaposition, or contiguous to each other; a fact which cannot be denied.

In giving a more particular description of the Bushman, it will be seen in what respect he resembles the true Hottentot, and in what he differs from him, both physically and mentally, and this description may now be given.

The Bushman is the smallest man with whom we are acquainted; and if the terms “dwarf” and “pigmy” may be applied to any race of human beings, the South-African Bushmen presents the fairest claim to these titles. He stands only 4 feet 6 inches upon his naked soles—never

more than 4 feet 9, and not unfrequently is he encountered of still less height—even so diminutive as 4 feet 2. His wife is of still shorter stature, and this Lilliputian lady is often the mother of children when the crown of her head is just 3 feet 9 inches above the soles of her feet. It has been a very common thing to contradict the assertion that these people are such pigmies in stature, and even Dr Livingstone has done so in his late magnificent work. The doctor states, very jocosely, that they are “not dwarfish—that the specimens brought to Europe have been selected, like costermongers’ dogs, for their extreme ugliness.”

But the doctor forgets that it is but from “the specimens brought to Europe” that the above standard of the Bushman’s height has been derived, but from the testimony of numerous travellers—many of them as trustworthy as the doctor himself—from actual measurements made by them upon the spot. It is hardly to be believed that such men as Sparmann and Burchell, Barrow and Lichtenstein, Harris, Campbell, Patterson, and a dozen others that might be mentioned, should all give an erroneous testimony on this subject. These travellers have differed notoriously on other points, but in this they all agree, that a Bushman of five feet in height is a *tall* man in his tribe. Dr Livingstone speaks of Bushmen “six feet high,” and these are the tribes lately discovered living so far north as the Lake Nagami. It is doubtful whether these are Bushmen at all. Indeed, the description given by the doctor, not only of their height and the colour of their skin, but also some hints about their intellectual character, would lead to the belief that he has mistaken some other people for Bushmen. It must be

remembered that the experience of this great traveller has been chiefly among the *Bechuana* tribes, and his knowledge of the Bushman proper does not appear to be either accurate or extensive. No man is expected to know everybody; and amid the profusion of new facts, which the doctor has so liberally laid before the world, it would be strange if a few inaccuracies should not occur. Perhaps we should have more confidence if this was the only one we are enabled to detect; but the doctor also denies that there is anything either terrific or majestic in the “roaring of the lion.” Thus speaks he: “The same feeling which has induced the modern painter to caricature the lion has led the sentimentalist to consider the lion’s roar as the most terrific of all earthly sounds. We hear of the ‘majestic roar of the king of beasts.’ To talk of the majestic roar of the lion is mere majestic twaddle.”

The doctor is certainly in error here. Does he suppose that any one is ignorant of the character of the lion’s roar? Does he fancy that no one has ever heard it but himself? If it be necessary to go to South Africa to take the true measure of a Bushman, it is not necessary to make that long journey in order to obtain a correct idea of the compass of the lion’s voice. We can hear it at home in all its modulations; and any one who has ever visited the Zoological Gardens in Regent’s Park—nay, any one who chances to live within half a mile of that magnificent menagerie—will be very much disposed to doubt the correctness of the doctor’s assertion. If there be a sound upon the earth above all others “majestic,” a noise above all others “terrific,” it is certainly the *roar* of the lion. Ask Albert Terrace and Saint John’s Wood!

But let us not be too severe upon the doctor. The world is indebted to him much more than to any other modern traveller, and all great men indulge occasionally in the luxury of an eccentric opinion. We have brought the point forward here for a special purpose,—to illustrate a too much neglected truth. Error is not always on the side of *exaggeration*; but is sometimes also found in the opposite extreme of a too-squeamish moderation. We find the learned Professor Lichtenstein ridiculing poor old Hernandez, the natural historian of Mexico, for having given a description of certain fabulous animals—*fabulous*, he terms them, because to him they were odd and unknown. But it turns out that the old author was right, and the *animals exist!* How many similar misconceptions might be recorded of the Buffons, and other closet philosophers—urged, too, with the most bitter zeal! Incredulity carried too far is but another form of credulity.

But to return to our proper theme, and complete the portrait of the Bushman. We have given his height. It is in tolerable proportion to his other dimensions. When young, he appears stout enough; but this is only when a mere boy. At the age of sixteen he has reached all the manhood he is ever destined to attain; and then his flesh disappears; his body assumes a meagre outline; his arms and limbs grow thin; the calf disappears from his legs; the plumpness from his cheeks; and altogether he becomes as wretched-looking an object as it is possible to conceive in human shape. Older, his skin grows dry, corrugated, and scaly; his bones protrude; and his knee, elbow, and ankle-joints appear like

horny knobs placed at the ends of what more resemble long straight sticks than the arms and limbs of a human being.

The colour of this creature may be designated a yellow-brown, though it is not easy to determine it to a shade. The Bushman appears darker than he really is; since his skin serves him for a towel, and every species of dirt that discommodates his fingers he gets rid of by wiping it off on his arms, sides, or breast. The result is, that his whole body is usually coated over with a stratum of grease and filth, which has led to the belief that he regularly anoints himself—a custom common among many savage tribes. This, however, the Bushman does not do: the smearing toilet is merely occasional or accidental, and consists simply in the fat of whatever flesh he has been eating being transferred from his fingers to the cuticle of his body. This is never washed off again—for water never touches the Bushman's hide. Such a use of water is entirely unknown to him, not even for washing his face. Should he have occasion to cleanse his hands—which the handling of gum or some like substance sometimes compels him to do—he performs the operation, not with soap and water, but with the dry dung of cattle or some wild animal. A little rubbing of this upon his skin is all the purification the Bushman believes to be needed.

Of course, the dirt darkens his complexion; but he has the vanity at times to brighten it up—not by making it whiter—but rather a brick-red. A little ochreous earth produces the colour he requires; and with this he smears his body all over—not excepting even the crown of his head, and the scant stock of wool that covers it.

Bushmen have been washed. It requires some scrubbing, and a plentiful application either of soda or soap, to reach the true skin and bring out the natural colour; but the experiment has been made, and the result proves that the Bushman is not so black as, under ordinary circumstances, he appears. A yellow hue shines through the epidermis, somewhat like the colour of the Chinese, or a European in the worst stage of jaundice—the eye only not having that complexion. Indeed, the features of the Bushman, as well as the Hottentot, bear a strong similarity to those of the Chinese, and the Bushman's eye is essentially of the Mongolian type. His hair, however, is entirely of another character. Instead of being long, straight, and lank, it is short, crisp, and curly,—in reality, wool. Its scantiness is a characteristic; and in this respect the Bushman differs from the woolly-haired tribes both of Africa and Australasia. These generally have “fleeces” in profusion, whereas both Hottentot and Bushman have not enough to half cover their scalps; and between the little knot-like “kinks” there are wide spaces without a single hair upon them. The Bushman's “wool” is naturally black, but red ochre and the sun soon convert the colour into a burnt reddish hue.

The Bushman has no beard or other hairy encumbrances. Were they to grow, he would root them out as useless inconveniences. He has a low-bridged nose, with wide flattened nostrils; an eye that appears a mere slit between the eyelids; a pair of high cheek-bones, and a receding forehead. His lips are not thick, as in the negro, and he is furnished with a set of fine white teeth, which, as he grows older, do not decay, but present the singular phenomenon

of being regularly worn down to the stumps—as occurs to the teeth of sheep and other ruminant animals.

Notwithstanding the small stature of the Bushman, his frame is wiry and capable of great endurance. He is also as agile as an antelope.

From the description above given, it will be inferred that the Bushman is no beauty. Neither is the Bushwoman; but, on the contrary, both having passed the period of youth, become absolutely ugly,—the woman, if possible, more so than the man.

And yet, strange to say, many of the Bush-girls, when young, have a cast of prettiness almost amounting to beauty. It is difficult to tell in what this beauty consists. Something, perhaps, in the expression of the oblique almond-shaped eye, and the small well-formed mouth and lips, with the shining white teeth. Their limbs, too, at this early age, are often well-rounded; and many of them exhibit forms that might serve as models for a sculptor. Their feet are especially well-shaped, and, in point of size, they are by far the smallest in the world. Had the Chinese ladies been gifted by nature with such little feet, they might have been spared the torture of compressing them.

The foot of a Bushwoman rarely measures so much as six inches in length; and full-grown girls have been seen, whose feet, submitted to the test of an actual measurement, proved but a very little over four inches!

Intellectually, the Bushman does not rank so low as is generally believed. He has a quick, cheerful mind, that appears ever on the alert,—as may be judged by the constant play of his little piercing black eye,—and though he

does not always display much skill in the manufacture of his weapons, he can do so if he pleases. Some tribes construct their bows, arrows, fish-baskets, and other implements and utensils with admirable ingenuity; but in general the Bushman takes no pride in fancy weapons. He prefers having them effective, and to this end he gives proof of his skill in the manufacture of *most deadly poisons* with which to anoint his arrows. Furthermore, he is ever active and ready for action; and in this his mind is in complete contrast with that of the Hottentot, with whom indolence is a predominant and well-marked characteristic. The Bushman, on the contrary, is always on the *qui vive*; always ready to be doing where there is anything to do; and there is not much opportunity for him to be idle, as he rarely ever knows where the next meal is to come from. The ingenuity which he displays in the capture of various kinds of game,—far exceeding that of other hunting tribes of Africa,—as also the cunning exhibited by him while engaged in cattle-stealing and other plundering forays, prove an intellectual capacity more than proportioned to his diminutive body; and, in short, in nearly every mental characteristic does he differ from the supposed cognate race—the Hottentot.

It would be hardly just to give the Bushman a character for high courage; but, on the other hand, it would be as unjust to charge him with cowardice. Small as he is, he shows plenty of “pluck,” and when brought to bay, his motto is, “No surrender.” He will fight to the death, discharging his poisoned arrows as long as he is able to bend a bow. Indeed, he has generally been treated to shooting, or clubbing to death, wherever and whenever caught, and he knows



nothing of *quarter*. Just as a badger he ends his life,—his last struggle being an attempt to do injury to his assailant. This trait in his character has, no doubt, been strengthened by the inhuman treatment that, for a century, he has been receiving from the brutal boers of the colonial frontier.

The costume of the Bushman is of the most primitive character,—differing only from that worn by our first parents, in that the fig-leaf used by the men is a patch of jackal-skin, and that of the women a sort of fringe or bunch of leather thongs, suspended around the waist by a strap, and hanging down to the knees. It is in reality a little apron of dressed skin; or, to speak more accurately, two of them, one above the other, both cut into narrow strips or thongs, from below the waist downward. Other clothing than this they have none, if we except a little skin *kaross*, or cloak, which is worn over their shoulders;—that of the women being provided with a bag or hood at the top, that answers the naked “piccaninny” for a nest or cradle. Sandals protect their feet from the sharp stones, and these are of the rudest description,—merely a piece of the thick hide cut a little longer and broader than the soles of the feet, and fastened at the toes and round the ankles by thongs of sinews. An attempt at ornament is displayed in a leathern skullcap, or more commonly a circlet around the head, upon which are sewed a number of “cowries,” or small shells of the *Cyprea moneta*.

It is difficult to say where these shells are procured,—as they are not the product of the Bushman’s country, but are only found on the far shores of the Indian Ocean. Most probably he obtains them by barter, and after they have

passed through many hands; but they must cost the Bushman dear, as he sets the highest value upon them. Other ornaments consist of old brass or copper buttons, attached to the little curls of his woolly hair; and, among the women, strings of little pieces of ostrich egg-shells, fashioned to resemble beads; besides a perfect load of leathern bracelets on the arms, and a like profusion of similar circlets on the limbs, often reaching from the knee to the ankle-joint.

Red ochre over the face and hair is the fashionable toilette, and a perfumery is obtained by rubbing the skin with the powdered leaves of the “buku” plant, a species of *diosma*. According to a quaint old writer, this causes them to “stink like a poppy,” and would be highly objectionable, were it not preferable to the odour which they have without it.

They do not *tattoo*, nor yet perforate the ears, lips, or nose,—practices so common among savage tribes. Some instances of nose-piercing have been observed, with the usual appendage of a piece of wood or porcupine’s quill inserted in the septum, but this is a custom rather of the Caffres than Bushmen. Among the latter it is rare. A grand ornament is obtained by smearing the face and head with a shining micaceous paste, which is procured from a cave in one particular part of the Bushman’s range; but this, being a “far-fetched” article, is proportionably scarce and dear. It is only a fine belle who can afford to give herself a coat of *blink-slip*,—as this sparkling pigment is called by the colonists. Many of the women, and men as well, carry in their hands the bushy tail of a jackal. The purpose is to fan

off the flies, and serve also as a “wipe,” to disembarass their bodies of perspiration when the weather chances to be over hot.

The domicile of the Bushman next merits description. It is quite as simple and primitive as his dress, and gives him about equal trouble in its construction. If a cave or cleft can be found in the rocks, of sufficient capacity to admit his own body and those of his family—never a very large one—he builds no house. The cave contents him, be it ever so tight a squeeze. If there be no cave handy, an overhanging rock will answer equally as well. He regards not the open sides, nor the draughts. It is only the rain which he does not relish; and any sort of a shed, that will shelter him from that, will serve him for a dwelling. If neither cave, crevice, nor impending cliff can be found in the neighbourhood, he then resorts to the alternative of housebuilding; and his style of architecture does not differ greatly from that of the orang-outang. A bush is chosen that grows near to two or three others,—the branches of all meeting in a common centre. Of these branches the builder takes advantage, fastening them together at the ends, and wattling some into the others. Over this framework a quantity of grass is scattered in such a fashion as to cast off a good shower of rain, and then the “carcass” of the building is considered complete. The inside work remains yet to be done, and that is next set about. A large roundish or oblong hole is scraped out in the middle of the floor. It is made wide enough and deep enough to hold the bodies of three or four Bush-people, though a single large Caffre or Dutchman would scarcely find room in it. Into this hole is flung a quantity of dry grass, and arranged so as

to present the appearance of a gigantic nest. This nest, or lair, becomes the bed of the Bushman, his wife, or wives,—for he frequently keeps two,—and the other members of his family. Coiled together like monkeys, and covered with their skin karosses, they all sleep in it,—whether “sweetly” or “soundly,” I shall not take upon me to determine.

It is supposed to be this fashion of literally “sleeping in the bush,” as also the mode by which he skulks and hides among bushes,—invariably taking to them when pursued,—that has given origin to the name Bushman, or *Bosjesman*, as it is in the language of the colonial Dutch. This derivation is probable enough, and no better has been offered.

The Bushman sometimes constructs himself a more elaborate dwelling; that is, some Bushmen;—for it should be remarked that there are a great many tribes or communities of these people, and they are not all so very low in the scale of civilisation. None, however, ever arrive at the building of a house,—not even a hut. A tent is their highest effort in the building line, and that is of the rudest description, scarce deserving the name. Its covering is a mat, which they weave out of a species of rush that grows along some of the desert streams; and in the fabrication of the covering they display far more ingenuity than in the planning or construction of the tent itself. The mat, in fact, is simply laid over two poles, that are bent into the form of an arch, by having both ends stuck into the ground. A second piece of matting closes up one end; and the other, left open, serves for the entrance. As a door is not deemed necessary, no further construction is required, and the tent is “pitched”

complete. It only remains to scoop out the sand, and make the *nest* as already described.

It is said that the Goths drew their ideas of architecture from the aisles of the oak forest; the Chinese from their Mongolian tents; and the Egyptians from their caves in the rocks. Beyond a doubt, the Bushman has borrowed his from the nest of the ostrich!

It now becomes necessary to inquire how the Bushman spends his time? how he obtains subsistence? and what is the nature of his food? All these questions can be answered, though at first it may appear difficult to answer them. Dwelling, as he always does, in the very heart of the desert, remote from forests that might furnish him with some sort of food—trees that might yield fruit,—far away from a fertile soil, with no knowledge of agriculture, even if it were near,—with no flocks or herds; neither sheep, cattle, horses, nor swine,—no domestic animals but his lean, diminutive dogs,—how does this Bushman procure enough to eat? What are his sources of supply?

We shall see. Being neither a grazier nor a farmer, he has other means of subsistence,—though it must be confessed that they are of a precarious character, and often during his life does the Bushman find himself on the very threshold of starvation. This, however, results less from the parsimony of Nature than the Bushman's own improvident habits,—a trait in his character which is, perhaps, more strongly developed in him than any other. We shall have occasion to refer to it presently.

His first and chief mode of procuring his food is by the chase: for, although he is surrounded by the sterile

wilderness, he is not the only animated being who has chosen the desert for his home. Several species of birds—one the largest of all—and quadrupeds, share with the Bushman the solitude and safety of this desolate region. The rhinoceros can dwell there; and in numerous streams are found the huge hippopotami; whilst quaggas, zebras, and several species of antelope frequent the desert plains as their favourite “stamping” ground. Some of these animals can live almost without water; but when they do require it, what to them is a gallop of fifty miles to some well-known “vley” or pool? It will be seen, therefore, that the desert has its numerous denizens. All these are objects of the Bushman’s pursuit, who follows them with incessant pertinacity—as if he were a beast of prey, furnished by Nature with the most carnivorous propensities.

In the capture of these animals he displays an almost incredible dexterity and cunning. His mode of approaching the sly ostrich, by disguising himself in the skin of one of these birds, is so well-known that I need not describe it here; but the *ruses* he adopts for capturing or killing other sorts of game are many of them equally ingenious. The pit-trap is one of his favourite contrivances; and this, too, has been often described,—but often very erroneously. The pit is not a large hollow,—as is usually asserted,—but rather of dimensions proportioned to the size of the animal that is expected to fall into it. For game like the rhinoceros or *eland* antelope, it is dug of six feet in length and three in width at the top; gradually narrowing to the bottom, where it ends in a trench of only twelve inches broad. Six or seven feet is considered deep enough; and the animal, once into it, gets

so wedged at the narrow bottom part as to be unable to make use of its legs for the purpose of springing out again. Sometimes a sharp stake or two are used, with the view of *impaling* the victim; but this plan is not always adopted. There is not much danger of a quadruped that drops in ever getting out again, till he is dragged out by the Bushman in the shape of a carcass.

The Bushman's ingenuity does not end here. Besides the construction of the trap, it is necessary the game should be guided into it. Were this not done, the pit might remain a long time empty, and, as a necessary consequence, so too might the belly of the Bushman. In the wide plain few of the gregarious animals have a path which they follow habitually; only where there is a pool may such beaten trails be found, and of these the Bushman also avails himself; but they are not enough. Some artificial means must be used to make the traps pay—for they are not constructed without much labour and patience. The plan adopted by the Bushman to accomplish this exhibits some points of originality. He first chooses a part of the plain which lies between two mountains. No matter if these be distant from each other: a mile, or even two, will not deter the Bushman from his design. By the help of his whole tribe—men, women, and children—he constructs a fence from one mountain to the other. The material used is whatever may be most ready to the hand: stones, sods, brush, or dead timber, if this be convenient. No matter how rude the fence: it need not either be very high. He leaves several gaps in it; and the wild animals, however easily they might leap over such a puny barrier, will, in their ordinary way, prefer to walk

leisurely through the gaps. In each of these, however, there is a dangerous hole—dangerous from its depth as well as from the cunning way in which it is concealed from the view—in short, in each gap there is a *pit-fall*. No one—at least no animal except the elephant—would ever suspect its presence; the grass seems to grow over it, and the sand lies unturned, just as elsewhere upon the plain. What quadruped could detect the cheat? Not any one except the sagacious elephant. The stupid eland tumbles through; the gemsbok goes under; and the rhinoceros rushes into it as if destined to destruction. The Bushman sees this from his elevated perch, glides forward over the ground, and spears the struggling victim with his *poisoned assagai*.

Besides the above method of capturing game the Bushman also uses the bow and arrows. This is a weapon in which he is greatly skilled; and although both bow and arrows are as tiny as if intended for children's toys, they are among the deadliest of weapons, their fatal effect lies not in the *size* of the wound they are capable of inflicting, but in the peculiar mode in which the barbs of the arrows are prepared. I need hardly add that they are dipped in poison;—for who has not heard of the poisoned arrows of the African Bushmen?

Both bow and arrows are usually rude enough in their construction, and would appear but a trumpery affair, were it not for a knowledge of their effects. The bow is a mere round stick, about three feet long, and slightly bent by means of its string of twisted sinews. The arrows are mere reeds, tipped with pieces of bone, with a split ostrich-quill lapped behind the head, and answering for a barb. This



arrow the Bushman can shoot with tolerable certainty to a distance of a hundred yards, and he can even project it farther by giving a slight elevation to his aim. It signifies not whether the force with which it strikes the object be ever so slight, if it only makes an entrance. Even a scratch from its point will sometimes prove fatal.

Of course the danger dwells altogether in the poison. Were it not for that, the Bushman, from his dwarfish stature and pigmy strength, would be a harmless creature indeed.

The poison he well knows how to prepare, and he can make it of the most "potent spell," when the "materials" are within his reach. For this purpose he makes use of both vegetable and animal substances, and a mineral is also employed; but the last is not a poison, and is only used to give consistency to the liquid, so that it may the better adhere to the arrow. The vegetable substances are of various kinds. Some are botanically known: the bulb of *Amaryllis disticha*,—the gum of a *Euphorbia*,—the sap of a species of sumac (*Rhus*),—and the nuts of a shrubby plant, by the colonists called *Woolf-gift* (Wolf-poison).

The animal substance is the fluid found in the fangs of venomous serpents, several species of which serve the purpose of the Bushman: as the little "Horned Snake,"—so called from the scales rising prominently over its eyes; the "Yellow Snake," or South-African Cobra (*Naga haje*); the "Puff Adder," and others. From all these he obtains the ingredients of his deadly ointment, and mixes them, not all together; for he cannot always procure them all in any one region of the country in which he dwells. He makes his poison, also, of different degrees of potency, according to

the purpose for which he intends it; whether for hunting or war. With sixty or seventy little arrows, well imbued with this fatal mixture, and carefully placed in his quiver of tree bark or skin,—or, what is not uncommon, stuck like a coronet around his head,—he sallies forth, ready to deal destruction either to game, animals, or to human enemies.

Of these last he has no lack. Every man, not a Bushman, he deems his enemy; and he has some reason for thinking so. Truly may it be said of him, as of Ishmael, that his “hand is against every man, and every man’s hand against him;” and such has been his unhappy history for ages. Not alone have the boers been his pursuers and oppressors, but all others upon his borders who are strong enough to attack him,—colonists, Caffres, and Bechuanas, all alike,—not even excepting his supposed kindred, the Hottentots. Not only does no fellow-feeling exist between Bushman and Hottentot, but, strange to say, they hate each other with the most rancorous hatred. The Bushman will plunder a Namaqua Hottentot, a Griqua, or a Gonaqua,—plunder and murder him with as much ruthlessness, or even more, than he would the hated Caffre or boer. All are alike his enemies,—all to be plundered and massacred, whenever met, and the thing appears possible.

We are speaking of plunder. This is another source of supply to the Bushman, though one that is not always to be depended upon. It is his most dangerous method of obtaining a livelihood, and often costs him his life. He only resorts to it when all other resources fail him, and food is no longer to be obtained by the chase.

He makes an expedition into the settlements,—either of the frontier boers, Caffres, or Hottentots,—whichever chance to live most convenient to his haunts. The expedition, of course, is by night, and conducted, not as an open *foray*, but in secret, and by stealth. The cattle are *stolen*, not *reeved*, and driven off while the owner and his people are asleep.

In the morning, or as soon as the loss is discovered, a pursuit is at once set on foot. A dozen men, mounted and armed with long muskets (*röers*), take the *spoor* of the spoilers, and follow it as fast as their horses will *carry* them. A dozen boers, or even half that number, is considered a match for a whole tribe of Bushmen, in any fight which may occur in the open plain, as the boers make use of their long-range guns at such a distance that the Bushmen are shot down without being able to use their poisoned arrows; and if the thieves have the fortune to be overtaken before they have got far into the desert, they stand a good chance of being terribly chastised.

There is no quarter shown them. Such a thing as mercy is never dreamt of,—no sparing of lives any more than if they were a pack of hyenas. The Bushmen may escape to the rocks, such of them as are not hit by the bullets; and there the boers know it would be idle to follow them. Like the klipspringer antelope, the little savages can bound from rock to rock, and cliff to cliff, or hide like partridges among crevices, where neither man nor horse can pursue them. Even upon the level plain—if it chance to be stony or intersected with breaks and ravines—a horseman would

endeavour to overtake them in vain, for these yellow imps are as swift as ostriches.

When the spoilers scatter thus, the boer may recover his cattle, but in what condition? That he has surmised already, without going among the herd. He does not expect to drive home one half of them; perhaps not one head. On reaching the flock he finds there is not one without a wound of some kind or other: a gash in the flank, the cut of a knife, the stab of an assagai, or a poisoned arrow—intended for the boer himself—sticking between the ribs. This is the sad spectacle that meets his eyes; but he never reflects that it is the result of his own cruelty,—he never regards it in the light of retribution. Had he not first hunted the Bushman to make him a slave, to make bondsmen and bondswomen of his sons and daughters, to submit them to the caprice and tyranny of his great, strapping *frau*, perhaps his cattle would have been browsing quietly in his fields. The poor Bushman, in attempting to take them, followed but his instincts of hunger: in yielding them up he obeyed but the promptings of revenge.

It is not always that the Bushman is thus overtaken. He frequently succeeds in carrying the whole herd to his desert fastness; and the skill which he exhibits in getting them there is perfectly surprising. The cattle themselves are more afraid of him than of a wild beast, and run at his approach; but the Bushman, swifter than they, can glide all around them, and keep them moving at a rapid rate.

He uses stratagem also to obstruct or baffle the pursuit. The route he takes is through the driest part of the desert,—if possible, where water does not exist at all. The cattle

suffer from thirst, and bellow from the pain; but the Bushman cares not for that, so long as he is himself served. But how is he served? There is no water, and a Bushman can no more go without drinking than a boer: how then does he provide for himself on these long expeditions?

All has been pre-arranged. While off to the settlements, the Bushman's wife has been busy. The whole *kraal* of women—young and old—have made an excursion halfway across the desert, each carrying ostrich egg-shells, as much as her kaross will hold, each shell full of water. These have been deposited at intervals along the route in secret spots known by marks to the Bushmen, and this accomplished the women return home again. In this way the plunderer obtains his supply of water, and thus is he enabled to continue his journey over the arid *Karoo*.

The pursuers become appalled. They are suffering from thirst—their horses sinking under them. Perhaps they have lost their way? It would be madness to proceed further. "Let the cattle go this time?" and with this disheartening reflection they give up the pursuit, turn the heads of their horses, and ride homeward.

There is a feast at the Bushman's *kraal*—and such a feast! not *one* ox is slaughtered, but a score of them all at once. They kill them, as if from very wantonness; and they no longer eat, but raven on the flesh.

For days the feasting is kept up almost continuously,—even at night they must wake up to have a midnight meal! and thus runs the tale, till every ox has been eaten. They have not the slightest idea of a provision for the future; even the lower animals seem wiser in this respect. They do

not think of keeping a few of the plundered cattle at pasture to serve them for a subsequent occasion. They give the poor brutes neither food nor drink; but, having penned them up in some defile of the rocks, leave them to moan and bellow, to drop down and die.

On goes the feasting, till all are finished; and even if the flesh has turned putrid, this forms not the slightest objection: it is eaten all the same.

The kraal now exhibits an altered spectacle. The starved, meagre wretches, who were seen flitting among its tents but a week ago, have all disappeared. Plump bodies and distended abdomens are the order of the day; and the profile of the Bushwoman, taken from the neck to the knees, now exhibits the outline of the letter S. The little imps leap about, tearing raw flesh,—their yellow cheeks besmeared with blood,—and the lean curs seem to have been exchanged for a pack of fat, petted poodles.

But this scene must some time come to an end, and at length it does end. All the flesh is exhausted, and the bones picked clean. A complete reaction comes over the spirit of the Bushman. He falls into a state of languor,—the only time when he knows such a feeling,—and he keeps his kraal, and remains idle for days. Often he sleeps for twenty-four hours at a time, and wakes only to go to sleep again. He need not rouse himself with the idea of getting something to eat: there is not a morsel in the whole kraal, and he knows it. He lies still, therefore,—weakened with hunger, and overcome with the drowsiness of a terrible lassitude.

Fortunate for him, while in this state, if those bold vultures—attracted by the *débris* of his feast, and now high