

BC 151 (Suppl)

BC 151 D3.3.1

THE BUSHMEN TRIBES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

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-lore, in which they were very pleased to help, all parties were suited.

BC 151 (Ingl)

First one man and then another 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 "goin goin," 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

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 possession 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.