

by

BC151 D3.8

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When van Riebeck and his followers settled at the Cape, they found two native races in the country. One was a nomadic pastoral people wandering across the flats and along the valleys of the Western Province with flocks of fattailed sheep and herds of longhorned cattle. The other was a race of hunters and foodgatherers first met with in the mountains thirty miles from Table Valley and found in all the rough country to the north and west and on the plains of the Karroo. The members of both these races were small and yellow, the hunters being the smaller. They both had slight limbs, tiny hands and feet, inward curving backbones and protruding hips. Their quaint faces had some features in common, and their hair was rolled in sparse tight curls. Both dressed in skins of animals and used bows and arrows. Yet their habits and customs, their characters and speech proved very different as they became better known.

The pastoral people, the Hottentots, dwelt together in large village communities each under its own captain but controlled by the chief of the ^{tribe} ~~tribe~~. Their homes were huts fashioned of mats which they could take down and carry away on their oxen. They lived chiefly on milk, adding to their food supply by occasional hunting or the purchase of wild vegetable food from their neighbours. They understood smelting ore, and could make metal knives and tips for their weapons. They roved from the Cape to the Kei or the Orange River, as they found pasture for their herds.

On the other hand the hunting race, the Bushmen, dwelt in tiny family ^{groups} ~~groups~~ scattered very sparsely over the country, had no chiefs and owned no ~~domestic~~ domestic animals. They were not really nomads, for though each family shifted about from end to end of the large tract of country it called its own, it would never leave the same. They lived on what nature provided in game and wild vegetable food, and as soon as the supply was exhausted in one part of their domain, they moved on to ~~the~~ another. Their homes were either tiny huts or windscreens made of bushes, or else caves and rockshelters when such were available. They did not understand tilling the soil or keeping cattle, and had no idea of dealing with metal, but depended upon wood and stone, leather, horn and bone for all implements and weapons.

The men shot the game with a reed arrowstipped with flint or bone, they skinned it with a stone knife, and carried the meat home in nets plaited of sinew. The women dug for roots and wild onions with a pointed stick, weighted by a round perforated stone, they pounded locusts or melon seeds between two stones, they fetched water in an empty ostrich eggshells and they served food on the breastbones of an ostriches.

The Bushmen's wants were few, his labour light. An arduous day's hunting would alternate with several days of leisure. In his spare time his gay and artistic nature found vent in song and dance, in endless story telling, dramatizing every incident related with the voice and gesture of a perfect mimic, or in painting the events of his life on the walls of rockshelters, or carving them on flat stones in

the open. Though one of the most backward races in all material culture, they excelled many more advanced people in art and fancy. Their paintings are only to be matched by the rockpaintings found in southern France and Spain, their folklore has a highly imaginative quality that reminds us of ~~myths~~ the mythology of our own ancestors, personifying forces of nature and the animal world, withal in a manner unique to themselves.

On hearing of this happy hunting race, one would think they should have had few human enemies. Abiding in their own borders, not intruding on another man's land, seeking only 'bread and games', what should expose them to the hostility of their neighbours? The same reason that caused Naboth's death: they owned the land that others coveted. Before the white man's advent some fighting must have taken place between Bushmen and Hottentots, as the latter, who ^{admitted having} ~~used to~~ come from the north, had displaced the former in the valleys with the best pasturage. Still the Bushmen managed to hold their own in less fertile tracts of country between the Hottentot tribes. It was merely a case of one bowman against another, and though the Hottentot had the advantage of numbers, the Bushmen were more fearless, ^{and} better shots, moreover they poisoned their arrows with deadly venom.

But with the advent of the European the fate of the hunters was sealed. Hungry for land the settlers spread far and wide over the country that seemed to them unoccupied, and camped wherever they found a suitable spring or waterhole. They saw no huts near the water, no tilled land, no herds or flocks, nothing to show signs of occupation. How should they know that the water was the most cherished possession of a Bushman family, handed down from generation to generation like an entailed estate? Yet such was the case. Each family group owned several drinking places dotted about its tract of country, and all the game drinking at these fountains was the property of that family. Any other Bushman hunting there was a trespasser and thief, ^{and} would be treated as such. So was the white man when he did the same thing.

Naturally the Bushman landowner, on returning from his winter to his summer quarters and finding his fountain in the hands of a white man and his precious buck shot down and frightened away, would try to expel the intruder. If he protested, he spoke to deaf ears, no one understood his difficult clicking language. Even if he found an interpreter, it was of little use. The ^{European} ~~settler~~ would never admit that he was wronging anyone by settling on uncultivated land that was apparently not occupied. For even when the Bushman was on that part of his territory and daily fetching water from that spring, he did not dwell close to the water for fear of frightening the game drinking there. His tiny huts might be at a distance of an hour's walk, quite invisible to the traveller's eye. Thus the European felt justified in settling there, while the Bushman saw himself deprived of food and water by a foreign robber. What wonder if he attacked the intruder in the same manner as he hunted the game, namely lay in wait ^{by} for him with a poisoned arrow. What wonder if he retaliated ^{by} the seizure of

cattle for the shooting and driving away of his bucks and birds !

Yet the settler felt equally aggrieved at being attacked apparently without cause, and when his cattle disappeared and their bones were found in the Bushman's huts, he called that theft and ~~xxx~~ started shooting down the Bushmen and capturing their children for servants. Then the Bushmen infuriated resorted to a general destruction of the enemy and all their property. The war of extermination began that could only end in one way.

While the white man was making an end of the hunters in the west, the black man was doing the same in the east. Bantu tribes were fighting their way down from the equator along the coastal belt, killing off or absorbing the Bushmen as they went. When the black and the white invaders met at the Great Fish River, the little people were still waging a losing war against the conquerors east and west. But the end soon came.

The Bushman of the old Cape Colony is no more. A few individuals, old and forlorn, may be found on distant farms, dependent on white masters. Among the coloured people of some districts an occasional face and figure tell of Bushman ancestry, but the race is extinct.

Other Bushman tribes, more or less distantly related to the colonial Bushmen, may still be found beyond the Orange River in the Kalahari and to the west thereof, but these have been too much exposed to the influence of other natives to be as pure in descent, as unique in thought and custom as the little people found in the Cape Colony, who died in defending the country they regarded as their own.