

THE ABORIGINES OF SOUTH AFRICA

It is a matter of congratulation to ethnologists that the late Dr. Stow's valuable work¹ has, after more than twenty-five years' interval, at last seen the light. Information about the Bushmen is like the Sibylline books,—every year that passes diminishes the available amount and increases the difficulties of acquisition. Even their rock-paintings, where they have not been wilfully destroyed, are, in some cases at least, slowly yielding to the influences of the weather; and we must be grateful to Dr. Stow for rescuing from oblivion those of which admirable reproductions appear in this book.

The popular idea of the Bushman as a degraded, ape-like being, with no notion of government or social organization, and very little of family ties, has to be considerably modified after a perusal of Dr. Stow's pages. He shows, in fact, that these people, so far as they exist at the present day, are the harassed and persecuted remnant of what was once a numerous and, in its own way, flourishing race, which

“was evidently at one time divided into a number of large tribes occupying tolerably well-defined tracts of country, which they looked upon as their own ancestral hunting-grounds, and any intrusion upon these was sure to be resented. These branch tribes were again divided, although they had but one chief, who was looked upon as paramount over the whole territory belonging to the tribe. The subdivisions, or minor clans, were under the guidance of lesser captains, who, nevertheless, seemed to possess almost uncontrolled authority over their respective kraals. The great cave represented the dignity and glory of the entire tribe, and it formed the grand centre around which they congregated when the different clans were threatened with a common danger.”

Each tribe had its emblem, corresponding to the *siboko* (Zulu *isibongo*) of the Bechuana and Basuto; and this em-

¹ *The Native Races of South Africa*. By George W. Stow, F.G.S., F.R.G.S. Edited by George McCall Theal, Litt.D., LL.B. London (Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd.).

blem was always painted on the rock in the tribal cave where the great chief had his residence. Dr. Stow mentions eleven of these caves which he had himself seen—in most cases securing copies of the paintings. Among these were, the Cave of the Eland, in the Stormberg, near Dordrecht, where the picture was almost life-size; the Cave of the Hippopotamus, on the farm Lichtenstein, near the Orange River; the Cave of the Python, near the Gwatchu, on the banks of the Zwart-Kei. The last chief of the Hippopotamus tribe, Ow'ku'ru'keu, called by the Dutch Baardman, was still living, in extreme old age, in 1860. It is not known when he died. Though he did not himself live at the Lichtenstein cave, he

“was proud of this grand representation of the large, charging hippopotamus, as well as the other paintings which adorned the home of his fathers. He was a very old man in 1839, when he was first met by one of the voortrekkers named David Swanepoel, to whom he frequently boasted that when he had seen them he would be able to say that he had seen paintings.”

This chief “was always desirous of maintaining peace with his neighbours.” Kwaha, a relative of his, informed Mr. C. S. Orpen that “he was loved very much” by his numerous subjects, whom the voortrekkers termed “Friendly Bushmen.” This was the character of the Bushmen everywhere, before unjust aggression and the cruel treatment they received from Bantu and European immigrants provoked them to retaliations which have given them an undeserved character for cruelty and ferocity. The Bantu, however, did not invariably dispossess them by force. The Leghoya, a pioneer tribe of Bechuana, treated them kindly and were on friendly terms with them; and the Abatembu seem to have become more or less amalgamated with the 'Tambu'ki tribe of Bushmen, who lived between the Great and Little Fish Rivers and the Tsomo.

The records of former Bushman occupation are not confined to the rock-paintings; the rock-chippings, or sculptures, are no less remarkable, and afford evidence of extreme antiquity. The *Lokualo*, attributed by Moffat to the Bechuana (*Missionary Labours in South Africa*, p. 15) and supposed by

him to indicate that they were extended as far south as the Orange River, are really of Bushman workmanship. The smooth rocks at Blaauwbank, on the Gumaap (Great Riet River) are covered with hundreds of such chippings, probably symbolical figures whose meaning was known only to the initiated, and is now completely lost. (See Plate II., facing p. 28.) Some remarkable sculptures are to be seen on an island in the Vaal, opposite Riverton.

"One of the oldest was that of an eland, done on a larger scale than any other representation of an animal found; but since its completion a large fissure has been worn through the rock, upwards of nine inches in breadth in its broadest part and about eighteen inches in depth."

This erosion of the porphyritic rock, judging by the state of the same stone in Egyptian temples, would seem to indicate an age of at least 2,500 years for the carving.

Dr. Stow thought that the Bushman race was divided into two branches, which entered South Africa by different lines of migration, one being skilled in painting, and the other in sculpture. The latter moved down the centre of the continent and established their headquarters in the valleys of the Malalarene, the Vaal, and the Great Riet River. They lived in large communities, on the hills, and built small spherical huts, opening to the east. The painters, who were cave-dwellers, advanced down the west coast, and "turned to the eastward, in which direction they can be traced as far as the mountains opposite Delagoa Bay." Most of them, however, occupied the central and eastern parts of Cape Colony, south of the Upper Orange River. This division is not accepted by the greatest living authority on the Bushmen—Miss L. C. Lloyd—who "thinks it probable that the matter was determined by locality and convenience." It is noticeable that Dr. Stow, in order to make his theory fit the facts, has to admit (p. 13) that

"along the line of the Sneeuwbergen some of the clans appear to have amalgamated, as their artists combined both styles of art for the ornamentation of their rock-shelters. A small clan of these painters appears to have penetrated as far as to the hills to the north

of Griquatown, where a few isolated caves were filled with paintings, while chippings or sculptures alone are found in the country round."¹

These the writer supposes to have been fugitives from the south. He adds that there were other tribes on the plains, who were neither painters nor sculptors, and carried their huts of withes and rush mats from place to place as they moved about after the game.

The last remnants of the painter tribes took refuge in the Maluti mountains of Basutoland, where

"the last known Bushman artist . . . was shot in the Witteberg Native Reserve, where he had been on a marauding expedition, and had captured some horses. He was evidently a man of considerable repute among his race. He had ten small horn pots hanging from a belt, each of which contained a different paint. The informant of the writer told him that he saw the belt, that there were no two colours alike, and that each had a marked difference from the rest" (p. 230).

Other relics of the Bushmen are the rock-cut grain-mortars, described on p. 58, the stone fences used to drive the game into pits, which formerly covered miles of country (it is not clear whether any of them are still in existence), and the cairns on hill-tops, or marking burial-places (p. 127).

The traditions of other tribes that, when they migrated from the north, they found the country unoccupied, except by herds of game, are somewhat misleading. They do not appear to reckon the Bushmen as human, and, in fact, assign them a distinct origin.²

"They acknowledge that the Bushmen were always to be found where the game was, and in their old myths of the origin of man they declare that when the Great Father brought men out of either

¹ A German missionary, Herr Irlé, says (*Die Herero*, p. 34) that he saw in 1876 "figures scratched in the rock" *in a cave* in the Erongo Mountains (between the Swakop and the Omaruru, not far from the West coast) one of which represented a man on horseback. Unfortunately, this writer's statements are often so loose as to render his work of little value (he speaks elsewhere of Bushman "inscriptions"), and it is quite possible that the figures he saw were paintings and not chippings.

² With this may be compared the Herero creation-myth. The first ancestors of that people, Mukuru (= the Zulu Unkulunkulu) and his wife Kamungarunga, sprang, with their cattle, from the sacred tree Omumborombonga, which they place in the Kaoko country. But sheep and goats, monkeys, and the *Hill Damara*, had a different origin: they came out of a rock (Irlé, p. 76). The Anyanja and Wayao also have a tradition of their common forefathers coming out of a rock, though in some versions they fell down from the sky on a rock which was then soft clay, but afterwards hardened, so as to keep the impressions of their feet.

the split reed or the fissure of a rock, the Bushman had nothing to do with these; he existed already; therefore, in speaking of a country as being uninhabited or unoccupied, the hunter race of the Bushmen was never taken into account. Other tribal traditions state that when their forefathers migrated to the south they found the land without inhabitants, and that only the wild game and the Bushmen were living in it, evidently classing the Bushmen and the game in the same category together as *wild animals*" (p. 3).

The existence of the still older race mentioned in Bushman traditions, and believed by them to be still living in some parts of the Kalahari, is a point full of interest. The late Mr. A. A. Anderson assured Dr. Stow he had seen in that region "a small clan of very diminutive and degraded people, who declared that their forefathers had inhabited this part of the world before the Bushmen came into it." Possibly these may be identical with the "Vaalpens," of whom such conflicting accounts are current. Professor Keane, however (*The Boer States*, pp. 71-73), asserts that the genuine Vaalpens are confined to the Zoutpansberg district, but without giving any authority for the details he reports concerning them.

We have, further, in this volume, a large amount of information, impossible to summarise here, respecting the weapons, games, dances, traditions, mythology, and social customs of the Bushmen, as well as other subjects. Some of the tunes for the dances were obtained from an old woman, 'Kou'ke, of whom and of her husband a most interesting account is given (pp. 102-105). The disguise called the 'Nadro (pp. 97, 98) and the heads of animals worn as masks in some of the dances (see pp. 82, 117, &c.) remind one of the *Zinyao* dance of the Anyanja, of which a photograph is given by the late M. Eugène Foà in *La Traversée de l'Afrique*. Dr. Stow's suggestion that the animal-headed deities of the Egyptians originated in a misunderstanding of some such pictured figures as these is at least worth consideration.

The latter part of the book, dealing with the southward migrations of the Bantu, and particularly the Bechuana, is less interesting, though exceedingly valuable. Space will not allow of our discussing this part of the subject in detail.

It may be mentioned, though the fact is not referred to by Dr. Stow, that the only Bushman now surviving in the

Pondomisi country is the accredited rain-doctor in those parts.¹ It would seem as if those Bushmen who escaped extermination were credited with magical powers, like the Finns in Europe. The coloured people in Cape Colony have a saying, when anything is unaccountably lost, "*Die Bosmankaptein het dit weggetooverd*"—"The Bushman chief has charmed it away"—which is probably based on some such idea.

The same writer refers to the tradition that the present chiefs of Pondoland have a strain of Bushman blood in them; but this, we have been assured by a member of the family in question, is incorrect.

Much of Dr. Stow's book, dealing as it does with the violent (and in some cases one must add wanton) extinction of a race, is necessarily painful reading. The only wonder is that any of that race are yet to be found. They would seem to have possessed wonderful vitality and to have attained an extraordinary age—as we saw in the case of old Baardman—when not cut off by starvation or slaughter. A yet more remarkable example is the following, which we extract from a South African paper just received. In the light of Dr. Stow's record, the old man's claim is scarcely to be called unreasonable.

"There is a native resident in the Cape Colony who has some title to be considered the oldest man in the world (says the *Cape Times*). Stuurman is an old Bushman, who lives on the top of a hill at Stuurman's Puts, in the Prieska district, the farm being named after him. He is said to be 146 years old, and his wife (his second) over 100. It is known for certain that 65 years ago he was a very old man, and that his son is more than 90 years old. He is one of the few genuine Bushmen still alive, and talks of the days when he wandered over the veld where Beaufort West now is. He holds that the farm of Stuurman's Puts and the country all round really belongs to him, and, living as he does on the top of a hill, in a queer shelter of bushes and rags, he is monarch of all he surveys. He is in full possession of his faculties, and has a wonderful set of teeth—without a trace of decay, though they are worn down to the gums by a century and a half of use."

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¹ See *Sketches of Kafir Life*, by the Rev. Godfrey Callaway, of S. Cuthbert's Mission, p. 27.