

THE NATIVES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

BY EDGAR MEIS, FORMERLY EDITOR OF THE JOHANNESBURG DAILY NEWS.

Statisticians assert that there are eleven hundred and fifty-one distinctive tribes of natives in South Africa, south of the Zambesi River. Most persons who have lived in that part of the world will cheerfully assert that this census is far below the truth—if dialects and racial differences count for aught. Rough guesses place the number of natives at from two to ten millions, but, as a matter of fact, no one knows even approximately their number. This lack of information is due to the roving propensities of the natives. Here



A BASUTO WOMAN DRESSED FOR A RELIGIOUS CEREMONIAL.

to-day, there to-morrow, it would take a mightier hunter than even the famed Selous to hunt them all down.

The writer has seen the South African native, commonly called Kafir, in all his varying phases, in his wild state, semi-civilized and wholly so. He has seen the native at his best and at his worst—untainted by the touch of civilization and soiled by its proximity. And through it all, the writer has believed, and perhaps always will, that the Kafir, whether Zulu or Basuto or Bechuana or Swazie or Amatonga or Matabele or any other tribe, has good in him, just as though his skin were white—and bad too.

Summed up in a few words, the Kafir, in his uncivilized state, is an overgrown child, with childish foibles and shortcomings. But let him learn the vices of civilization, let him realize the evil there is in him, let him discover that there is a broad path leading to destruction—and you will find a fully civilized being, as capable in certain directions as is the white man.

It is a fact that where the Kafir is permitted to dwell in primeval ignorance, with none to warn him against vices he knows nothing about, he remains a good Christian, even though he is ignorant of doctrinal disputes and the meaning of higher criticism. It is equally a fact that where he imbibes a little learning, especially a knowledge of English, he becomes all that is worst in a human being.

A study of the Kafir is a study of the human being. And what is more, he has been grossly and shamefully maltreated. Space prevents a recital of the wrongs of the native, so to a dissertation as to his idiosyncrasies and peculiarities.

It must be borne in mind that the Kafir is very much unlike the American negro. There is no blood taint in the Zulu nor consumption in the Matabele. Endowed with a superabundance of

animal health and a constitution untainted (in most cases) by civilization, the average Kafir is a magnificent specimen of humanity. And here the difference between him and his American ex-brethren asserts itself. Put a Southern "darker" and a Zulu side by side, and the difference will be apparent to the most casual observer. The skin of the Zulu is totally unlike that of a negro as we know him. The Zulu's cuticle is transparent—so much so, that the red blood can be seen coursing beneath it. That is the Zulu's greatest pride. He will point to his skin to prove that he is a pure-bred Zulu—the real Ethiopian of the ancients. And it is so with the other tribes. The flat feet and bowed legs and other peculiarities of the American negro are all missing.

As for the morality of the Kafir—that differs according to the tribe and its proximity to civilization. The Zulu is eminently virtuous. Infraction of the law of morality is punished by death. The culprits are placed on the ground with their respective heads resting upon a flat stone. Then their heads are crushed with another stone. On the other hand, the Hottentot, having been a close companion of the white man, is the most immoral and depraved human being perhaps in existence. The Matabeles are moral, so are the Basutos and the Mashonas. The Bechuanas are less so, and the Bushmen rank next to the despised Hottentots. That the latter are as bad as stated is evident when the Zulus will not work in the same mine with one nor sleep in the same room or kraal.

Nearly all the tribes, save the Hottentots and Bushmen, are cleanly, the Zulus particularly so. The Zulu goes in bathing twice a day. He cleanses his teeth with milk at sunrise and again at sunset.

All the tribes, even those partially civilized, believe in ghosts and spirits. Many worship the spirits of the departed. Still others are fetish worshippers.

The most advanced tribe is the Basuto nation, in which there are fifty thousand Christians, with one hundred and forty-four schools. Strict as are the laws against the indiscriminate selling of liquors to natives, they are yet able to obtain all they want. And when their supply of ordinary rum and whisky runs short, they manufacture the notorious "Cape Smoke." This addiction to alcohol is the great curse of the Basutos, and, in fact, of every other tribe.

Cape Smoke must be tasted to be appreciated—provided the person thus experimenting survives. For be it known that Cape Smoke consists of wood alcohol, red pepper and sulphuric acid. This terrible concoction is relished by the Kafirs as no European drink is—they have not yet been civilized up to the level of the American "mixed drink."

But to return to the Basutos. For more than one hundred years this tribe has been undergoing a process of forcible civilization. Good men and good women have sacrificed their lives to the noble cause.

Just before the present war began, there was a gathering of Indunas, or native priests, near the Free State border. Thousands of "Christian" natives attended. Two oxen were brought into a ring formed for the purpose. One of the animals was snow white, representing the British. The other, coal black, represented the Boers. With weird incantations and wild dances, these Christianized Basutos skinned the poor oxen alive. The white ox succumbed after five hours of terrible agony; the black one lived for nearly a day and a night. The gods of the "Christian" Basutos had answered the oracle—the Boers would win.

The Kafir is a stoic. With him, what is, is. I have seen a Zulu's toe crushed by a rock. Calmly he cut the injured member off, tied the wound up with a rag, and then as calmly resumed work. This stoicism it is that makes the Kafir such a formidable foe.

The native does not know his own power—due to numerical superiority. Arm him with modern weapons and you build a Frankenstein, who will prove as terrible a conundrum as Mrs. Shelley's monster. For despite his schooling and christianizing and civilizing, the Kafir remains a Kafir, unable to forget his wrongs, and



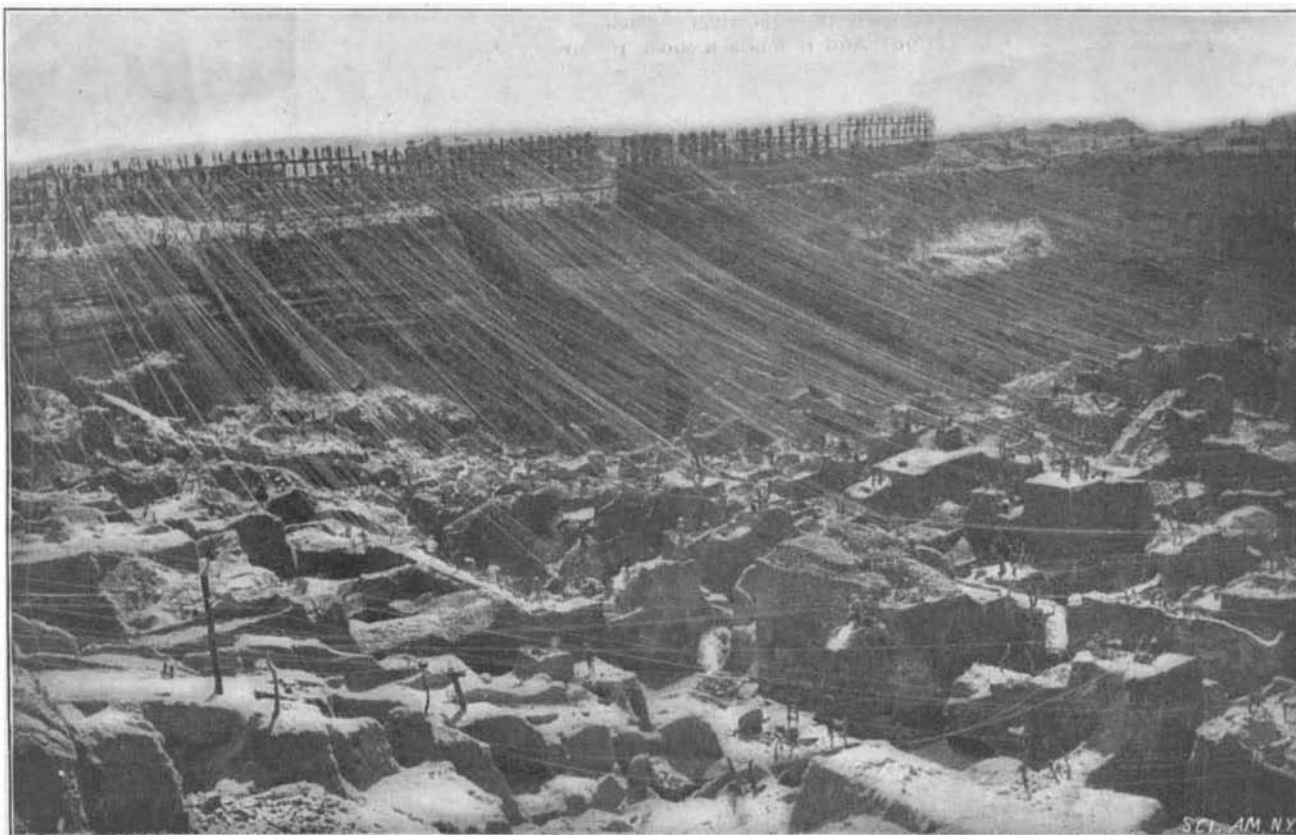
KAFIRS WITH SUGAR-CANE.

held in leash only through fear of the white man's death-dealing weapons. Even now the Basutos are considering the advisability of attacking the side that will lose in the campaign between the contending white men. Let the British be defeated a few more times, and even the loyalty of the Basuto chief, Lerothodi, will not be able to stem the tide. The only preventive of open hostility, even at this writing, is the parliamentary form of government of the Basutos.

Basutoland, while nominally independent, is yet a British colony. It is governed by a High Commissioner, who in turn is ruled by the governor of Cape Colony. The native chiefs adjudicate all disputes between natives, although an appeal can be taken to the Magistrate's Court, where cases between whites are tried. The revenues are derived from the Cape Colony contribution, the post office, native hut tax and the sale of licenses. Whites are not wanted in Basutoland and everything possible is done to keep them out. The land belongs to the natives, and the unutilized soil is allotted to householders for grazing purposes. The chief allots fields to each householder, who cannot sell the land, but whose descendants get it on his death. Several times a year the chiefs of the nation hold a national assembly called the Pitso. Here any native can freely express his opinion without fear. He can take refuge behind his status as a member of the Basuto parliament.

In this respect the Basutos are far in advance of the other tribes, most of which are ruled in despotic manner, by chiefs more renowned for their appetites for blood than for aught else.

As for the dress of the natives, in civilized districts, that is regulated by local statutes. Nowadays, all are forced to wear more or less civilized clothing. Fashion does not, however, dictate as to what they shall wear, and so ludicrous results ensue. It is not uncommon to see a native dressed in a breech cloth, a red



THE GREAT DIAMOND MINE OF KIMBERLEY, LOOKING TOWARD THE "REEF" AND STAGING.

Eton army jacket and a silk hat. Others prefer white duck trousers and a woman's bonnet. As for the women, they are content with whatever their lords and masters may allot to them.

The accompanying reproductions of photographs represent the best type of the Kafirs. One peculiarity that will interest bachelors is that, as shown in the pictures, the married men have a band drawn around their hair, while those still in single misery are without this emblem.

One word more; the black question in South Africa will yet prove a far more serious question than the black question in the South. And the white man must shoulder the blame, it is his burden.

THE DIAMOND MINES OF KIMBERLEY.

The attack on Kimberley by the Boer forces has caused considerable public interest in the great diamond mines which now produce about ninety-five per cent of the annual output of the world. The story of these mines is a most fascinating one, and is even more interesting than our own California gold fever of '49.

In 1750, a missionary marked a map of Africa at the point where Kimberley now is with the words "Here be diamonds;" but it was not until the year 1867 that this source of wealth was discovered, and the great elevated desert of Colesberg Kopje, just outside the western border of the Orange Free State, began to teem with life. The wilderness had been given over to the Griquas, a tribe or nation of mixed Dutch and Kafir origin. In 1867, John O'Reilly obtained of a Dutch farmer, named Van Niekirk, a stone which the latter had bought of a little Griqua boy. O'Reilly sold the stone and divided the \$2,500 with Van Niekirk, who bought another one from a little Hottentot boy, and it was sold in Cape Town for \$50,000. This was the famous "Star of South Africa," weighing 83½ carats. Prospectors began to flock to the region, and in 1869 Kimberley was formally founded. The territory was ceded to the British authorities and became "Griqualand West," a territory of Cape Colony, comprising 15,197 square miles, and a total population of 83,375. Kimberley itself had, in 1891, a population of 28,718. The rush to the diamond fields was usually made by means of ox-trains, and the prospectors suffered many privations, which were more than compensated for by the rich harvest. The pioneer miners simply dug and sifted, each man for himself, or for self and partner. The methods employed were the crudest imaginable, rough cradles being used. The results were phenomenal, and some men became rich in an hour. The first diamonds were discovered along the Vaal River, some 20 miles from Kimberley, but in 1871

diamonds were discovered at Dutoit's Pan, a short distance from that place. The crowds rushed to the new fields, or the "dry diggings" as they were called. The discovery of the stones was soon made at "New Rush," or Kimberley, which shortly became the supreme center of the mining industry.

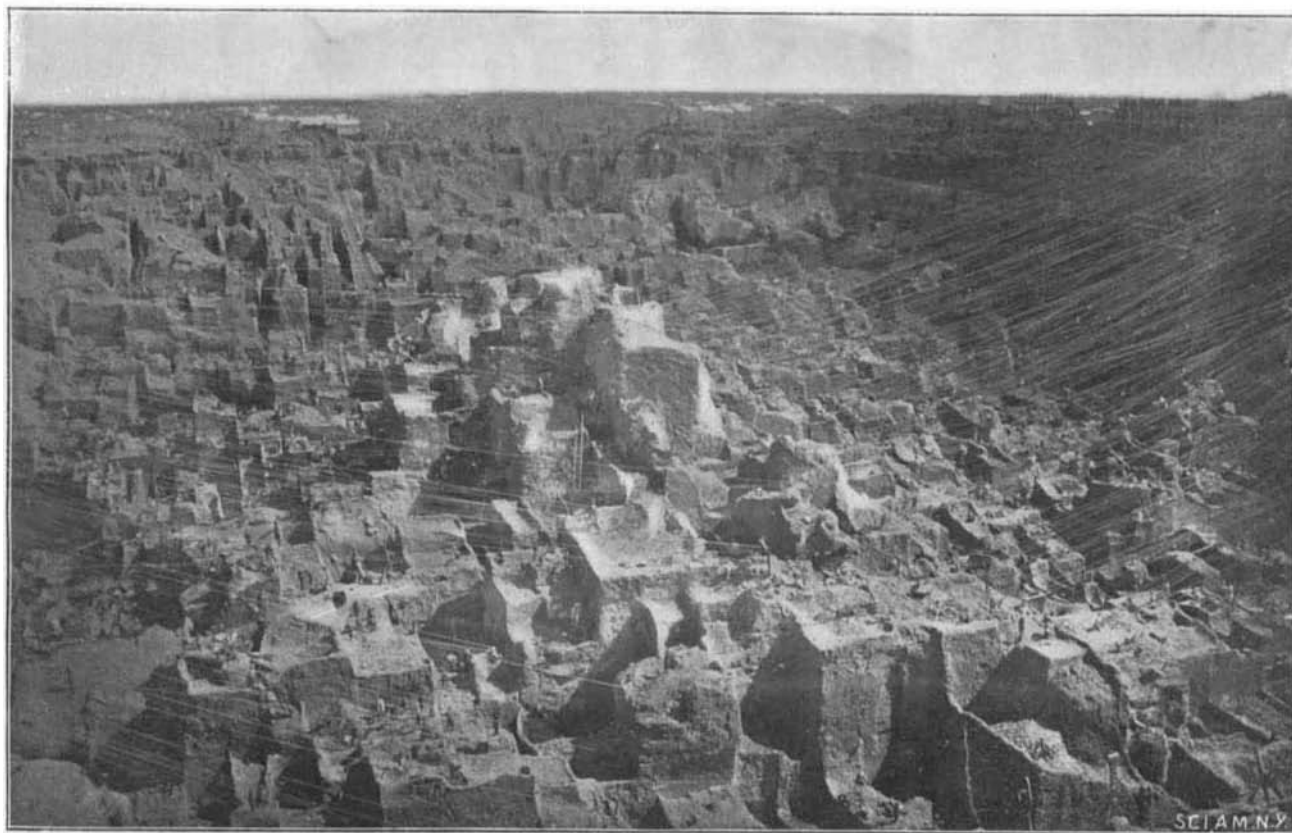
The original Kimberley mine had an area of 13 acres, and this was soon converted into an enormous hole, which has been extended until now it is about 1,100 feet deep. The diamonds come in what are known as "pipes," which run down through the layers of shale,

men. The ropes ran at all angles, some of them being almost vertical, where they served the claims almost under the staging. Each wire rope was secured to a post which was driven in the claim. The bucket ran on the wire rope. At first the buckets were made of ox hide, and when it was filled with the blue earth which contained the diamonds, it was hauled up by the stalwart Kafirs, so that each claim was to all intents and purposes a separate mine. The soil proved to be remarkably valuable, and the great open shaft was sunk rapidly. The claims were very largely subdivided, and even a small section of one proved to be of great value.

The miners were greatly hindered in their work by water which invaded the diamond field. The reef had to be constantly pared to prevent it from sliding into the mine proper.

Some of the diamonds were, of course, picked out during the digging, but a large part of the work was done at the surface. At first the dry process was employed, but finally washing machines were introduced which enabled them to work abandoned piles and tailings. The Kafirs were, of course, constantly watched to prevent them secreting any diamonds, and they were kept in what was termed a "compound" for three, six, nine or twelve months, depending upon the agreement which they made. During this time they were virtually prisoners. They were not allowed to leave the stockade.

In time, methods began to change in the mines, and small capitalists were crowded from the field. The expense of raising the earth constantly increased, the depth necessitating the use of horse whims instead of the old method of using Kafir labor. The reef was constantly crumbling, and the expense of working caused by the influx of water forced many owners of claims to sell out to larger miners. The result was that in time the methods of diamond mining became entirely changed; and while the operation was more rapid and thorough and was less expensive, it could be



THE DIAMOND MINE AT KIMBERLEY, SHOWING INDIVIDUAL CLAIMS, TWENTY YEARS AGO.

which are stratified. Twenty years ago the mine presented a most remarkable appearance, and we have been fortunate enough to secure photographs taken about this time, which was before the days of consolidation, and the mine was all divided up into small claims. The edge of the rock which surrounded the mine was termed the "reef," and from it could be obtained an excellent view of the mine itself, which seemed at first to be a collection of houses of cliff dwellers. It was perhaps 1,000 feet across, and the whole surface was covered by hundreds of wire ropes which ran up to staging at the top, which consisted of a framework carrying three sets of sheaves superimposed. It should be said that each of the newcomers to the mine staked out a claim 31 feet square. It was staked out by a surveyor, and when this was done the owners could dig out all that section of the earth as far as they could go. There was a small tax of \$2.50 a month on each claim. Some of these claims proved to be much better than others, and some were worked much more rapidly than others, the result being that no two adjacent claims seemed to be of the same altitude, and it made a most picturesque appearance; but the accidents from falling earth were of great frequency and were very serious. Each claim was connected with the staging by a wire rope which ran over wheels about four feet in diameter, the wheels being turned with the aid of cranks by four careful work-



MAKING A ZULU TOILET.



GROUP OF UNMARRIED ZULUS.