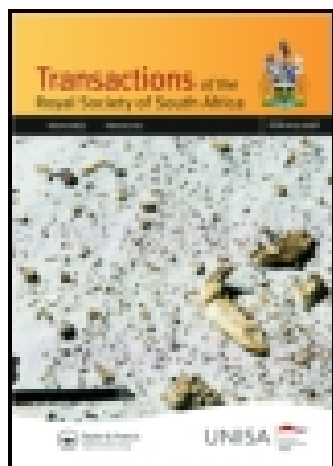


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XIX.—OTHER DAYS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Facts like these which might be multiplied indefinitely are enough to show that one degree or two degrees Fah. is an important factor in nature, and cannot be neglected if sound deductions are to be made.

Not much has been done in this country as yet in connecting the laws of temperature with the observation of nature. The periods of song in the common singing birds, and the times of migration of the birds of passage are worthy of attention. Observers, like White of Selbourne, are wanted at various spots in South Africa. I do not know if the South African Philosophical Society would undertake to call for such observers and summarize and tabulate the results of the observations. The isolated and unconnected labours of individuals otherwise come to nothing.

The connection between temperature and cultivation is also important. A few questions ought to be settled from what is already known on this subject without an appeal to vain experiments. We are beyond the coffee line in the colony, and the line for the castor-oil plant, and even cotton. These things all run the same road—a fair beginning, a precarious existence, and then a blight or disease that kills the plant. On the other hand we are within the area for the olive, the cork-oak, the silk-mulberry, the evergreen oak, the chesnut, and in fact everything called classical, whether plants, animal or bird. Tea is also quite a possible culture if suitable soil could be found, not for export but for local use. The question about the olive deserves special attention. Among the innumerable soils in the colony—marl, stiff clay, limestone, disintegrated shales and granites, karroos, and others, some soil ought to be found fitted for the olive, and if so, a few patches in Tuscany will bear evidence how great an industry the production of olive oil might become. As to the culture of silk, nothing will ever be done till families from Lyons and Lombardy introduce it, as the Huguenots did the production of wine.

To make possible, however, the application of the laws of temperature to the observation of nature, to cultivation, and to related subjects, it will be necessary to accumulate accurate observations in regard to summer-heat and winter-cold, and to both as connected with elevation and distance from the sea. These are of more importance than mean annual temperature.

XIX.—OTHER DAYS IN SOUTH AFRICA.—By COLONEL J. H. BOWKER, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., &c., &c.

[Read July 30th, 1884.]

In whatever circumstances we may be placed, it is pleasant to fall back upon the occurrences of our childhood, and draw from the memories of the past; and conjure them up at will to suit our fancies, and more so when the face of nature has been so changed, that the country and its surroundings would not be identified by those who rest from their toil, under the quiet sod of the fields, over which they

hunted at pleasure, in the days before the wild game had given place to the sheep and cattle of the farmer, days when the lion was the real lord of the domain, and counted the wild Bushman and Koranna hunters amongst his vassals, ever ready and even willing to do his behests (get out of his way) upon finding they were intruding, or as often happened in the ups and downs of savage life, working for mutual benefit. There are days when the hunter meets with disappointment; game is wild, wind from the wrong quarter, grass too wet for creeping under its cover as the bow string would not do its duty. The poet speaks of "bow string when relaxed by rain," so it was with the Bushman, and when compelled to resort to strategy he would bide his time and a herd of game would be driven over the lair of a lion, knowing well that his confederate would be awake to the chance. Unfair means were sometimes resorted to; when the lion had killed, the drill (fire) stocks would soon do their duty and lighting the grass to windward and following up the line of the fire compel the reluctant owner to relinquish his spoil, under protest (no doubt). Such surreptitious modes of depriving a brother hunter of results of his honest labour it is to be hoped were but few and not often resorted to, knowing that it would lead to reprisals in the end. The pioneers of South African civilization often found it necessary to keep up a sort of armed neutrality with the lions, and it was only when one took to cattle killing that the friends and neighbours assembled and hunted the intruder to death. Pringle relates a story of this sort in one of his poems; and when shooting in the wilds, north of the Orange River in 1867, the Boers told us the same thing. The hills were swarming with lions but they never molested them without just cause. The country at that time was covered with countless troops of antelope, &c., and the lion at home met us at unexpected short intervals and often we were under the necessity of deviating from the track taken. We were not slothful and yet there *was* a lion in the way, and what was more the beast disputed with success the right of way, and not being in a position to raise the question we accepted the situation and passed by on the other side; it was however not always so, and sometimes when in an aggressive mood we fought and slew him and had our revenge for past insults. It was however a dangerous game to play and far from rich; in case of accident we fell into the same line as the wandering Boers and gave them a wide berth. The breech-loader had not then been thought of, and the denizens of the fields and fells would hold their own; but all is now changed. The railway whistle is heard, where only a few years ago the snort of the wildebeest, or whistle of the reybuck, broke upon the ear, and the Bushman has gone. with the rest *his* richly stored pastures have become private property. This, together with the temptation met with in (what was not to him), civilization, has stamped out a race who for many traits of character have not left their like behind; but it is not the Bushman alone; the thoughtless happy Koranna of the Diamond Fields is fast following in the same track to oblivion. When the nineteenth century was still young, a number of Bechuana refugees, from the valley of the Caledon River (people who had survived the

raids of Motselekatse, and other South African Attilas) were brought into the colony, and distributed amongst the frontier farmers; two of these families were handed over to my father, who had settled in Lower Albany; amongst them, was a boy who soon picked up a smattering of English, and his quaint way of telling over the vicissitudes of his past life was most interesting to us, and illustrative of what had occurred in the wilderness, amongst wild beasts, and wilder men. The former only killed to satisfy their daily wants, while the latter slew, for the pleasure of slaying. The people we took over were from the valley of the Caledon River, which by its main stream from the Jammerberg to its sources divides the Orange Free State from what is now Imperial Basutoland.

Graham's Town, which then consisted of a few scattered houses, was the only seat of Magistracy on the frontier, and it was there that they first saw the abodes of the white man, whose manners and customs were no doubt strange to the children of the wilds, as the poet says, and truly says,

What can we reason but from what we know.

Prostrate in front of the Landdrost's office and awaiting their turn to touch the pen and thus become the indentured property of a stranger, they naturally looked around, and one of the objects which drew particular attention was that of a gentleman pacing up and down the verandah, and no doubt enjoying his little constitutional before dinner. "What was he doing it for, and why he did not sit down?" was the puzzle, and to quote the boy's words, "He keep on walking up and down in front of the door looking at the ground and never speaking to any body; we say perhaps he is thinking about killing somebody."

Amongst other resources to which they had fallen for subsistence, was cannibalism; and to quote the boy's way of telling the story, "We catch a lad, or a lass, we don't know, we just cut him up and put him in the pot, and think he is a buck." This was told while helping to skin a bushbuck, and probably sent his memory back to the past. Their domestic arrangements, according to his account, were simple in the extreme; but probably rendered so by the precarious tenure upon which all held their lives and living. "When a woman have more than one baby at a time, the old women come together and pick out the fattest, which they give back to the mother. The other one they put dry sand in its mouth till it is dead."

Driven from the plains, and forced to seek refuge in the caves and rocks of the Malutis, amongst other modes of meeting daily wants, was that of watching the vultures sweeping past below them; and, when satisfied that they had a quarry in view, the line taken by the birds was followed in hot haste (knowing that the lions had killed not far off); sometimes the pursuers got to the spot, before the real master of the situation had finished his early breakfast; and when this was the case, they had to "*sit* with the vultures" at a respectful distance, until the lord of the feast had left; and then came their turn to close in, and secure the remains, and scramble with the birds for possession of the bones and refuse; armed as they were, only

with a pointed stick for digging roots, and scantily clothed in the remains of the last torn skin, recovered in like manner, their position was certainly not that of lords of creation, and therefore they had to accept the second, or perhaps third place in the scramble. An old woman who had managed to find her way down to the Colony, with the younger and abler, used to bask in the morning sun at the back of our dairy, while the milk was being churned; and then take a long drink of buttermilk when the butter had been taken off. This was in the good times, before Kaffir war, and lung-sickness, had decimated the then large herds of the frontier farmer; and when the butter was salted into casks, and sold for exportation to some foreign market; and three pence the pound by the hundred weight was thought a remunerative price. Our dairy was situated on the sloping side of a hill; and a gutter was dug through the soil, into which the buttermilk was shot after all had been served. The first morning of the old woman's was most amusing; after drinking two or three quarts, she watched the succeeding operation with great interest, and when the churn was turned over, and the remains of the buttermilk thrown into the gutter, exclaimed with uplifted hands, "Oh why have I not a belly big enough to hold it all."

Time went on, and our old Basutos were almost forgotten. We had grown to manhood, and like the rest of the world went out to seek our fortunes, chances and ups and downs placed me, after many years, in the responsible position of High Commissioner's Agent of the newly annexed territory of Basutoland, with instructions to maintain peace between the Free State and the Basutos. To while away the weary months, amongst other things I began a series of enquiries into the past history of the people, and was soon convinced, beyond all doubt, that cannibalism had not only been carried on in former times, but had been practised up to a recent date. There was but little disguising it, and the people when questioned spoke freely of it, as first a necessity, and then a choice.

Returning from a visit to Molepo's in the autumn of 1868, I procured a guide and went for the Putrasena Caves; most of them had been cleaned out of bones and used as places of refuge during the late war: but one I was told of had been but little used from the difficulty of driving cattle into it. We struck for this one, and were not long in arriving at the opening leading to the large cave; it was situated in a broken stratum of the huge sandstone cliff overhanging the Putresana Valley; in a pretty situation, with broken ridges, and here and there a patch of grass and bush; the guide was a strong looking young fellow, who had been born in the cave. There was a certain amount of romance about his history and parentage.

His story was that his father lived in the cave, and was a leading cannibal in his time. In one of his raids three girls were captured and brought in alive; one, his mother, was a good looking girl, and found favour in the eyes of the hunter, who took her as his wife; while the other two went to stock the general larder. Following the guide down a deep water-worn cleft in the rocks, or as I might better term it, a hand-and-foot path for some distance, we came to the mouth of

a large cave, or overhanging rock, facing to the westward and running for some distance into the hill side; the floor was almost level, and had been used as a goat kraal during the late war. The arched roof was blackened with soot which had accumulated there for years, and had found its way into the gloomy recesses of this "Chamber of Horrors:" here and there were the bones of different animals, including a few human ones, but mostly those of pigs or goats. However, after going to the outside of the cave where it sloped off through some stunted bush and grass towards the river, I found it completely covered with the burnt or charred remains of human beings. They were in all stages of decay, from those half buried in the earth, to others of a more recent date; some of the broken pieces of skull, which had fallen so as to form a little cup, were full of earth and small ferns or moss growing in them. In addition to bones, I found that the ash middens contained large quantities of human teeth and small bones of the hands and feet. The skulls were mostly broken in pieces, by some heavy instrument, others bore the marks of an axe; the leg and arm bones had been mostly split up for the marrow, leaving only the joint-ends. I collected as many pieces as I could conveniently carry away, selecting those which bore the marks of fire or cutting instruments about the throat or neck-joint; my guide who could remember the tribe before broken up by Moshesh, pointed out the different places of interest; a little cave was shown as the place where he was born, and where he had passed his childhood's sunny hours; and at another spot was a shelf several feet above the floor, which was used as the larder; there the meat was kept; and a little further back was a gloomy hole, where the captives were kept alive—during the cold season all were killed; but during the heat of summer some were kept for a few days, to prevent spoiling on their hands; any attempt to escape was settled by a leg being broken, which was always effectual.

The modes of killing were various, the hot blood was a favourite drink for the weary hunter, and a limited supply was sometimes drawn from a finger or two; but this often ended in the body having to be carried home. In most cases the captives were brought in alive, a rope or reim was put round the neck, and the unfortunate creature held down by the united strength of several people according to the strength of protest, while they drew the reim tight; and a smart blow upon it, broke the neck; the body was then left to get cold; then it was cut up, and divided out according to the different claims, or number of family. Relatives did not eat each other; but a sort of exchange could always be made with a neighbour.

The Revd. Mr. Cassalis gives the date and time when the gangs were broken up and dispersed amongst the other portions of the tribes. One story which was related to me is too good to be lost. Moshesh's father met with the same fate as a number of others, and was eaten by the cannibals. This occurred many years before; but when it was proposed by one of his councillors, that extermination of the whole gang was the best, the old chief, who was anxious to strengthen himself against outside enemies, evaded this course by saying, "No, we must not destroy our fathers' graves." I never had an opportunity of

visiting the Korannaberg, Veerfoot and Mensvreeters (Maneaters) Mountain in the conquered territory; but was told upon good authority that similar remains were to be met with in the caves upon the sides of those hills, as in Basutoland Proper. Other caves along the foot of the Malutis had all been cleared during the war by those who had taken shelter in them.

Curious stories were rife amongst the people, how that there were night prowlers who associated with their fellow-men during the day, but when darkness set in went their rounds for the purpose of stealing children, puppies, sucking pigs, or whatever was handy; and, when a take was made the party collected together, went to some secluded spot, and, like the ghouls of eastern fable, had their feast. A story was told to me as having occurred at a kraal not far from my camp at the Korokoro, and shortly before we came into the country, in which a woman was sleeping in her hut with a baby in her arms, when, between sleeping and waking she felt the child being drawn quietly away; clutching fast hold of the feet she held on with all her strength—a real case of “Pull devil, pull baker.” The cries of the child against such treatment being likely to arouse the people in the neighbouring huts, the unknown one relinquished his or her hold, and all search round was vain, and beyond a little shred of torn skin kaross, near the narrow doorway, nothing was ever found; but the impression was that it was one of a gang of men and women, who were hanging about the kraals, without any clearly defined way of obtaining a living. I tell the story as it was told to me. What I have related about the cave cannibals is a matter of history; and further research would lead to further evidence. The ornaments got from them were made chiefly of small bits of bone drilled, or teeth drilled for necklaces and armlets, while the drinking cups (like one I have used myself in Newstead Abbey, when on a visit) were made of the skulls of the slain, and very good dippers they would make. I could get none, but was told that there was or is a good collection in the Paris Missionary Museum.

The weapons used were much the same as we meet with at the present day,—club, shield and spear. Most of the caves were or had been in use as dwellings for ages; and numbers of pre-historic stone implements were strewed about; but none of the people could remember ever having seen them in use, and seem to think they had been brought there by the Bushmen. Some of the collection, bones, stone implements, &c., are now in the Cape Town Museum, others I sent to the late Sir Charles Lyell. In conclusion, I may add that the substance of the above was communicated to the “Cape Monthly,” and appeared in print early in 1869. Holding the appointment of Chief Agent in the country I had some delicacy in putting my name to it; this, however, did not prevent others from doing so. It went the round of the newspaper world of the day, and was translated into different languages. I met with it in, “All the Year Round,” as the result of the researches of a Mr. Leyland. Who Mr. Leyland was I do not know, but probably some unscrupulous pirate, who made up his travels as some make up a library, by affixing their names to a book and trusting to its being sent in some day with an apology for its having been kept so long.