

Hottentots also use in similar cases, mixed with gunpowder, and, as is affirmed, usually with good effect.

AUGUST 1.—Being desirous of penetrating the Bushman country to the northward, and to ascertain, if possible, the junction of the Zak, or rather the Hartebeest River, with the Gariep, I had persuaded the Veld-Commandant to send round messengers to several places, in order to procure me horses and attendants; but not being able to find a single Hottentot in this vicinity who would engage to accompany me, I found myself obliged to skirt the Colony farther towards the West, in the hope of completing my arrangements at the Hantam. This morning, therefore, I left the house of old Nel, a man who, whatever be his defects, certainly possesses the virtue of hospitality in high perfection. With all their roughness and rusticity of manner, and with all their cruel unchristian prejudices in regard to the poor natives, these colonists still retain much patriarchal simplicity, and many traits of good-nature and friendliness in their general character. We parted with mutual good wishes.

Nel had supplied me with fresh horses and a guide. I proceeded over an elevated tract of country, from whence I occasionally caught glimpses of the Cedar mountains. The scenery was haggard and uninviting, and the climate bleak. Yet I saw occasionally warm nooks among the mountain glens, where most of the colonial fruits are brought to perfection. In the evening I reached Downes, the residence of Schalk van der Merwe, situated at the north end of the Roggeveld-Bergen, which terminate here in bluff detached hills.

I found the lady of the mansion *kraaling* her flocks and herds, her lord being absent; and soon ascertained from her, that neither horses nor guides were to be obtained here; but being informed that some free Bastard-Hottentots resided at a distance of about six miles, I set off on foot by moonlight, with the view of engaging one or two of them as guides, and of collecting information respecting my proposed route.

An old Hottentot servant of the family accompanied me. This man was between sixty and seventy years of age, and had all his life resided

upon the Bushman frontier. I found him communicative, and elicited some interesting information from him. He said he could recollect the time, when few or no murders were committed by the Bushmen,—especially upon the Christians. The era of bitter and bloody hostility between them commenced, according to his account, about fifty years ago, in the following manner.—The burgher Coetzee Van Reenen had an overseer who kept his flocks near the Zak River: this fellow was of a brutal and insolent disposition, and a great tyrant over the Bushmen; and had shot some of them at times, out of mere wantonness. The Bushmen submissively endured the oppression of this petty tyrant for a long period; but at length their patience was worn out; and one day, while he was cruelly maltreating one of their nation, another struck him through with his asagai. This act was represented in the Colony as a horrible murder. A strong commando was sent into the Bushman country, and hundreds of innocent people were massacred to avenge the death of this ruffian. Such treatment roused the animosity of the Bushmen to the utmost pitch, and

eradicated all remains of respect, which they still retained for the Christians. The commando had scarcely left their country, when the whole race of Bushmen along the frontier simultaneously commenced a system of predatory and murderous incursions against the colonists, from the Kamiesberg to the Stormberg. These depredations were retaliated by fresh commandoes, who slew the old without pity, and carried off the young into bondage. The commandoes were again avenged by new robberies and murders; and thus mutual injuries have been accumulated, and mutual rancour kept up to the present day.*

* The following remarks, extracted from a letter received from Mr. Melvill of Griqua Town, dated August 3, 1825, show that some of the colonists are at length adopting a more humane policy towards this persecuted race; and the pleasing result of milder measures proves, at the same time, that the Bushman is neither insensible of kindness nor incapable of improvement:—

“ In the year 1821, on my way to Griqua Town, while I was at Graaff-Reinet at the house of the Landdrost, Capt. Stockenstrom, a Veld-cornet came to request permission to make a commando against a kraal, or party of Bushmen; who, he said, had committed some depredations. The Landdrost appeared very angry with the farmer, and expressed his disapprobation, in strong terms, of the conduct of the farmers

On reaching the Hottentot kraal, I found that the men were all absent, and only the women and children at home, with a few cattle and sheep. I

in general, when they were allowed to go against the Bushmen.

“ On my way from Graaff-Reinet, I had some conversation with the Veld-Commandant, Gert Vanderwalt, who resided on the Zeekoe River, respecting the Bushmen. He told me, that both his father and himself had been for many years at war with this people. From the time that he could use a gun he went upon commandoes; but he could now see, he owned, that no good was ever done by this course of vindictive retaliation. They still continued their depredations, and, retaining an inveterate spirit of revenge, he was constantly in danger of losing his cattle and of being murdered by them. But having at length seen the evil effects of war and cruelty, he had, for a few years past, tried what might be done by cultivating peace with them; and experience had convinced him that his present plan was most conducive to his interest. He said, the Landdrost Stockenstrom was also friendly to pacific measures, and encouraged the plan he had adopted. This plan was to keep a flock of goats to supply the Bushmen with food in seasons of great want, and occasionally to give them other little presents; by which means he not only kept on friendly terms with them, but they became very serviceable in taking care of his flocks in dry seasons. He said, that on such occasions, when there was no pasturage on his own farm, he was accustomed to give his cattle entirely into the hands of the Chief of a tribe who lived near him, and after a certain period they never failed to be brought back in so improved a condition that he scarcely knew them to be his own.

“ A

made my way, therefore, with my old guide, to the nearest boor's place, which was old Hans Coetzee's, between the Hantamberg and the Paarden-

"A few days after, when I came into the Bushman country, I witnessed the beneficial effects of cultivating the arts of peace with this people. Seeing a Bushman village, or kraal, about a quarter of an hour's ride from the road, I went to it; and so confident was I of the peaceable disposition of this people, when not provoked, that I went alone and unarmed. When I came to the kraal, I was gratified with a most pleasing indication of the improved habits of the individuals composing this little horde. On the brow of a hill were seen grazing a flock of goats, and a number of young kids were tied to stakes round about their huts. Upon inquiry, I found they had belonged to the late Missionary Institution of Hephzibah, in the Bushman Country; and from what I could understand from one or two who spoke a little Dutch, they were exceedingly sorry that the mission had been given up, and said they would go again to reside at a Missionary station, if one were established. They spoke much in favour of the Veld-commandant Vanderwalt, to whom, I believe, they were indebted for the goats I had seen.

"About a day's journey farther, I came to a place called Dassen-Poort. Here a farmer had been residing, and had built a hut, and raised some wheat—but had been ordered away from it by the Landdrost, on account of its being beyond the boundaries of the Colony. I found at this place two Bushmen, under whose custody a quantity of wheat had been left by the farmer when he removed from the place—another proof that it is not so difficult to cultivate peace with these oppressed people, if measures of real kindness are adopted towards them."

berg. We found all the family asleep, and gained admittance, not without some difficulty. Nor was the accommodation very comfortable when I got in. The old boor yawned forth an apology, that he had no bread to offer me ; so I obtained a glass of water and a sort of shakedown to stretch my wearied limbs on, and every other want was soon forgotten in sound repose.



CHAPTER II.

Journey to the Hantam.—Hottentot Guides.—Departure from the Colony.—Intercourse with the Bushmen.—Salt Lake.—Excessive Drought.—Kat's-kop River.

AUGUST 2. — HAVING here procured fresh horses and a guide, I sent for my saddles and baggage from the last boor's place, and started again after breakfast. I continued my journey through an arid, and apparently very barren coun-

try. On my left was the Hantamberg, an insulated mountain of great extent, being about two days' ride in circumference. The top of this mountain, which is flat, and of no very great elevation, is considered extremely salubrious for the grazing of horses at certain seasons of the year, when the periodical sickness prevails in the adjoining plains. Nor is it this destructive distemper, and the robberies of the Bushmen, that the farmers have alone to dread in this vicinity. The wild beasts also are exceedingly fierce and numerous. At Schalk van der Merwe's, I was told that upwards of thirty horses had been destroyed upon the farm by the leopards and hyænas, in the course of the season. Another farmer had had, within a few days, nine fine young horses killed by the wild dogs.* It would require great

* Burchell has ranked the African wild dog as a species of hyæna, under the name of *Hyæna Venatica*. Other naturalists class it as a new genus. It forms, in fact, the connecting link between the wolf and hyæna tribes; and in its habits and physical conformation partakes of the character of both. Wild dogs always hunt in packs, and are exceedingly fierce and active. In some quarters of the Colony their ravages upon the flocks, and on the young horses and cattle, are very severely felt by the farmers,

profits to compensate for the losses and vexations to which the frontier boors are thus constantly exposed.

In a narrow defile between two mountains, called Morderaar's Poort, (Murderer's Gate,) on account of several colonists having been here killed by the Bushmen,—my guide pointed out six very large piles of stones or cairns, which had been raised, he said, by the Hottentots, to commemorate a bloody conflict that had taken place here between two tribes of their countrymen, before the Europeans came and reduced them all to bondage.

At a place called Welledag, (Karel van der Merwe's,) where I halted; I found an English settler from Clan William, a carpenter, working at his trade in the service of the farmers. Adventurous persons of this description are now to be found scattered through the remotest parts of the Colony; and are gradually introducing among the African boors, not only improvements in agriculture and in the mechanical arts, but also a spirit of civil independence, which will, ere long, supersede the servile docility, which long submission to every *fiat* of the provincial functionaries has su-

perinduced upon the naturally sturdy and stubborn character of the Hollander.

The boor at this place mentioned to me, among other disadvantages of the farmers in this quarter, the prevalence of a poisonous plant called jackal's-bush. This shrub, when other vegetation fails in the dry season, is apt to be browsed upon by the sheep, and frequently destroys multitudes of them. Five or six hundred will sometimes perish from this cause in a single day. If, however, they recover from the sickness caused by this plant, they are, in future, proof against its deleterious effects.

Truly these frontier boors have no very enviable life of it! Here I also learned that four slaves belonging to a neighbouring farmer (T. Trone) had just absconded, taking with them six horses and as many muskets, and had fled, as was supposed, to join the marauding banditti of run-aways and Bastards who have their retreats about the banks of the Gariep. Such occurrences are not unfrequent, and add one to the many arguments for the gradual and equitable extinction of slavery in southern Africa.

Late in the evening I reached the Veld-cornet Louw's at Tee-Fonteyn, anticipating all the comforts of a social meal and a warm shelter from the cold wind and drizzling rain. My disappointment was comparatively great, when I found the house locked up, and three or four slaves and Hottentots alone left in charge of the place, residing in a miserable straw hut. After some parley with them, I adopted the plan suggested by one of the slaves, of gaining admittance by force. A little supper was prepared for me, and I listened to the storm now raging without, in tranquillity and comfort. It is remarkable that the heavy rains, which come this length with the west winds from the Atlantic, do not extend farther into the interior.

3.—This morning opened gloomily. A heavy drenching rain continued the whole day, grateful to the parched country, but unfavourable to my journey. About mid-day, the owner of the place, for whom I had dispatched a messenger, made his appearance. My apology for taking forcible possession of his house was readily received; and as he could not himself make the necessary arrange-

ments for facilitating my journey, he accompanied me to Groote-Toren (Great Tower), the place of William Louw. Louw himself was absent at Cape Town, but his wife and family afforded me every assistance in their power; and messengers were instantly dispatched in search of a couple of Hottentots to accompany me into the Bushman Country.

While waiting for them, I had some conversation with an English settler of the name of Freyer, a man of considerable intelligence and enterprise, who had married into this family and settled here. From him I obtained some interesting information respecting this quarter of the Colony, and also the Namaqua Country, where he had been travelling. It is not a little surprising to see a man of this sort, with all the advantages of a good education, setting himself down among the rough and untutored inhabitants of these deserts. Yet the leaven of English feelings and English blood thus scattered, is doubtless a most desirable event for the improvement of the country.

At this spot formerly resided a boor of the name of Pienaar, who with his family were mur-

dered by the Namaqua robber Africaner. Little can be said in palliation of an act of bloody violence like this; yet, from what I could learn, it seems to have been not altogether unprovoked on the part of the colonists. Adjoining to the house was a sort of clay fort, with loop holes to fire from in the event of any formidable attack of the Bushmen. Many of the farmhouses, along both the Caffer and Bushman frontier, are protected by similar defences.

4.—The rain still continuing, though more moderately, I was detained here the whole of this day much against my will; for the boors are so excessively afraid of getting wet, that none of them would ride out to enforce the requisition for Hottentots and horses which the Veld-cornet had issued. Many of them, indeed, are afflicted with severe rheumatic complaints, which they ascribe to getting wet with rain, but which, I think, may be more justly attributed to their frequently sitting or sleeping without changing their wet clothes.

5.—This day still continued showery and cold. The females sat with Dutch stoves under their

petticoats, issuing orders to their slaves and Hottentots. The men sat talking and smoking around an iron pot filled with burning charcoal. None of the boors have chimneys in their dwellings, even in these cold regions; and their stoves and pots of charcoal afford to a European a very indifferent compensation for the want of a cheerful blazing hearth.

About noon, a Hottentot named Witteboy, who had been requested to accompany me, arrived. After many interrogations about my proposed route, my objects and intentions, &c., he declared the journey too hazardous without more company, and declined proceeding without a comrade. I was thus again as much at a loss as ever, when fortunately another Hottentot (Jacob Zwart) arrived; and after similar inquiries and much humming and hesitation, they both engaged in my service, and agreed to meet me next day, at Tee-Fonteyn, where the horses were to be prepared for us.

6.—The rain had ceased, and was followed by bright and beautiful weather. I met my Hottentots at the Veld Cornet's before mid-day; but

such were the tardy movements of the boors, that the horses were not yet ready, and I was obliged to delay another night, with my patience now almost worn out.

7.—At length this morning, at an early hour, I and my two guides got on horseback, having two led horses to carry our knapsacks, and to change occasionally with those we rode. I soon found, however, that the boors, with all their outward civility, had played me a scurvy trick, by giving me young horses scarcely half broke. The consequence was, that we had scarcely started, when the one that carried our knapsacks became restive, broke off from the man that led him, and cost us a chase of nearly an hour, before we could catch him again; and what was ultimately of far more consequence, our stock of provisions was shaken from his back, and a great part lost, and the calabashes for carrying water broken in pieces; but I was so provoked and out of patience, that I would not turn back for a further supply, but ordered my men to proceed. This was imprudent; but I had at that time no doubt that our guns would procure us game enough on our way.

About noon we reached Slinger-Fonteyn, the last place inhabited by colonists. An old German of the name of Richert, resides here in a miserable reed hut. We unsaddled and refreshed ourselves for a couple of hours, and then again proceeding, left behind us civilized man and his haunts; and once more I found myself, with a mingled feeling of awe and exultation, a traveller in the waste and solitary wilderness.*

* Mr. Pringle's poem, "Afar in the Desert," (first published in the "South African Journal," a few weeks before I set out on this journey,) expresses so well the feelings of a traveller in the wilderness, and contains such lively and appropriate sketches of African scenery, that, though somewhat long for a foot note, I gladly avail myself of the author's permission to add it to the other illustrations which he has kindly contributed to my work.

AFAR IN THE DESERT.

AFAR in the Desert I love to ride,
 With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side:
 When the sorrows of life the soul o'ercast,
 And, sick of the present, I turn to the past;
 And the eye is suffused with regretful tears,
 From the fond recollections of former years;
 And the shadows of things that have long since fled
 Flit over the brain, like the ghosts of the dead—
 Bright visions of glory, that vanish'd too soon,—
 Day-dreams that departed ere manhood's noon,—

In about an hour after passing Slinger-Fonteyn, we passed a conical hill called Spioen-Berg, (Spy-mountain,) looking over the boundless plains to the north. The first part of these plains was

Attachments by fate or by falsehood reft,—
 Companions of early days lost or left,—
 And my NATIVE LAND! whose magical name
 Thrills to my heart like electric flame ;
 The home of my childhood ; the haunts of my prime ;
 All the passions and scenes of that rapturous time,
 When the feelings were young, and the world was new,
 Like the fresh bowers of Paradise opening to view !—
 All—all now forsaken, forgotten, or gone—
 And I, a lone exile—remember'd of none—
 My high aims abandon'd—and good acts undone—
 Aweary of all that is under the sun,—
 With that sadness of heart which no stranger may scan,
 I fly to the Desert afar from man.

Afar in the Desert I love to ride,
 With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side :
 When the wild turmoil of this wearisome life,
 With its scenes of oppression, corruption, and strife ;
 The proud man's frown, and the base man's fear ;
 And the scorner's laugh, and the sufferer's tear ;
 And malice, and meanness, and falsehood, and folly,
 Dispose me to musing and dark melancholy ;
 When my bosom is full, and my thoughts are high,
 And my soul is sick with the bondman's sigh—
 Oh, then—there is freedom, and joy, and pride,
 Afar in the Desert alone to ride !
 There is rapture to vault on the champing steed,

sprinkled over with singular piles of rocks, looking almost as if placed there by art, and assuming at a distance the most grotesque appearances, such as those of houses, quadrupeds, birds, &c.

And to bound away with the eagle's speed,
 With the death-fraught firelock in my hand,
 (The only law of the Desert land,)
 But 'tis not the innocent to destroy,
 For I hate the huntsman's savage joy.

Afar in the Desert I love to ride,
 With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side :
 Away—away from the dwellings of men,
 By the wild deer's haunt, and the buffalo's glen ;
 By vallies remote, where the oribi plays ;
 Where the gnoo, the gazelle, and the hartebeest graze ;
 And the gemsbok and eland unhunted recline
 By the skirts of grey forests o'ergrown with wild vine ;
 And the elephant browses at peace in his wood ;
 And the river-horse gambols unscared in the flood ;
 And the mighty rhinoceros wallows at will
 In the *Vley*, where the wild-ass is drinking his fill.

Afar in the Desert I love to ride,
 With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side :
 O'er the brown Karroo, where the bleating cry
 Of the springbok's fawn sounds plaintively ;
 Where the zebra wantonly tosses his mane,
 In fields seldom freshen'd by moisture or rain ;
 And the stately koodoo exultingly bounds,
 Undisturb'd by the bay of the hunter's hounds ;
 And the timorous quagha's wild whistling neigh
 Is heard by the brak fountain far away ;

Burchell has given a good idea of this species of scenery in his view of a natural obelisk in the Bushman country. After passing through this

And the fleet-footed ostrich over the waste
Speeds like a horseman who travels in haste ;
And the vulture in circles wheels high overhead,
Greedy to scent and to gorge on the dead ;
And the grisly wolf, and the shrieking jackal,
Howl for their prey at the evening fall ;
And the fiend-like laugh of hyenas grim
Fearfully startles the twilight dim.

Afar in the Desert I love to ride,
With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side :
Away—away in the wilderness vast,*
Where the white man's foot hath never pass'd,
And the quiver'd Koranna or Bechuan
Hath rarely cross'd with his roving clan :
A region of emptiness, howling and drear,
Which man hath abandon'd from famine and fear ;
Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone,
And the bat flitting forth from his old hollow stone ;
Where grass, nor herb, nor shrub takes root,
Save poisonous thorns that pierce the foot ;
And the bitter melon, for food and drink,
Is the pilgrim's fare, by the Salt Lake's brink :
A region of drought, where no river glides,
Nor rippling brook with osier'd sides ;
Nor reedy pool, nor mossy fountain,
Nor shady tree, nor cloud-capp'd mountain,
Are found—to refresh the aching eye :
But the barren earth, and the burning sky,

* The great desert of Challahengah, beyond the Gariép.

scenery, which reminded me of the enchanted City of the Desert, in the Arabian tales, we proceeded over immense plains, extending as far as the eye could reach, covered only with low bushes. The animals that we saw were the usual inhabitants of such regions,—ostriches, quaghas, springboks, &c. We steered N.N.E. by compass till sunset, when we turned off to the N.W. a little, in quest of a fountain, which we reached before dusk. Here we had good water, but no shelter, and scarcely materials to make a tolerable fire.

We had scarcely taken up our position, when we observed a light at a little distance from us.

And the blank horizon round and round,
Without a living sight or sound,
Tell to the heart, in its pensive mood,
That this is—NATURE'S SOLITUDE!

And here—while the night-winds round me sigh,
And the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,
As I sit apart by the cavern'd stone,
Like Elijah at Horeb's cave alone,
And feel as a moth in the Mighty Hand
That spread the heavens and heaved the land,—
A "still small voice" comes through the wild,
(Like a father consoling his fretful child),
Which banishes bitterness, wrath, and fear—
Saying "MAN IS DISTANT, BUT GOD IS NEAR!"

This we concluded to be some Bushman encampment, and looked that our guns were all in order, that we might be prepared for the worst. I had brought with me my double-barrelled gun, and about ten pounds of ammunition, and my Hottentots had each a musket. We had just struck up a fire and begun to cook some victuals, when a party of those poor savages, consisting of about a dozen men and women, approached, and without exhibiting any signs of apprehension, came and seated themselves beside us, around our fire, and entered immediately into conversation with my guides. Though I would much rather, under present circumstances, have dispensed with their visit, yet I considered it best to treat them civilly, and with every appearance of confidence. They examined my dress, and evinced considerable eagerness to know what was my object in journeying through their country. After all their questions had been answered, they thought fit to entertain themselves and us with one of their *country-dances*, which they renewed at intervals, and kept up till midnight, "under the pale moonlight," with great animation.

The dance consisted of stamping on the ground with great violence, wreathing their bodies, at the same time, into all manner of contortions. Their only music was a sort of groaning sound uttered by the men, with a softer monotonous moaning accompaniment by the females. They continued this dance for several hours with great vivacity and apparent enjoyment, while the perspiration flowed profusely from their bodies.

During the intervals of this dance, I took the opportunity, while they were sitting round our fire, to make one of my Hottentots put a variety of questions to some of the most intelligent of them, to ascertain whether their language was so very deficient in compass as I had heard. The following was the result of my examination with regard to the numerals :

One, t'a ; two, t'oa ; three, quo.

These three sounds are the whole of their simple numerals. The others, as far as ten, are expressed by repetitions and combinations of these three words, in the following manner :

Four—t'o'a, t'oa.

Five—t'oa, t'oa, t'a.

Six—t'oa, t'oa, t'oa.

Seven—t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'a.

Eight—t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'oa.

Nine—t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'a.

Ten—t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'oa, t'oa.

The exceeding want of invention and ingenuity displayed in their language is a striking evidence of the degraded state of intellect among them. The mere care of supporting existence seems to have engrossed their entire faculties. The intellectual nature has succumbed to the brutal. Yet the party is considered by the Hantam colonists as one of the most civilized of the Bushman hordes; for they are advanced a little beyond this hunter's state, being in possession of a few cattle, and a flock of about 200 sheep. The captain of another kraal, who is commonly called the "Bushman Boor," also possesses a small flock. Which instances prove, however, that these people are not so entirely destitute of foresight and prudence as they are generally represented.

About midnight our visitors left us, and returned quickly to their own camp, and we stretched

ourselves out by the fire to sleep. I wished to prevail on the Hottentots to keep watch alternately with me, but this they strenuously objected to, urging, in the first place, that it was quite unnecessary, and in the second, that it was quite impossible,—because, as they alleged, after a hard day's journey “no man can keep himself awake.” I was, therefore, obliged, both now and throughout our journey, to trust our safety to the care of Providence, and to rise frequently in the night myself to replenish the fires with fuel. At this place (Adriaan's-Fonteyn) it was no easy matter to keep up a watch-fire, there being no fuel except the dung of the wild animals frequenting the fountain.

8.—Rose at dawn of day, and turned our horses loose to graze on the dry tufted herbage, while we made our hasty breakfast. We then prosecuted our journey for about eight hours, without stopping, except to let our horses roll,—an indulgence which relieves them greatly when fagged and heated. The country, as we proceeded, became more and more parched and desolate. We crossed the dry beds of various torrents, and saw

on our right several beds of salt called the Brak-pans. We passed through a valley about six miles in breadth, entirely composed of naked sand, which had the appearance of being occasionally covered with water, though not a drop was to be found at present. We had not met with water during the whole day; and to augment our thirst, a strong scorching north-east wind blew full in our faces. At length, however, we reached a spot known to my guides, called the *kuil* or pit, where we found a small natural reservoir of tolerable water, but so deeply sunk between two rocks, that we with difficulty succeeded in drawing up a little of it for ourselves by means of the shell of an ostrich egg, but without the possibility of procuring a supply for our horses. Neither was there grass nor any sort of forage for them in the neighbourhood. We rode on, therefore, a little farther, and then unsaddled; but our horses could not graze, on account of thirst, and we lay panting under a burning sun, without a bush or a rock to shelter us. The thermometer stood at 85° in the shade, and on being placed in the sun immediately rose to 110°. This was a mighty

change, in so short a space, from the cold hills of the Roggeveld.

About two o'clock we again proceeded, directing our course somewhat more to the eastward, in order to survey an immense "salt-pan," which was said to exist in that vicinity. The country was entirely without verdure of any description. Brown stunted bushes scattered here and there were its only covering. The soil consisted, in some parts, of a sharp gravel of decomposed schistus,—in others, of a calcareous stratum, strewn over with flints. At length, from the summit of a low ridge of hills, I beheld at my feet, and extending far to the northward, the prodigious "pan," or rather valley of salt, which I was in search of. This valley, from what I could guess, and learn from my guides, can scarcely be less than forty miles in circumference. It was now covered with fine dry salt of a brilliant whiteness. When the occasional torrents of rain fall, it must be one vast sheet of water: and there can be no question, I apprehend, that this, and similar collections of salt in South Africa, are occasioned by the sudden and heavy rains washing off from the

surface of the adjoining country the innumerable saline particles, with which the earth is everywhere impregnated, into these natural reservoirs. I named this, the Commissioner's Salt-pan, in honour of His Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry now in the Colony.

I took from this spot the bearing of Spioenberg, the summit of which appeared like a dim speck in the horizon over the extensive plains which we had crossed.

I now directed the Hottentots to steer north-east, in order to fall in with the course of the Hartebeest River, and ascertain its junction with the Gariap; after which I purposed to follow the stream of the latter towards the coast. After skirting the margin of the salt lake for some time, we turned off to the east; but had scarcely travelled an hour from its banks, when we were overtaken by twilight, and were forced to take up our bivouac on the open plain, without a bush to shelter us from the cold night wind, or a drop of water to refresh our poor horses. For ourselves we had my two holster bottles, which I had filled at the last fountain. With one of these,

and a very moderate allowance of provisions, we were obliged to content ourselves; not knowing when we should obtain a fresh supply. I named this spot Dry Station. A miserable one it was, in every respect, and scarcely afforded us even fuel to make a fire.

As soon as the night closed in, we observed a Bushman fire at no great distance. This was an object, however, that I was far from regarding with satisfaction; for my guides had taught me to entertain (perhaps unjustly) considerable apprehension of a nocturnal attack from these vindictive savages; who might, no doubt, naturally enough regard us as hostile intruders in their country. We slept, nevertheless, undisturbed by them, or by the wild beasts, till about two hours before daybreak, when we again proceeded on our journey, anxious to reach some fountain, or pool of water, as neither our horses nor ourselves could hold out long without a supply of that vital article.

9.—We passed a considerable ridge, covered with dry tufted grass, and after a ride of about three hours, a little after sunrise reached the bed

of the Kat's-kop (Cat's-head) River, as my Hottentots called it; but, to our extreme disappointment, found it completely dry. We unsaddled, but our horses were so thirsty, that they refused to eat. They had not had any water since we left Adriaan's-Fonteyn, and we now began to be seriously alarmed, both on their account and our own.

Witteboy and I immediately set out on foot in opposite directions, to search the bed of the river for some pool or puddle yet unexhausted. Jacob was unwell, and unable to assist us. I proceeded about two miles up the channel without success; when, observing the fresh traces of Bushmen, I returned to our station. There I found that Witteboy had also come back unsuccessful. From the circumstance, however, of Bushmen's recent footprints being seen, we concluded that water must exist at no great distance. Witteboy again set off in search of it, and at length was so fortunate as to discover a pit, recently dug by the Bushmen, and which contained water, though of a very brackish quality. On his return with this intelligence, we immediately proceeded thither

with the horses, and with some difficulty got them down to drink from the pit by turns. On filling my two bottles to carry water to Jacob, I was so unlucky as to let one be broken by the horses, which in our circumstances was a very serious misfortune.

We now sat down to cook our dinner, and on rummaging our knapsack, found to our dismay that this was the last meal that it would supply; the greater part of its contents having been unfortunately lost, when our packhorse ran off at starting from Tee-Fonteyn. Almost all our horses had occasioned us much trouble by their wildness and want of training, excepting one old one, which was stiff, and already beginning to look exhausted. The conduct of the Hantam boors in supplying me with such a set of animals, upon such an excursion, was certainly extremely reprehensible, and in the sequel proved not a little disastrous

CHAPTER III.

Farther Interviews with the Bushmen.—Gamka River.—
Hartebeest River.—Miserable Condition of a Horde of
Korannas.—Sufferings from Thirst and Famine.

WE were convinced, from certain indications, that Bushmen were watching us from an adjoining height; and ere long a small party were observed approaching in an open and peaceful manner. They consisted of one old man, two women, and two children. The children appeared healthy, and in good condition, but the adults were miserable-looking creatures. The old man was exceedingly emaciated, and the skin of one of the women hung in loose folds from her sides like a piece of leather. They had come to beg tobacco, and a small piece which we gave them seemed to render them quite happy. They readily entered

into conversation with my Hottentots, but could furnish no satisfactory answers to our inquiries, in regard to the existence of water in the direction in which we were travelling. These poor creatures were at this time subsisting almost exclusively upon the larvæ of ants, which they dig from the ground with a pointed stick, hardened in the fire, and loaded with a stone at the thick end. We saw many parts of the plains full of holes which they had made in search of these insects. There are two species of ants which they chiefly feed upon—one of a black, and the other of a white colour. The latter is considered by them very palatable food, and is, from its appearance, called by the boors “Bushman’s rice.” This rice has an acid, and not very unpleasant taste, but it must require a great quantity to satisfy a hungry man. In order to fill the stomach, and perhaps to correct the too great acidity* of this food, the Bushmen eat along with it the

* The facility with which a strong and palatable acid may be obtained from certain species of ants, is not unknown in Europe. In Norway the peasants catch quantities of these insects (by placing bottles half filled with water in the ant-hills), which they afterwards boil up and make into vinegar.

gum of the mimosa tree, which is merely a variety of gum arabic.

While we were conversing with those people I observed that the old man was without the joint of one of his little fingers. On inquiring the cause, he said that his mother, having lost all her previous offspring soon after birth, had cut off this joint to prevent the like misfortune happening to him. Such puerile superstitions seem to constitute all the religion of the Bushmen.

Having refreshed ourselves and our famished horses, we proceeded a little after mid-day. A strong north-east wind, the *sirocco* of these regions, blew full in our faces, which it parched excessively; and the frequent application of a little fat, which I had kept for the purpose, but slightly relieved me. Our way now lay over a boundless plain. On our right was the range of the Kat'skop hills; and on our left, and in front, one of those extensive views peculiar to the vicinity of the Great River. Speaking generally of the Bushman country, between the Colony and the Gariiep, it may be described as one great inclined plain,

falling very gradually from the Nieuwveld ridge of mountains to the banks of that river.

About an hour after we started we fell in with a Bushman and his wife, returning from a hunting excursion. He had been successful, and was carrying on his back half of the carcase of a young gemsbok which he had slain with his poisoned arrows. His wife was loaded with the remainder, together with a little child which sat upon her shoulders, with its legs hanging over her bosom, and holding itself on by her matted hair. This load of provisions, and probably a hearty meal from their game as soon as it was killed, had given these people a comfortable and joyous appearance. The female appeared to me the prettiest Bushwoman I ever beheld. In spite of the prominent features of her race she might almost be called a beauty, with her dark eyes sparkling like brilliants from a happy laughing countenance, and with a set of teeth as white as the finest ivory. On questioning them about the probability of finding water on our route, the hunter, pointing to a certain part of the heavens, told us, that if we rode hard, we should find

water by the time the moon stood there. This indicated a distance of not less than fifty miles. Yet it was a consolation to know that we should find water even within that distance. Rewarding our informant with a bit of tobacco, we pushed on with redoubled speed.

About sunset I ventured, on the strength of the Bushman's report, to divide, with my Hottentots, the bottle of brackish water we had brought from the pit, in the bed of the Kat's-kop River, which proved, however, very inadequate to refresh our burning thirst. Hour after hour succeeded till midnight was past, and still the moon had not reached the situation pointed out by the Bushman, while our horses were ready to sink under us at the rate we travelled. As we drew near the spot where we expected to find water, my guides, who usually kept a little a-head of me, requested me to ride in close file with them, because lions usually lay in ambush in such places, and were more apt to spring upon men when riding singly than in a clump together. We had scarcely adopted this precaution when we passed within thirty paces of one of these formidable

animals. He gazed at us for a moment, and then lay down, couchant, while we passed on as fast as possible, not without looking frequently behind, with feelings of awe and apprehension. We soon after reached the bed of the Gamka (or Lion's) River, but found it at this place, to our sorrow, entirely dry. We were all ready to sink under the exertions we had this day made, and the thirst we had endured. Jacob, in particular, who was unwell, and had suffered much from the hard riding, repeatedly told us that he could hold out no longer, but wished to lie down and die. The dread, however, of being devoured by the lions now acted on him as a spur to exertion ; and Witteboy and myself, knowing that our fate depended upon our getting water, continued to urge on our horses along the course of the river, most anxiously looking out for the pool the Bushman had told us of. In this way we proceeded till two o'clock in the morning, and were almost despairing of success, when we at length discovered the promised pool,—which, though thick with mud, and defiled by the dung and urine of the wild beasts, was, nevertheless, a most grateful relief to us

and our horses. We had been up since two o'clock on the preceding morning, had been on horseback above sixteen hours, and had travelled in that time a distance of fully eighty miles, the last stage of about sixty entirely without stopping. Our condition, and that of our horses, may therefore be readily imagined to have been one of great exhaustion. Extreme fatigue had, indeed, quite destroyed all appetite,—which, as we had not a morsel to eat, was no great disadvantage. Having fastened our horses to a bush, we stretched ourselves on the earth near them, being too wearied to take the trouble of kindling a fire for the short space of the night that remained, trusting that, if the lions discovered us, they would prefer the horses to ourselves.

10.—We were awakened about daybreak by the roar of a lion at a little distance, but were not otherwise molested. The other difficulties of our situation now engrossed all my thoughts. All our horses were excessively fagged by the severe thirst and great exertions of the two preceding days. The old horse, indeed, exhibited strong symptoms of giving up altogether. Jacob seemed

to be in a plight equally precarious. We had not a morsel of provisions left, nor did we know when we should get any. We had calculated on finding game in plenty, but the great drought that had long prevailed in these regions had driven almost the whole of the wild animals to other quarters. We, however, remained here till about mid-day to refresh our horses; we ourselves lying panting with empty stomachs under the scorching sun. The Hottentots named this spot, significantly enough, "*Korte pens* (empty paunch) station."

We proceeded at an easy pace along the banks of the river, which we found in many places covered with mimosas, the certain sign of a climate never subject to any great severity of cold. This plant is never found on the more elevated tracts of Southern Africa. Passed a solitary conical hill, near the junction of the Gamka with the Hartebeest River, to which, in honour of a friend, I gave the name of Ravenhill. Several beds of torrents that must occasionally pour forth considerable streams, here join the Gamka. The country in general appeared excessively dry and barren, though here and there were spots covered

with withered grass. The soil was alternately sand and sharp calcareous gravel. Not a living creature was to be seen.

About sunset we crossed the channel of the Gamka, for the last time, our course now turning almost due north towards the Hartebeest River, where we hoped to find water, and probably game. We proceeded at a very lagging pace, for some of our horses were lamed by the sharp flinty road, and the old one got fairly fagged; so that we were at length reluctantly obliged to leave him. About nine o'clock, after a tedious ride of nine hours, during which we had scarcely travelled thirty-five miles, we reached the bed of the Hartebeest River, at a place called "Camel's Mouth;" but, to our extreme chagrin, found it perfectly dry. We had no resource but to tie our horses to a tree; and, having made a fire, we stretched ourselves beside it, and sought consolation in sleep. During the night we were disturbed by the hyænas, which came within a few yards, but did not venture to attack us.

11.—At daybreak turned our horses out to graze. We found ourselves in the bed of a river,

which at some seasons must contain a stream of water of great power and volume. It is, in fact, the channel through which all the waters of the northern side of the Nieuwveld pour themselves, after the great thunder-storms, or periodical deluges, into the Gariep. How precarious and unfrequent these deluges are, may be surmised from the fact, that this river had not been running for *five* years.

The banks were overhung with the umbrage of mimosa and willow-trees, and numbers of doves and pigeons were chirping and cooing among the branches. At another time I should have enjoyed such soothing sounds in a scene so lone and tranquil. At present, the pressure of hunger awoke only my regret for having neglected to bring small shot, that, by that means, I might now have procured a breakfast of turtle-doves. Famine, alas! is too powerful for poetic sentimentality.

Our first care was to search for water, and we had the great satisfaction of discovering it at no great distance, in a pit about ten feet deep, recently dug by the natives. It was very brack,

indeed, but proved, nevertheless, a most grateful relief to us. To assuage the cravings of hunger, our Hottentots gathered and ate a little gum from the mimosa-trees. I also attempted to eat a small quantity, but could not swallow it.

Witteboy then went out with his gun in search of game; Jacob followed to look after the horses which had strayed to some distance in quest of pasture; and I stayed behind to guard the baggage. While I sat here, musing in no very comfortable mood, two Korannas suddenly made their appearance, and without hesitation came and seated themselves beside me. They were miserable-looking beings, emaciated and lank, with the withered skin hanging in folds upon their sides, while a belt bound tight round each of their bodies indicated that they were suffering, like myself, from the long privation of food. I attempted to make them understand by signs that I was in want of provisions, and would gladly purchase some; but they replied in a language that could not be misunderstood, by shaking their heads, and pointing to the "girdles of famine," tied round their bellies; and I afterwards learned that they had been subsisting

for many days entirely on gum. I gave them a little tobacco, which seemed to please them ; but as they continued to gaze very earnestly upon my gun, I took care to keep it ready, in my own grasp, being somewhat suspicious of their intentions.

In this position we sat together for upwards of two hours, until at length Witteboy made his appearance, leading the old horse that we had left some miles behind the preceding night, but without any game. He immediately entered into conversation with the Korannas, but could learn from them only the details of their own miserable situation. On account of the long continued drought, the wild game had almost entirely deserted this quarter of the country ; the bulbs, also, had disappeared ; and they were reduced to famine. Jacob soon after returning with the horses, we saddled up about nine o'clock, and left these poor Korannas and the " Camel's Mouth," filing away in a melancholy train down the dry channel of the river. We took this path through a heavy sand, to save our horses' feet from the sharp flints which covered the banks.

After about an hour's ride, we came to a spot marked with the recent foot-prints of the natives; and, looking around us, we saw two human beings seated at a little distance under a mimosa. On approaching them, a picture of misery presented itself, such as my eyes had never before witnessed. Two Koranna women were sitting on the ground entirely naked; their eyes were fixed upon the earth, and when we addressed them, one of them muttered some words in reply, but looked not up on us. Their bodies were wasted by famine to mere skin and bone. One of them was apparently far advanced in years. The other was rather a young woman, but a cripple. An infant lay in her naked lap, wasted like herself to a skeleton, which every now and then applied its little mouth alternately to the shrivelled breasts of its dying mother. Before them stood a wooden vessel, containing merely a few spoonfuls of muddy water. By degrees the Hottentots obtained for me an explanation of this melancholy scene. These three unfortunate beings had been thus left to perish by their relatives when famine pressed sore upon the horde, because they were helpless,

and unable to provide for themselves. A pot of water had been left with them ; and on this, and a little gum, they had been for a number of days eking out a miserable existence. It seemed wonderful that they had so long escaped falling a prey to the wild beasts ; but it was evident that one or two days more of famine would be sufficient to release them from all their earthly sufferings.

My heart was moved with commiseration for these deserted and dying creatures, but I possessed no means of relieving them. We had looked forward with confidence to the relief of our own pressing wants on reaching the Koranna hordes upon the Gariép ; but if the others were in a similar condition with those we had seen, our prospect was, indeed, a very gloomy one. Leaving with melancholy forebodings this scene of misery, we continued our journey down the bed of the river. A little farther on, we found several more Koranna women and children on the banks, in a condition not much better than those we had just left. The men belonging to the party had been absent several days in quest of game, and

had left them to subsist on gum till their return. From them, of course, we could procure no assistance.

From the long want of food, I now began to feel myself so weak, that I could with difficulty maintain an upright posture on horseback. The jolting of the horse seemed as if it would shake me to pieces. It struck me that I would try the method which I saw adopted by the famishing Korannas, and by my own Hottentots, of tying a band tightly round the body. I unloosed my cravat, and employed it for this purpose, and had no sooner done so, than I found great and immediate relief. We continued travelling in this manner, sometimes in the bed of the river, sometimes along its banks, till about two o'clock, when we found the heat so overpowering, that we unsaddled at the foot of a conical hill, and turned the horses out to graze. Witteboy and I then ascended the hill to look over the plain for game, and thinking we perceived some at a distance, we set off in pursuit, leaving Jacob in charge of the horses. I felt so weak that I threw off my coat and waistcoat, my gun being a load more than

sufficient for me, and was often obliged to rest by the way. On reaching the spot where we thought we had seen the game, we could perceive no living creature ; so that either the animals had fled, or our eyes had deceived us. The latter was probably the case, for the glare of light reflected from the dry and calcareous gravel in the heat of the day, was almost enough to destroy my sight, and frequently dazzled and deceived even that of the Hottentôts.

After a weary trudge of about two hours, we returned with desponding hearts to Jacob ; saddled up our horses, and again proceeded ; having bestowed on this spot the name of "Hopeless Hill." We moved slowly on till sunset, without observing any game, or finding water. Passed the bed of a considerable branch of the Hartebeest River, which takes its rise, as my guides informed me, about 20 or 30 miles to the westward, near some large saltpans. At eight o'clock, finding ourselves quite exhausted, though we had not travelled to-day above 25 miles, we unsaddled in the bed of the river, tied our horses to a tree, and stretched ourselves on a bank of sand. Our rest,

however, was but indifferent,—disturbed by cold, hunger, thirst, and the howling of wild beasts, and by frightful dreams, produced by all these afflictions combined.

12.—At dawn of day awoke again to the full sense of our distressed condition. Witteboy and I immediately proceeded to an adjoining height to look out for game. We could see none; but observed a party of Korannas at no great distance, to whom we immediately proceeded. There were about a dozen of them, young and old; and all in the same state of destitution as those we had last seen. They were subsisting principally upon gum, and had not a morsel of any other food to give us. One of them, however, led us to a pit which they had dug in the channel of the river, where, with some difficulty, we procured each of us a draught of very brack water; which, bad as it was, somewhat relieved our thirst. Our prospects of obtaining relief were now more than ever disheartening. We had been three days entirely without any food, except a little gum, which was, perhaps, even worse than none; and for two days previous to that, we had been on very

short allowance. All this time we had been travelling with very great bodily exertion. I felt myself dreadfully reduced, and as weak as an infant. My poor Hottentots looked like moving ghosts. Their gaunt, hollow cheeks, and eyes sunk in the sockets, gave them a frightful aspect. Jacob was suffering under illness as well as famine, —yet neither of the poor fellows complained much.

I now proposed to kill one of the horses to supply our urgent wants, since the prospect of shooting game had become almost hopeless, and our fruitless search for it had almost worn us out. Witteboy, however, begged earnestly that I would permit him to make another attempt with his gun. I agreed: but before he set out, it was necessary to procure water for the horses. To effect this, we were obliged to enlarge the pit, and dig a passage to it, in order to admit them one by one. We had no other implement but a tortoise-shell; and with this we at length, with great difficulty, accomplished our object. Witteboy then set off with his gun, accompanied by three or four of the Korannas, who were scarcely less anxious

for his success than ourselves,—hoping to come in for a share of what he might kill. Jacob and I, meanwhile, took up our station on the top of a small hill, to watch the proceedings of the hunters. An old Koranna kept us company, from whom I obtained the following information respecting his tribe, through the interpretation of Jacob.

The Korannas inhabiting the banks of the Hartebeest River, are entirely destitute of cattle, and live precisely in the same manner as the Bushmen: that is, upon game, when they can kill any, and upon such esculent roots as the country produces; and when these resources fail, they support life as well as they can upon ants, and gum, and the twigs of a certain bush. They kill the game, in the same manner as the Bushmen, by poisoned arrows, and by pitfalls, with a sharp stake fixed in the centre. These pits are so numerous along the banks and bed of the Hartebeest River, that it is surprising we escaped falling into some of them. At this time, the extreme drought, by destroying all vestiges of the edible bulbs over the surface of the country, had reduced these people to extreme destitution. These Korannas,

surpass the Bushmen generally in stature, and differ from them in language, and in some other slight particulars. But as they appear formerly to have possessed cattle, like the rest of their nation, and to have been reduced to this precarious mode of life by being plundered by some of their neighbours, their present situation exhibits the obvious process by which the Bushman race have been originally driven back from the pastoral state to that of the huntsman and robber.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY, DORSET STREET.





THOMPSON'S
TRAVELS

VOL.
I.



ZA 916.8
THOMPSON

1827