



# LXIII. Observations relative to the origin and history of the Bushmen

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LXIII. *Observations relative to the Origin and History of the Bushmen.* By ANDREW SMITH, M.D. M.W.S. &c.

[Concluded, from page 342.]

IN the art of carrying off their pillage, they are extremely dexterous; and in the practices of deception on such occasions they are peculiarly expert. They sometimes commit their depredations during the day, when the flock and herds are dispersed in the fields, but more frequently at night, when they are collected for rest. Should necessity permit of their exercising a choice as to time, they commonly prefer the decline of the moon, so as to have the benefit of darkness to assist them in the commission of the act, and the aid of light to facilitate in the carrying away of the spoil. The existence of rainy weather they also regard as favourable for such pursuits, on account of fire-arms being then less available; but, nevertheless, the circumstance of footmarks of every description being more distinctly imprinted at such times, whereby they can be more readily traced, often prevents them from availing themselves of the advantage in question. Having once got possession of cattle, they invariably carry them across the most parched and arid spots, and regularly in the directions where water is least abundant, in order to incommode their followers, or render pursuit impossible. If at the time they commit their outrages, the country through which they intend to return be very dry and destitute of water, they furnish themselves before they commence the expedition, with a number of ostrich shells filled with that fluid, and those they deposit successively in holes of the ground during the approach to the scene of their intended operations, whereby they supply themselves on their return with what may be necessary to quench their thirst. By these arrangements they readily continue their retreat when their pursuers are forced to turn back, and by such practices they often set at defiance the endeavours of commandoes, either to destroy them or retake cattle. When they succeed in the object of their enterprise, they either betake themselves to a convenient water-place, or else to the spot where their families reside, and there kill and eat till all be consumed. If it happen that the means of pasturage occur in the vicinity of the place resorted to, they sometimes permit what is not immediately required, to exist, till what they may have slaughtered be eaten; but when such is not the case, or when there is a chance of the persons plundered desecrating their retreat, they prefer destroying all at once, and

either allowing a portion to go to waste, or to be consumed when even far advanced in putridity.

When in the act of driving away either cattle, sheep, or horses, they are pursued and approached, they immediately commence destroying them; and as soon as that is completed, they betake themselves to flight\*. Should, however, they discover that by the time they have effected the first of those objects, the latter cannot be achieved, they prepare for defence, and then according to circumstances, either are satisfied with attempting that in exposed positions, or else from behind rocks or stones; or, if time will permit, from holes formed in the ground. The dexterity and quickness with which they often form the latter, is matter of great wonder with the colonists; and I have been told by persons who have been much in the habit of observing them in such situations, that almost in the course of a few minutes they will model cavities, in which two or three can conceal themselves, and avoid in a great measure the effects of fire-arms. From such positions they send forth their arrows with great precision, and while in them they are regarded as nearly upon an equality with their opponents.

\* Field Cornet Louw, of the Aghter Hantam, writes, "I received a report on the 20th November, 1829, from the Burgher Hendrik Johannis Rygert, stating that five Bushmen had taken away, between the place of Middlekraal and Slang Fonteyn, three black cattle and two horses, belonging to Hendrik Wolfgraaf, when, having driven them a short distance, they shot them dead. I immediately ordered out a commando, and proceeded on the 23rd following, as far as the place Hinger Fonteyn, to discover their tracks and the road they had taken. I there ascertained that they had taken some more horses. I then proceeded nearly as far as the Fish river, where was a Bushman kraal, and finding that the aforesaid Bushmen had reached it before me, and had broken it up and gone to a greater distance, I resolved to return, the more on account of want of water. On arriving at Hendrik Visage's he informed me that five Bushmen had again been in the colony, on the Hantam mountains, and that he had sent three bastards on their tracks. I then directed my commando to remain for the day, in order to call in the assistance of more people, as thinking it not strong enough. One of the bastards ordered by me having gone to the place Brandwacht, to fetch his horses, discovered that the said Bushmen had taken two the day before. Following their tracks he found they had driven them into a deep kloof near the place; but being afraid to pursue them further, he returned to us to report the same. In consequence of the information, I repaired to the place the same evening, with my commando, and at a late hour sent out spies to see whether they were still in the kloof, but they made no discoveries. I subsequently took the same thither, and came to the spot where it appeared, by the remains of the horses, that they had been feasting upon their flesh, having previously pierced them with arrows. Still following their track, I at length arrived at my own place, where, about 1000 yards from the house, I found they had driven off my horses, and at the distance of about half as much further, they had stabbed four of them and shot others with poisoned arrows, so as to cause their death. Still in pursuit,

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opponents. If when they are detected they be in the vicinity of rocks or mountains, they, after securing their plunder in the way already described, retreat to those with amazing rapidity, and from thence conduct their defence so dexterously and effectually, that seldom are they overcome. They shelter themselves so completely behind the rocks, that shot can produce little or no effect, and the uncertainty of their actual resorts renders the assailants little disposed to venture upon a close approach. When in such positions, as well as when in holes of the ground, the only effectual way in which they can be secured or destroyed, is by approaching them under the cover of a large shield, formed of the dried hide of an ox, or of a hard rush or reed mat, and carried by one person, while another accompanies him prepared for an actual attack. Through those articles, the arrow will not penetrate so as to produce much effect; and therefore, if they are not in considerable numbers, or so close as that in advancing to one, others are so situated as to be enabled to act with success, they may thus be subdued, and frequently are so, both by the frontier farmers, as well as by the Namaquas, River Hottentot,

we found five more of my horses lying dead, one upon another, and on a rocky rising ground, between the places Brandwacht and Malpes Fonteyn, the robbers themselves. Here they defended themselves to the last extremity, in consequence of which, two of them were killed by the commando."—MSS.

A gentleman, who lately happened to be on the northern frontier of the colony, at a time when the Bushmen had stolen 1200 sheep, says, "A commando, which I accompanied, pushed forwards as fast as possible upon the traces of the thieves, and it was most lamentable to see the track so strewn with dead sheep which had been destroyed by the plunderers. It appears," he adds, "that the Bushmen never leave behind them any cattle alive which, from fatigue, cannot go on, but invariably kill them with poisoned arrows." When they overtook them upon a high and rocky hill, they appeared much confused, but immediately dispersed themselves and got behind rocks, from whence they showered their arrows upon the farmers. Of those the writer brought away two hundred.—MSS.

"On the morning which was fixed for our departure," says Mr. Kicherer, "one of our cows came home with an arrow sticking in her flank. We immediately concluded that the Boschemen had driven away part of our herd. In these cases, they oblige the cattle to run as fast as they can, and when any of them are unable to keep up with the rest, they pierce it with a dart; in consequence of which, it falls on the road, and the carcass is fetched away by the robbers on the following day. The cow which returned to us had been thus treated, and served as a messenger to apprise us of what had happened. I dispatched some Hottentots with fire-arms to pursue the track of the banditti; and in the mean time travelled on with the remainder of the caravan. On the next day, my people joined us with seventy-three out of eighty oxen, which had been stolen from us. They had happily fallen in with the robbers, at the distance of a long day's journey beyond the hills, and recovered the property; but two of our horses had been killed by the fatigue."—*Transactions of the Missionary Society*, vol. iii. p. 12.

Hottentot, and Caffres. On such occasions, however, when the defendants perceive that their efforts are likely to be ineffectual, they are apt to rush forth from their hiding-places, and approach with such a rapidity and ferocity as not unfrequently secures them a victory.

Much difference of opinion exists as to their skill in the use of the bow: some certainly are very dexterous therewith, and will almost to a certainty, at a very tolerable distance, strike any object of moderate size, while others are less certain of their aim; but as a general position, it may be admitted that the majority will not shoot many times without effect, at a distance of sixty or even eighty yards, when the object in view is equal to the dimensions of a man. As those weapons form their only articles of defence, as well as the means of procuring a large proportion of their food, expertness in the use of them is a principal object of study, and one of the most frequent amusements even of their early years. Every Bushman youth is furnished with his bow, and even the infant at the breast is frequently so supplied. In the construction thereof, almost all their art is centered; and in giving them the form and character best calculated for their particular objects, much ingenuity and cunning are often displayed. The bow varies in size amongst different hordes, being with some between four and five feet in length, and with others not more than three. It is made of various sorts of wood, but such as are strongest and most elastic are usually preferred. The string by which it is bent, and held in a condition fit for immediate use, is formed either of the dried intestines of quadrupeds, or else of the lacerated and otherwise prepared tendons of animals. The arrows differ in length according to the bows, but seldom extend beyond two feet or two-and-a-half. They are formed of strong reed, about the thickness of a writing quill, and with one extremity fitted to embrace the string of the bow, and the other to receive a piece of cylindrical bone of nearly the same circumference as the reed itself, and on which is fixed the article for inflicting the wound. In some cases, the latter is of fine stone formed into a somewhat triangular shape, and in others it is of iron, constructed so as to ensure most effect to its operation. On the portion of the arrow immediately behind the part destined for cutting or puncturing, is the poison spread, and that in such a way as completely to encircle about two inches of it. In many specimens immediately behind that, the shaft is cut more than half across, so that the slightest motion after it penetrates, or the least attempt to withdraw it, does generally occasion the separation of the major part from that which bears the poison; and on the site of the latter is also frequently

frequently attached a small barb of quill or fine iron, so as to assist more effectually in rendering extraction almost impossible. With the view of ensuring the arrow a straight course when ejected from the bow, they in common with all others who use the like instrument, attach a portion of feather to its hinder extremity. Of such, thus completed, every Bushman will perhaps be supplied with fifty or sixty, and those he carries in a sort of quiver, formed of the bark of the Kokkerboom, from which the woody part has been excavated. When, however, in a state of war, or in pursuit of game, he generally holds more or less loose in his hand, and when about to shoot, always places them in a convenient situation upon the ground.

The poison they employ is manufactured in various ways, so as to concentrate and render it adapted for application to the arrows. The most virulent sort, and that which they usually employ when they go against their enemies, is chiefly composed of the poison of snakes; the next to that is one obtained from the larvæ of an insect, found upon a bush growing near the Orange River; and the third is of vegetable origin, and called the malkop poison, on account of the peculiar effects it produces upon the senses. This last is not considered so serious in its consequences as either of the others, and is the sort commonly employed upon arrows destined for killing game.

Such then are a few of the points of interest connected with the history of the Bushmen; and though far from exhausting the subject, or even including all that my own notes would afford, yet I am induced to conclude for the present, with an earnest recommendation to such of the members as may have been in the habit of observing our savage tribes, to embody their remarks for occasions like the present; as by such proceedings they may advance their individual reputations, at the same time that they acquire a consequence and character for our institution, which must be dear to all of us who feel a pride in the success of enterprizes in which we have a share.

#### LXIV. *Theory of the Telescopic Level*. By JOHN NIXON, Esq.\*

A TELESCOPIC level of the *most simple* construction, would consist of a refracting telescope with adjustable cross wires fixed within a perfectly cylindrical tube; the latter having attached to its surface (by means of adjusting screws) a spirit-level, placed parallel to the direction of its axis.

\* Communicated by the Author.